

PRESS RELEASE  
MILAN, JULY 2016

## **THE KING AND I**

Alcantara® and 9 artists reinvent the Prince's Apartment:  
**Maurizio Anzeri, Arthur Arbesser, Paola Besana, Gentucca Bini, Matthew Herbert,  
Taisuke Koyama, Francesco Simeti, Adrian Wong & Shane Aspegren**  
curated by Davide Quadrio and Massimo Torrigiani

From 20 September to 23 October 2016  
Prince's Apartment, Palazzo Reale, Milan

Free entry

**"The King And I"** is an exhibition sponsored and produced by the **Municipality of Milan – Culture, Palazzo Reale (Royal Palace)** and **Alcantara**, which will be held in the rooms of the **Prince's Apartment** from **20 September to 23 October 2016**. **Entry will be free of charge.**

With this exhibition at Milan's Palazzo Reale, **Alcantara**, a company that produces and sells the homonymous registered trademark material worldwide, presents a contemporary take on the atmosphere of a space full of historical connotations with a project conceived to engage and amaze. **"The King and I"** presents works created specially by nine international artists from different creative worlds. This encounter between art, theatre, music and fashion creates an experimental path around Alcantara® material and the project's venue, the Prince's Apartment .

The artists are: **Maurizio Anzeri, Arthur Arbesser, Paola Besana, Gentucca Bini, Matthew Herbert, Taisuke Koyama, Francesco Simeti, Adrian Wong & Shane Aspegren.**

Alcantara inspired them to write a collective narrative using characters from our fairy-tale imagination: kings, queens, princes and princesses, frogs and labyrinths, which journey through the flight of our imagination and their stories. The strands of this multi-faceted exhibition dialogue with the apartment's architecture and decor, in a lively play of references and superimpositions, guided by the curators.

*"An Alcantara-specific and site-specific project, two tracks of thought that have engaged the artists and us in careful and playful reflection, thanks to an original commission and a different way of interacting with a space like the Prince's Apartment. Rather than considering it a 'window' or 'set', we conceived it as 'spirit' and 'place'. A starting point that stimulated everyone to reinvent the space and the material in ways that we at first found surprising,"* says Massimo Torrigiani, one of the exhibition curators.

Palazzo Reale thus offers the public a selection of original large scale works designed for its rooms. Sculptures, photographs, clothes, installations and performances dialogue with the Prince's Apartment in a continuous reinvention.

The Italian title of the exhibition **"Ho visto un re"** (The King and I) aims straight at the heart of Milan, quoting the famous song by Enzo Jannacci, with its easy-going rhythm, an ironic stance against the arrogance of the powerful. A spirit that here, with art and with the same fairy-tale charm of the song, reappropriates a space that was once for the few, giving it back to everyone for free and in contemporary garb.

"This rarely inhabited dwelling, together with the opportunity the artists had to meet and be together, talk and work deeply with the material, have been a source of inspiration for everyone. This has given rise to combinations, overlaps and partnerships, freeing an all-new imagination, a healthy and irreverent creativity," comments Davide Quadrio, curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition extends through the 10 rooms of the Prince's Apartment in which each artist creates a coherent and shared narrative.

## THE EXHIBITION

*Skinned*, by **Gentucca Bini**, opens the exhibition. A work about disturbance, about the mistake that provokes distortions and undesired revelations as it exposes what shouldn't be seen. In this case, the layer below the decorations: a fake reinforced-concrete wall. A work that connects with one by **Maurizio Anzeri**: a large hand covered with Alcantara on one side and with a mirror surface on the other, playing with its surroundings and with us as it reflects and distorts us.

The second room has two works by **Arthur Arbesser** which draw visitors into the re-telling of two classic fables. *Il principe ranocchio* (The Frog King) is a fountain lined with cloud-patterned Alcantara where visitors can gaze at their reflection as they briefly play the role of the princess or the prince. In *Re Nudo* (The Emperor's New Clothes) the six life-size chess pieces, dressed in everyday clothes, copy our movements and those of the emperor, alone and naked.

Theatre features in the two rooms hosting works by **Francesco Simeti**. Here, visitors enter a spectacular narrative. The first of his works, entitled *Xanadu* – like the city built by Kublai Khan and described by Marco Polo – is composed of a number of static and moving panels decorated with images of exotic travels to faraway lands. The panels intersect and blend together, like the wings of a little 18<sup>th</sup>-century theatre. In his second room, Simeti has made a catoptric theatre, an octagonal chest containing a series of mirrors which deform and multiply any object placed inside it. Optical illusions in which the Apartment's architecture and ornamentation mutually reflect, similarly to the artist's visionary drawings.

