

GIUSEPPE  
Bianchi!

GINO  
Chiodo!

JOHN  
Spiteri!

# Che Cosa!

LIANG  
Luscombe!

HEATH  
Franco!

JOSIE  
Cavallaro!

KENNY  
Pittock!

GEORGE  
Egerton-  
Warburton!

TOM  
Polo!

KATTHY  
Cavaliere!

CIRCUS  
Solarus  
& EMMA  
Saunders!

MATTHEW  
Hopkins!

# Che Cosa!

Benvenuti!  
JOHN MONTELEONE

*Che Cosa!* is a collection of artists considering ideas around Italian culture. Exploring the allure of national and cultural identification, the exhibition examines ways in which traditions are maintained and communicated. Artists respond to Italian aesthetics, language and historical art and design movements in the form of dance, video, costume, sculpture, photography and painting. Curated by David Capra

Chè cosa is an Italian interrogative pronoun which roughly translates as *what?* or more casually and conversationally as *what the...?* or *what's up?* A linguistic shrug, it is ubiquitous within contemporary Italian language and perhaps a fitting, albeit informal, signifier of Italian attitudes and culture.

The exhibition *Che Cosa!* explores ideas surrounding Italian cultural identification and responds to cultural attributions such as language, aesthetics, art and design important cues to recognising and understanding what is the essence of being Italian.

Wollongong Art Gallery has long supported projects that explore notions of personal, community and national identity. Stories that engage with the migrant experience have a particularly strong resonance with this region. *Che Cosa!* brings focus to

Italian culture through a range of unique responses in a variety of media by a diverse group of multi-generational contemporary artists.

The Gallery would like to thank the artists Giuseppe Bianchi, Katthy Cavaliere, Josie Cavallaro, Gino Chiodo, George Egerton-Warburton, Heath Franco, Matthew Hopkins, Liang Luscombe, Kenny Pittock, Tom Polo, Circus Solarus, Emma Saunders and John Spiteri for their participation and insight. We would also like to thank the visiting curator David Capra for his vision and passion for this project.

We hope you enjoy the exhibition.

Ciao,  
John Monteleone  
Program Director

## KATTHY CAVALIERE 1972-2012

From the late 1970s to the present the categorisations that used to apply to art education at a tertiary level have been experiencing a fragmentation that creates a direct pathway to the *Che Cosa!* exhibition at Wollongong Art Gallery. My scant knowledge of the Italian language led me into a number of enthralling conversations in an attempt to gain an accurate translation of this phrase that, after all, is the title for David Capra's exhibition. In the end, I ascertained that *chè cosa* represents something akin to a rhetorical shrugging of the shoulders and has many layers of meaning. But in this context and with this particular selection of artists there is a direct link to that evolutionary time in the late 1970s through the early 90s when definitions were not so much questioned but re-examined, when performance blurred into installation, when photography morphed into digital media and where the shutter opened and closed on the complete history of video art.

With *Che Cosa!* as a phenomenal backdrop to her short-lived career, I would like to say a few words about Katthy Cavaliere's diverse art practice that ranges from photography through to performance and installation. I first met Katthy in the early 1990s at UNSW Art & Design (AKA College of Fine Arts) where she was studying photography. One of my earliest

Why exhibit them just out of reach? Suspended words in inaccessible places became the silences between Katthy's conversation with her audience and perhaps the gaps within her own understanding of herself and her identity.

In a country whose recent history is based upon migration, the question of identity is frequently brought sharply into focus. The migrant dilemma finds fluctuating foundations in identity that swing in and out of favour with alternating generations. Post World War 2, the great Italian port of Trieste built a significant part of its fortune on the misfortunes of European emigration. On the foreshore of that magnificent harbour is a small bronze sculpture of Le Sartine, two seamstresses who symbolise the industry and expertise that were also departing those shores. Those same migrants gravitated towards the industrial centres of Wollongong and Newcastle where they established their own communities and attempted to preserve a proud identity through the domestic industries that linked them to the homeland. As is often the case, the following generation assimilated and abandoned those time-honoured practices but never deserted their heritage. Instead they settled themselves into a slipstream of identity that is embodied within the crux of *Che Cosa!*

smokiness of its dictionary definition and the Ethnic Arts Alliance became the signal post for a semaphore of self examination.

