

LUCIANO BONOMI: NOVELLAS





front cover The Postman/2007/collage/15x10cm

Madame Di.../1984/collage/8.5x13.5cm

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10 June to 3 July 2008

ART FIRST CONTEMPORARY ART

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'...These antique fables, nor these fairy toys'
Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Scene 1.
William Shakespeare

Perhaps it's not just a coincidence of art and industry that Luciano Bonomi found himself in West Bromwich in the West Midlands in 1986. That was the year he moved from Italy to England, as the Managing Director of the Vicenza-based manufacturing company Acciaierie Valbruna, one of the largest producers of stainless steel, nickel alloy and titanium bars in the world. Nor are the technical words out of place, the nouns and verbs applied to the business of production: forging, rolling, drawing, grinding and testing; and to the product: ingot, billet, rod in coil, round, hexagon, square, flat, angle, channel, reinforcement bars and wire. These words, found on Valbruna UK Ltd's website, chime with the making and realisation of Bonomi's fairy-tale, three-dimensional images. ¶ There is too a synchronicity about the choice of the West Midlands, with Birmingham at its centre. Birmingham and its hinterland was from the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth, the centre of metal manufacturing trades, in silver, brass, iron and steel. Long known as the Toy Shop of Europe,

where 'toy' and 'shop' had older meanings, the toy trade included the manufacture of a wide range of small items made from steel, such as buttons, buckles and brooches, synonymous with the name of the entrepreneur Matthew Boulton. ¶ Children's toys did come into it later, think of Chad Valley toys, known after their Birmingham base, but it was the hundreds of small, one-man-band or family-run engineering firms making highly specialised metal alloy widgets for bigger industrial manufacturers, practically garden shed activities, that characterised the region. These items were made by artisan craftsmen and women, and to see Luciano Bonomi working at his bench, apron on, is to recall generations of such skilled goldsmiths, clockmakers, or engineers, widget and specifically gizmo-makers. 'Gizmo' was originally the technical word for the small fittings, two inches in diameter and cut from sheet brass, for theatre lamps, whereby images were projected onto the curtain, flats or backcloth of a stage, creating silhouetted images. ¶ Just as the facture of Bonomi's sculpture recalls

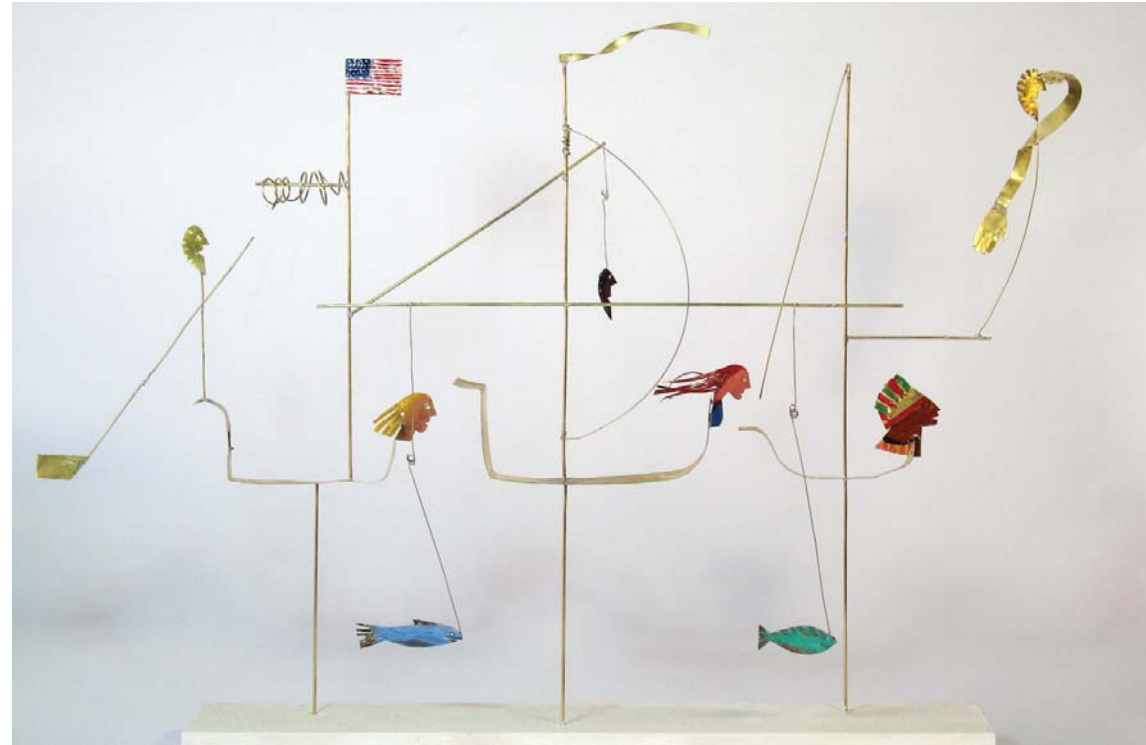
The Anglers/2006/brass construction/57x62x20cm