With **Matthew Herbert's** *Unconcealed*, the fifth room is turned into an intimate space where visitors are required to do something very simple: sit on a chair. From this chair – upholstered in red Alcantara and lit by a spotlight – emerge the voices of people who work in Alcantara's factory and offices. Fantasy stories mingle with real ones as we share the past, present and future lives of the men and women who actually create the seed of this project.

Gentucca Bini returns in the sixth room with *Frange Reali* (Real/Royal Fringes). The hyperrealistically-printed Alcantara covering the floor and walls of this richly decorated room replicates the ornamental motifs of another room of the Prince's Apartment, so the interiors' decorative complexity is only visible when visitors directly interact with the work.

In the seventh room, Japanese photographer **Taisuke Koyama** exploits the material's most advanced variants to explore Alcantara's morphology through macroscopic photographic reproductions. A Z-shaped wall and three big vertical elements covered in 12 panels of printed Alcantara create an optical illusion. The material cannot be distinguished from the reproductions, while the large mirrors decorating the room multiply relations and reflections.

*Giochi per un principe* (Games for a Prince) by **Maurizio Anzeri** returns to fill the Apartment's ninth room. Huge stylised, overlapping faces in shades of blue and brown are set around the room's perimeter like tapestries or standards. A large central screen, also composed of faces, looms over us; both seductive and disturbing as only fairytales can be.

With *Notti a Palazzo* (Nights in the Palace), **Paola Besana** has created a family home which interweaves her personal history with Palazzo Reale's one. Through her work, the Prince's Apartment, which the artist sees as somewhere that has been rarely lived in or enjoyed, is turned into an intimate place. Two beds belonging to her family – in Restoration style, the same as the Apartment's last furnishings – are surrounded by a long band of plaited Alcantara, almost as if it is protecting the beds. The work gently takes over the space, giving it a warm, domestic feel.

The exhibition ends with a four-handed work by **Adrian Wong & Shane Aspegren**, a new opportunity for visitors to lose themselves – literally, in this case – in Alcantara's potential. The room is turned into a complex labyrinth, making it impossible to reach the royal guardsman, whose hat and bayonet are the only things that appear above the hedge. The guardsman is just the first of the members of an imaginary court played by actors who pop up unexpectedly, turning the whole exhibition into a piece of performance art.

Arthur Arbesser and Gentucca Bini made the costumes for the performances created by Adrian Wong & Shane Aspegren.

Alcantara is a versatile material, with a wide range of uses from the car industry to fashion, which here fully takes its place in contemporary art with a kaleidoscopic exhibition, where it is clear that the artists had fun exploring an innovative medium. The result is a playful and surprising exhibition that travels on the tracks of their imagination.

*"We are extremely excited about this new partnership with Palazzo Reale - says Andrea Boragno, Chairman and CEO of Alcantara - This project clearly expresses and reaffirms our identity as a Company through a series of commissions in support of the culture of our times. Alcantara is a unique material and this exhibition has highlighted its incredible versatility in a creative research process, also showing how a play of variations on a theme can create a challenge with unforeseeable solutions."*

Alcantara thus becomes a modern fairy-tale that takes visitors through the rooms of one of the most prestigious buildings in Milan, shaping a creative vision full of surprises.

## PRESS CONTACTS

### PCM STUDIO

Via C. Goldoni 38 – 20129 Milano

press@paolamanfredi.com | Tel. +39 02 87286582

Paola C. Manfredi | [paola.manfredi@paolamanfredi.com](mailto:paola.manfredi@paolamanfredi.com)

### COMUNE DI MILANO

Elena Conenna

[elenamaria.conenna@comune.milano.it](mailto:elenamaria.conenna@comune.milano.it)

## ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

### MAURIZIO ANZERI

Born in 1969 in Loano, Liguria, he obtained his MA from the Slade School of Fine Arts in London, where he has lived since the mid-Eighties. A sculptor, he often works with embroidery, found photos and flat surfaces. His work has been shown in many galleries and museums including the Photographer's Gallery, the Saatchi Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London; the Chapter Art Centre, Cardiff; the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle; Pier 24, San Francisco; the National Museum of Oslo; the Bavarian State Opera, Munich; and C/O Berlin.

### ARTHUR ARBESSER

He was born in 1982 in Vienna, where he grew up. He studied at Central Saint Martins in London before finding his direction in Milan where he worked with Giorgio Armani for seven years. In 2013 he won the *Who Is On Next?* competition and launched his own label, then in 2015 he was chosen as one of the eight finalists for the LVMH Award. In the same year he was also the creative director of Iceberg's women's collections. Being strongly influenced by his Austrian background and by a very uncluttered approach to design, Arbesser's aesthetic is clean and distinctive. A lover of the arts and architecture, he experiments with unusual materials to reinvent the uses of clothes and accessories.

