

ART IS BETWEEN US

BOB & ROBERTA SMITH

Bob and Roberta Smith – real name Patrick Brill OBE RA – is an artist, activist, writer, author, musician, supporter of art education and one of the UK's foremost keynote speakers. Famous around the world for his brightly coloured slogans, he is a passionate advocate for art as a vital tool of democracy.

His show at MAAB features a series of works on the bond between Italy and the United Kingdom in the aftermath of Brexit. *Art is between us* is a mix of punk culture and excoriating criticism of the choices made by recent British governments, filled with ideas on how the UK can avoid isolation from Europe.

The artist installed the exhibition at the Milanese gallery with the help of curator Massimiliano Scuderi. It takes the form of a *Wunderkammer*, a cabinet of curiosities, filled with found objects ranging from old appliance doors to café tables and various other everyday items. These items serve as physical manifestations of the hand-painted slogans, object correlatives that imbue the space with a calming, loving atmosphere. The overall effect is that of a subversive matchmaking agency.

Inspired by a meeting with another great artist, James Lee Byars, who at the 1993 Venice Biennale gave him one of his gold stickers bearing the slogan 'Your presence is your best work', B&R Smith does not aim to define public art so much as bring art to the public. Since then, he has applied this approach – which aligns closely with Nicolas Bourriaud's definition of operative realism – in a variety of fields, using art as a tool for the creation of collective works. Another iconic work that has influenced the exhibition is *Le Grande Verre* (The Large Glass 1915–1923) by Marcel Duchamp, hailed as a masterpiece of contemporary art by critics worldwide. Like Duchamp's work, which metaphorically places the naked bride at its centre and depicts the bachelors as machines, this collection emphasises the freedom of both the artist and the viewer: the artist to create and the viewer to interpret.

Other solo exhibitions by Bob and Roberta Smith include shows at Fondazione Zimei in Pescara and Rome (2023), the Tate Modern in London (2022), the Panacée in Montpellier and MoMA PS1 in New York. His work has also been featured in group exhibitions like Nicolas Bourriaud's *Altermodern*, as well as shows at the ZKM in Karlsruhe and San Francisco's CCAC (the latter curated by Ralph Rugoff), among others.

BOB & ROBERTA SMITH is actually one man. He used to collaborate with his sister but she retrained to become a group psychiatric specialist. Bob and Roberta Smith use words painted on canvases and made into signs, written in newspapers and sung in songs to say statements about art and free expression that have influenced generation of teachers and students of arts subjects to embrace the idea that the arts are a human right. Bob and Roberta Smith collaborated in the early 1990's with other artist musicians to create a lively art music scene with his band *The Apathy Band*. In 2015 Bob and Roberta Smith stood in a general election in the constituency of Michael Gove to directly confront him over his promotion of the Ebacc that has diminished the teaching of art in schools.

Bob and Roberta Smith has shown at Moma PS1 New York, Tate's Britain, Modern and Liverpool. In 2019 Bob and Roberta Smith had major retrospectives in La Panacee, Montpellier, curated by Nicholas Bouriaud and The Harris Museum Preston. Bob is a Royal Academician, and was awarded an OBE in 2017. Bob believes that 'all schools should be art schools'.

Hard Facts

MAAB Gallery

via Nerino 3 – 20123 Milano

From December 12th 2024 to February 14th 2025

Open from Monday to Friday, 10.30 am – 6 pm

Opening: Thursday, December 12th | 6 – 8 pm

Information

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