long-held traditions, so the imagery of his postcard-sized collages is deeply embedded in the visual memory of the twentieth century. Some are formally abstract, and pleasing in their simplicity of form and colour, are reminiscent of Le Corbusier's architecture. The faux-naivety of Paul Klee also inevitably comes to mind, while others such as *Milano* remind us of the deconstructed world of the Futurists, particularly the work of Gino Severini, in which an internal narrative is pieced together, and where words and letters play a significant role. ¶ There is another iconographic root to Bonomi's art, one which flourished until the beginning of the twentieth century, that of popular art, often labelled 'naïve' or 'folk'. This is the art of fairgrounds, circuses, puppet shows and musical hall entertainment, which found a sophistication in the drawings of William Heath Robinson and others. But intrinsically there is nothing naïve or folksy about Luciano Bonomi's work: it is, one might say, very knowing. ¶ The collages clearly are part of the creative process, acting as *disegni*, or in the technological language of the engineer, patterns. Sometimes an idea for a three dimensional piece will generate a group of associated collages as in *Also sprach Zarathustra*. In this work the five main components appear in the two-dimensional 'drawings' more or less where they do in the completed

work, but in various stages of complexity and detail, and in a variety of sourced material. ¶ Curiously in a reversal of the traditional procedure, the two-dimensional designs have a weightier, more earth-bound quality than the airy, three-dimensional finished pieces. Usually it is the technical drafts or design drawings that convey an unsubstantiated sense of the as yet unresolved ambition of their creator. As in *The Trojan Horse* or *Il Postino* (*The Postman*) Bonomi works away from the tougher reality of his collages to a more ethereal plane inhabited by an apparently whimsical race. ¶ Like his acknowledged master at the Brera in Milan, Fausto Melotti (1901-1986), Bonomi's titles belie the light-hearted appearance of the work, as in Melotti's *Scultura E* (*La ghigliottina*) (1969) or *Giocattolo per figlio di dittatore* (1979): the latter's particularly chilling in its intent. Bonomi's *The MP Cart*, or *the Vanity Cart* has layers of association attached to it. It might be a Victory car, with the victor or his champion Fame, in victorious gesture, Roman or twentieth century, classical or contemporary. It might be a glass carriage in which the establishment elite are visible but unapproachable. Either way however it's a comment on the times. While *The Discovery of America* could be said to be happening *con brio*, there is a speedy enthusiasm and urgency about it as everything

The Discovery Of America/2007/brass construction/45x66x 18cm



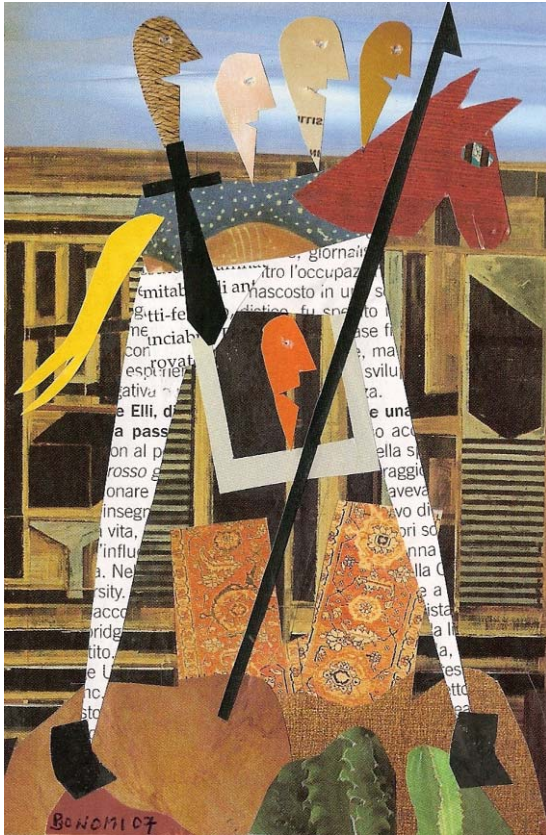
and everyone appears to be racing forward in the same direction. Nevertheless the figure-heads, unusually for Bonomi highly coloured, are perhaps sirens, and the sailors, their faces echoing Mycenaean metalwork masks, are Argonauts. In others such as *An hazardous Pool* and *The Anglers* the depths are revealed to us the viewers in parallel with the optimistic diver and the contentedly unaware fishermen, as full of menace and treacherous seduction. A solitary *Fisherman on the Bay of Naples* appears to land a handsome catch, but behind, beyond and above him Vesuvius smokes. ¶