### PAOLA BESANA

She has for over fifty years worked in and around textile art, or fibre art, touching on all its aspects. After studying in the early Sixties with Lily Blumenau in New York and Trude Guermonprez at the California College of Arts and Crafts, she worked with Jack Lenor Larsen in New York before returning to Italy. Here, she worked a lot in State schools and with the unions to teach arts and crafts teachers (weaving) and children of all ages. Having established a permanent base in Milan, in 1968 she opened the Studio di Tessitura Paola Besana: a workshop and a research, production and training centre. In 2015 the Studio became an Association; in addition to training activities for artists/artisans, the association also deals with the conservation of collections of textiles, objects and artworks, and it has a textile library with 1650 books.

### GENTUCCA BINI

Born in 1973, she grew up amidst the atmosphere of art and fashion around her couturier grandmother, Bruna Bini. She studied architecture in Milan and in Paris, where she worked in Pierre Cardin's fashion house and as the assistant to fashion editor Andrée Leon Talley. She also met Karl Lagerfeld in Paris and worked with him on creating hats for his Chanel Haute Couture runway shows. Formerly the creative director of the Romeo Gigli label, she now runs her own brand and her haute couture collections are shown on the Paris and Rome runways.

### MATTHEW HERBERT

Born in 1972 in England, he is a highly respected electronic musician. Many of the sounds used in his compositions are made in the places and by common, everyday objects he records himself. In 2000 he wrote his manifesto *Personal Contract for the Composition of Music (Incorporating The Manifesto of Mistakes)*, which he used a guideline for his later works. The manifesto forbids him to use electronic drums or pre-existing sounds and ensures that nothing created in the recording studio can be replicated live. In addition to house, electro e techno albums, Herbert has written scores for HBO and British television as well as music for theatre and dance productions. At the invitation of the London Sinfonietta, in 2010 he wrote *One Day*, a work in which a Saturday issue of *The Guardian* newspaper was put into music. He founded the museum of sound, an online public archive/platform, and since 2012 he is the creative director of the re-established BBC Radiophonic Workshop, a leading centre of sound and electronics research applied to music.

### TAISUKE KOYAMA

Born in 1978 in Tokyo, he lives and works between Amsterdam and the city of his birth. After studying biology, in 2003 he began to focus on photography. He has held solo exhibitions in the Daiwa Foundation-Japan House Gallery, London; the Sunday Gallery, Zurich; the G/P gallery, Tokyo; the Metronom gallery, Modena; and the Kyoto Art

Center. He has also participated in numerous international collective exhibitions, including the Aichi Triennale 2016 and the Setouchi Triennale 2013. He won the 15<sup>th</sup> Japan Media Arts Festival Award, Tokyo, 2012. In 2014 the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs awarded him a study grant as part of the Japanese Government Overseas Study Program for Artists.

#### FRANCESCO SIMETI

Born in Palermo in 1968, he lives in New York. He has made a name for himself on the contemporary art scene thanks to his sculptures, installations and public art works made for major organisations, especially the Cooper Hewitt National Museum of Design and Columbia University, New York; the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna; MUDAC Musée de Design et d'Arts Appliqués Contemporains, Lausanne; and the 2012 Shanghai Biennale. Included in many public collections, his work has been shown at international venues such as the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, Miami; Exit Art and Artists Space, New York; Rivoli Castle, Turin; Milan Triennale; MoCA, Massachusetts; and the Courtauld Institute, London. The wallpaper often featured in his works is inspired by the work's setting. It contrasts and blends icons from different eras to reinterpret and suggest worlds, re-using images and decorative motifs in a continuous invention which is familiar yet, looking closer, always new and strange.

#### ADRIAN WONG & SHANE ASPEGREN

Born in Chicago in 1980, Adrian Wong has since 2005 lived and worked in Hong Kong where he founded the Embassy Projects production agency. He graduated in experimental psychology from Stanford University and majored in sculpture at Yale University. His installations and sculptures explore the relationship with the environment through collective works. The Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, and the Saatchi Gallery, London, have held solo exhibitions of his work. His films have been shown at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (Germany), at the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival and at the Kunsthalle of Vienna. Included in numerous public and private collections, his work won the Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2014.

Shane Aspegren is a musician, producer and artist from Nebraska. He has worked with numerous artists on electronic, indie/pop and experimental music albums and tours. In 2001 he founded the duo The Berg Sans Nipple, which played gigs at international clubs and festivals and in such major institutions as the Whitney Museum, and collaborated with artists such as Bright Eyes, Arto Lindsay, Woodkid and many others. He has for over a decade also written scores for films, theatre, videos and installations in addition to his photographic, video and performance works which have been presented, amongst others, at Art Basel, MCA in Chicago, at the Anthology Film Archives, New York and at the Festival International du Cinéma Méditerranéen in Tétouan, Morocco. In 2012 he moved to Hong Kong, where he develops collaborative projects with other musicians and artists.