When I think of Katthy's work, I think firstly of her installations, then I think of her performances and finally, I think of her photography. This compendium of activities and actions reveal so much about her as an artist who pursued an enduring and fearless quest for self-discovery and self-expression. Her choice of media was endless and her commitment to her work was profound. When Katthy and I worked together, she revealed to me the wonders of the Camera Obscura by converting a room in a house into a human scale camera. Standing in the velvet dark I ventured to ask what I was supposed to be experiencing. Katthy removed the black tape on the blackened out window to reveal the tiniest source of light that created a projection on the opposite wall. As my eyes adjusted, I saw the image from outside of the house and Katthy declared triumphantly... "There, you see, its back to front, upside down and inside out!"

Somehow, in the hands of Katthy Cavaliere, this ancient form of image capturing appeared to take on a simplicity that may have begged the phrase "*chè cosa*", yet when blown up to billboard dimensions at the Hazelhurst Gallery, the scale and pictorial sophistication created a sense of wonderment that not only insisted upon a second glance but also demanded contemplation. Unlike the camera with its ability to bracket in quick-fire succession, the pinhole becomes a Cyclops fixed within a structure, with a constant view outside of which the operator either has to stage the subject matter in a theatrical sense, or just wait for something to happen. In the end, the image that is printed depends entirely upon the aesthetic of the artist.

As was the case with the performances that Katthy Cavaliere embarked upon it is interesting to note that these were also solitary forms of expression that were, without fail, deeply personal. Her homage to her recently deceased mother, alone on a rock at Clovelly, naked and surrounded by a sea of her mother's garments, Katthy stares out and embraces the horizon, unaware perhaps of her own impending doom, a six month battle with cancer. Again as her alter ego, the ragged doll, alone on the stage of the opera theatre in her hometown, Sarteano, from whence she and her family migrated to Australia when she was four years of age. An urge to consolidate but also to share ultimately led her, as a student at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Brera, Milano, Italy into one of her most meaningful influences and mentorships with Marina Abramovic who took an immediate interest in her work and invited her to participate in a workshop at the Fondazione Ratti.

In these moments of reflection, I think of Katthy as an inspirational artist who demands of us to continue asking questions as we move down the highway with a single lens that captures everything before us and when we see the image continue to unravel the quest that Katthy posited that life indeed is "back to front, upside down and inside out!" and perhaps can only deserve the rhetorical question "*Chè cosa?*"

Nick Vickers, 2014



memories of her was seeing her on a ladder suspending her personal diaries, encased in clear resin, from a ceiling for an exhibition that I later discovered was her photographic assessment. I knew then that her studies in photography were going to take her to places that are only frequented by people who are endlessly asking questions, incessantly curious.

It is this diversity that constantly intrigues me, her fascination with herself as the point of departure for a series of meditations that take her through landscapes that are both real and imagined, existing and fabricated, creating an endless stream of questions that her work poses to me as a viewer. Why encase your diaries in resin when diaries are so personal?

It was in those early days of her artistic career that Katthy and her peers were to form part of the Ethnic Arts Alliance and in particular "Sfumato" which, in itself, became a seal that identified herself, Rox De Luca, Maria Ionico, Viola Dominello, Pasqualino Arcuri, Filipina Buttitta, Patricia Calabrese, Carla Drago, Salvatore Gerardi, Gabriel Rosati, Marie Stucci and Sebastian Zagarella to name a small number of second generation migrants who exhibited their work at UNSW and UWS, Nepean. "Sfumato" provided the cradle that rocked Katthy into a voyage of self-discovery, assisting her with the negotiation of her identity within contemporary Australian art. "Sfumato" became her camera obscura, darkened by the

Image: John Spiteri, *Eyes on the future*, 2000, video still. Courtesy the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery Sydney

***Che Cosa!* is dedicated to artist Katthy Cavaliere**

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ART GALLERY



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