When one wakes, as I did this week, to see shadows of the frayed edge of the window screen cast on the ceiling gently moving in an early morning air, and one recalls those cast by Bonomi's ethereal images, one can be sure that these beguiling conceits with their emblematic quality have entered one's own visual vocabulary and memory.

Katharine Eustace
May 2008

A Hazardous Pool/2006/brass construction/41 x56x21cm





The Trojan Horse/2007/collage/15x10cm



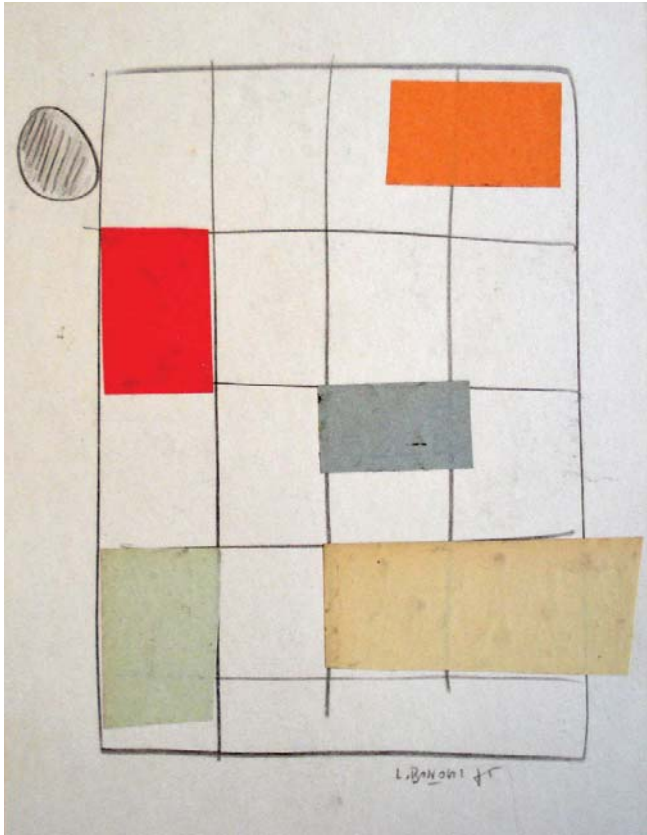
The Trojan Horse/2006/brass construction/54x41x18.5cm



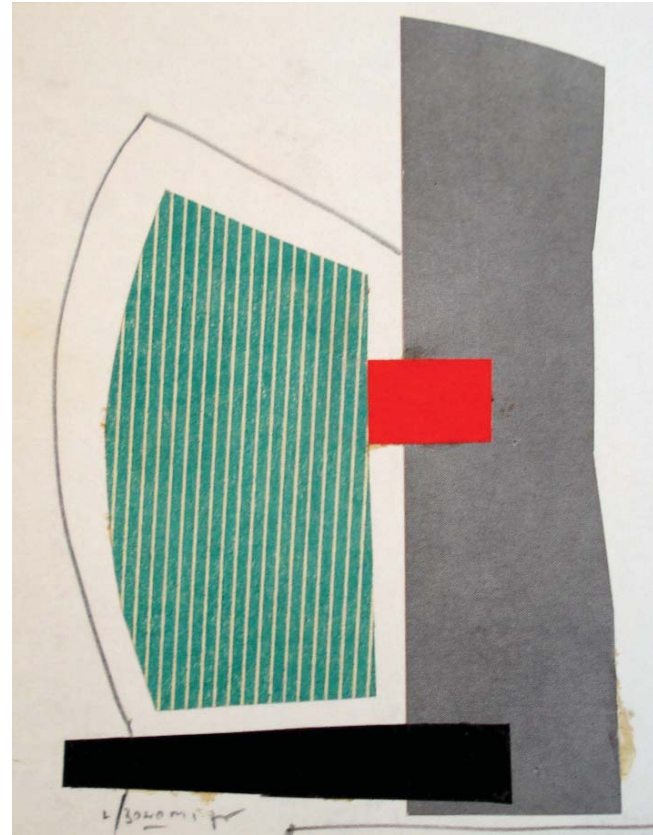
Also Sprach Zarathustra/2007/brass construction/37x40x14cm