---

## CURATORS' BIOGRAPHIES

From 1998 to 2010 **Davide Quadrio** founded and directed the BizArt Center, the first no-profit artistic/creative workshop in Shanghai, where he has lived since 1994. In 2007 he established Arthub Asia, a platform for producing and promoting contemporary art of and in Asia. To this end, he organised numerous exhibitions, educational and cultural-exchange projects to stimulate relations among institutions all over the world. He was a consultant for the Bund18 creative space in Shanghai (2005-2008) and curated the Chinese edition of the Victoria & Albert Museum's Vivienne Westwood exhibition and the Droog Design itinerant show (in Shanghai, Shenzhen and Beijing) as well as Olivo Barbieri's solo show for the 2006 Shanghai Biennale. He also coordinated the City Pavilions project for the 2012 Shanghai Biennale. His most recent projects include his curation, with Shaway Yeh, of the Zhang Enli and Christopher Doyle dual exhibition in the Aurora Museum, Shanghai; curation, with Chiara Bertola, of the Qiu Zhijie exhibition at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia for the 2013 Venice Biennale; the Yang Fudong retrospective, curated with Noah Cowan, for the 2013 Toronto Film Festival 2013; the Jompet solo exhibition at the Fondazione Gervasuti, Venice, for the 2011 Venice Biennale.

**Massimo Torrigiani** chairs the technical committee of the PAC, the City of Milan's contemporary art museum, and was appointed by Bari council to curate the artistic and design development of the town's nascent contemporary art centre. Since 2014, he is the creative director of Art In The City Shanghai, a festival of China's new creative scene. He is also the artistic director of Capo d'Arte, a cycle of exhibitions in Gagliano del Capo (Lecce), for which he has mounted shows with Yang Fudong, Soundwalk Collective and Shilpa Gupta. Since 2009 he has co-directed Fantom, a curatorial and publishing project centred on photography and sound. In 2010-2012 he directed Shanghai's contemporary art fair. He lives in Milan, which is also the base of Boiler Corporation, the creative agency he co-founded in 2001 to publish the international art magazine *Boiler*.

Since 2010 **Quadrio and Torrigiani** have worked together on exhibitions, projects and publications. These include the Shanghai contemporary art fair, the Yang Fudong retrospective for Capo d'Arte 2014; the Art In The City Shanghai festival (2014-16); the workings of the technical committee of the PAC, Milan, where, amongst other things, in 2015 they produced the exhibition *Jing Shen: L'atto della pittura nella Cina contemporanea* (Jing Shen: Painting in Contemporary China)

Curatorial coordination of the exhibition and of art work production and installation is by **Selva Barni** with **Ilaria Speri**, of Fantom.

---

## THE PRINCE'S APARTMENT

Composed of ten rooms in the south-west wing of the Royal Palace in Milan, the Prince's Apartment is a significant example of an early-19<sup>th</sup>-century royal residence, which has reached us virtually intact. Established as a result of the Napoleonic reorganisation of the palace in 1805, it was in 1830 designated as the *Appartamento di Riserva per Principi* (Apartment Reserved for the Princes) for the little princes and archdukes resulting from the marriage of Ranier Joseph of Austria to Elisabeth of Savoy. The renovation work, supervised by architect Giacomo Tazzini – which included the rooms' sophisticated decoration, mainly in the Restoration style – was concluded in 1838 soon after Emperor Ferdinand I arrived in Milan to take the crown as King of Lombardy-Venetia.

## THE ROYAL PALACE

The Apartment is reached via the Atrio delle Quattro Colonne (Atrium of the Four Columns) and the current Prima Sala degli Arazzi (First Tapestry Hall) of the Royal Palace. The seat of city government from the late Middle Ages onwards, the palace was a major political centre under the Torriani, Visconti and Sforza dynasties. There was a lavish court life. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the palace passed under the rule of the Austrian empire. It underwent restoration in the Neoclassical style under the supervision of Giuseppe Piermarini, including the monumental staircase at the entrance, a new façade on Piazza Duomo, and the modern-day Piazzetta Reale. This former residence of kings and queens, richly embellished by leading decorators, sculptors, painters and carpenters, was transferred to the State in 1919 and parts of it were opened to the public. Bombing raids in 1943 destroyed the greater part of the palace's treasures. Under the auspices of Milan City Council and the Sovrintendenza per i Beni Archeologici, reconstruction and restoration work continued for more than twenty years until the Royal Palace finally reopened as an exhibition centre.