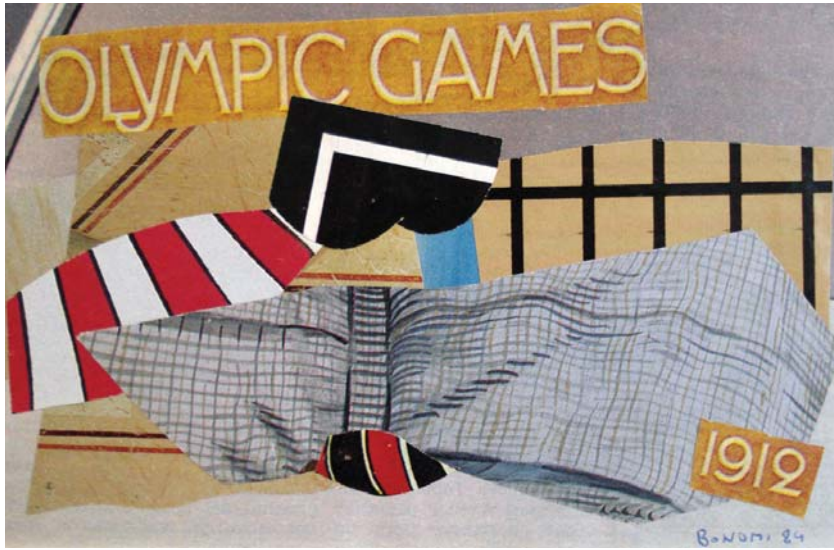
Also Sprach Zarathustra/2007/collage/10x15cm



Untitled/1975/collage/15x12cm



Untitled II/1975/collage/15x12cm



Olympic Games/1984/collage/8.5x13.5 cm



Biography

- 1939 Born in Milan
1963 Graduated in Economics,
Universita' L.Bocconi, Milan
1975 Graduated, Scuola Superiore degli Artefici,
Accademia di Brera, Milan
2006 Lives and works in Latina, near Rome

Solo exhibitions

- 1973 Galleria San Rocco, Seregno
1974 Centroarte Interspazio, Milan
1975 Galleria d'Arte 'Studio A', Milan
– Centroarte 'Il Multiplo', Marigliano, Napoli
1976 Galleria d'Arte Pietra, Milan
1988 'Dream and Geometry', Dudley Museum
and Art Gallery
1990 'Witty Tales', Walsall Museum
and Art Gallery
1991 'Drawn in brass', Midlands Contemporary
Art, Birmingham
1993 'Metallic Tales', Wolverhampton Museum
and Art Gallery
1995 'Re-telling the tale', Art First, London
1998 'Tales, ancient and modern',
Art First, London
2003 'Story lines', Art First, London

Group exhibitions

- 1972 Giovani Artisti dell'Accademia di Brera, Milan
1973 Galleria Pilota, Milan
1974 Galleria d'Arte Moderna 'Studio A', Milan
– Museo Santa Barbara, Reggio Calabria

- 1975 Galleria d'Arte Moderna 'Studio A'
– Galleria 'Le Firme', Milano
– 'XI Mostra Internazionale' Museo Pagani,
Legnano
– Scultura+Campagna=Habitat Naturale,
Cadorago
– Galleria d'Arte Moderna 'Cesare da Sesto',
Sesto Calende
– 'Forme Nuove per Una Citta' Nuova', Seregno
– 'Scultura 75', Villa Reale, Monza
– 'Scultori d'Oggi al festival dell'Unita', Milan
1976 'Grands et Jeunes d'Aujourd'hui',
Grand Palais, Paris
1977 'Presenze 77', Villa Litta, Milan
– Teatro di Dario Fo, Palazzina Liberty, Milan
– 'Mostra di grafica e di piccole sculture',
Galleria Pietra
1989 'Mid Art 89', Dudley
– Midlands Contemporary Art, Birmingham
1992 'Light weight show' Worcester City Museum
and Art Gallery
1993 Articles in Reading, Cole & Cole, Reading
1997 '3 Years on!', Art First, London
– "Muddied Oafs" An exhibition of football."
Gallery 27, London
1999 'Starting a Collection', Art First, London
2001 'Ten Years Celebrity', Art First, London
2006 'Twelve Square', Art First, London
2007 'Election', Art First, London
– The Postcard Project', Art First, London

Collections include

- Comune di Cerano d'Intelvi
– Dudley Museum and Art Gallery
– Wolverhampton Museum and Art Gallery

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Gallery hours

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Saturday 11am-2pm



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