

L'ULTIMO MERAVIGLIOSO MINUTO
PIETRO RUFFO

29 October 2024 – 16 February 2025
Palazzo Esposizioni Roma
curated by Sébastien Delot

PRESS RELEASE

From **29 October** 2024 to **16 February** 2025, **Palazzo Esposizioni Roma** will host a solo exhibition by **Pietro Ruffo** entitled ***L'ultimo meraviglioso minuto* (The Final Marvellous Minute)**. Curated by **Sébastien Delot**, Director of the Collection at the Musée National Picasso-Paris, the exhibition is promoted by **Assessorato alla Cultura di Roma Capitale** and **Azienda Speciale Palaexpo**, produced and organised by **Azienda Speciale Palaexpo**.

L'ultimo meraviglioso minuto, the most extensive solo exhibition of Pietro Ruffo's work ever held by a public institution, brings together a diverse body of work that forms a unified narrative—a long and intricate journey through space and time, culminating in a grand tribute to the city of Rome.

More than **50 works**, specially created by the artist for four rooms on the piano nobile of the Palazzo Esposizioni, constitute an artistic gesture that explores the highly topical and debated theme of the relationship between human beings and the planet. This is presented from a fresh and courageous perspective, inviting reflection on the potential 'marvel' of our presence on Earth.

Already acknowledged by critics and the international public, Pietro Ruffo is participating in the 2024 Venice Biennale with a major installation entitled *L'immagine del mondo* (The Image of the World). Some of his works have been acquired by notable collections—including the Vatican Museums, the MAXXI, and the Deutsche Bank Foundation—and this exhibition at the Palazzo Esposizioni marks a highly dynamic and vital moment in his career.

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition plays on the dilation and contraction of time and space. Its aim is to convey extremely long timescales, for us unfathomable—those of the history of the planet and humanity—within the singular space and time of the encounter with the artworks.

It all began with an adventure during Ruffo's residency at the Nirox Foundation, where, through his friendship with world-renowned anthropologist and palaeontologist Lee Berger, he had an experience that profoundly shaped his work: a visit to one of the most iconic sites in human history, the Cradle of Humankind, a paleoanthropological site located near Johannesburg, South Africa, where the first primate in history was discovered.

The exhibition begins 55 million years ago. The title of the **first room**, *Le monde avant la création de l'homme* (The World Before the Creation of Man), is borrowed from the book by Camille Flammarion, subtitled "*origines de la terre, origines de la vie, origines de l'humanité*" (The Origins of the Earth, the Origins of Life, the Origins of Humanity) (1886), a text that Ruffo read as a teenager and has since rediscovered for both its literary merit and the magnificent engraved plates that depict how, in the late 19th century, the world before the 'creation' of man was imagined.

Ruffo outlines the characteristic elements of this planet. Using a ballpoint pen, he draws a primordial forest, creating a vast curtain (700 square metres) that runs along the entire perimeter of the space (*Primordial Forest*), surrounding visitors with images of plants and minerals, evoking the time when tropical jungles covered much of the Earth's surface. The room is intersected by a large self-supporting structure (4 metres by 21), on which he depicts a section of the Grand Canyon, painted in ink on canvased paper using the *camaïeu* technique (utilising different tones of the same colour, in this case, burnt sienna). Beyond this grand structure, the public finds themselves walking among traces of the Earth's past life: 21 circular works of varying sizes, titled *De Hortus*, float like water lilies on the white floor, creating a chromatic atmosphere of great visual impact.

The exhibition journey then moves into the Anthropocene, the geological era in which the Earth's environment—understood as the sum of the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics that support and evolve life—has been influenced by the effects of human activity. The palaeoclimatologist Rebecca Wragg Sykes, in her renowned work *Neanderthals: Life, Art, Love and Death*, referring to Carl Sagan's 'cosmic calendar', writes: "If we boil down the Universe's 13.8 billion years to a period of twelve months, the dinosaurs would appear around Christmas time – unbelievable! – while the first Homo Sapiens would only arrive on the scene a few minutes before the New Year's fireworks." It is to these fleeting last minutes of our planet's history that the subsequent three rooms are dedicated, where Pietro Ruffo explores human intervention in search of 'marvel'.

In the **second room**, which showcases works on canvased paper, with cuts and ink drawings, visitors are immersed in a visual archive symbolically retracing the steps of our ancestors' evolution, from the Neanderthal skulls of Saccopastore to votive figurines, the first emblem of abstract thought upon which societies are built.

In the **third room**, with a radical change of scenery, visitors are enveloped in a video installation titled *The Planetary Garden*, created in collaboration with Noruwei. Inspired by the eponymous text by French philosopher Gilles Clément, the work gives three-dimensional form to the movement, shift, and transformation of the landscape over time.

The **final room**, titled *Antropocene attraverso le stratificazioni di Roma* (The Anthropocene Through the Stratifications of Rome), features works entirely dedicated to the city. What was Rome like 2,777 years ago, at the time of its founding? And even earlier, when the streets we walk today were trodden by jaguars and rhinoceroses?

Starting with the famous maps of the city by Giovanni Battista Nolli (1701-1756) and Luigi Canina (1775-1856), Ruffo overlays these with unexpected glimpses of natural landscapes, offering a novel walk through the history and prehistory of the Roman territory. The works in this room allow visitors to move from the depths of the sea (*Anthropocene 77, Rome Under the Sea*), to the primordial forest (*Anthropocene 92, Rome Covered by a Primordial Forest*), and then to the theatre of great architectural constructions (*Anthropocene 51, Rome Imperial Period; Anthropocene 53, Rome Porta Maggiore*, and others). The anthology of landscapes explored in these works presents a mosaic of historical and hypothetical future moments, in which each transformation is simultaneously the consequence of natural events and human intervention. Cuts in canvased paper, pen drawings, oil paintings, and reliefs come together in a compositional harmony that invites deep observation.

“To understand the infancy of our planet, we must look deep beneath its surface. Strange as it may seem, the Earth is very much alive. The face of the Earth changes over time. Rediscovering this lost infancy means understanding what has happened deep within,” writes curator Sébastien Delot.

Through ‘marvel, Ruffo, using the artist’s tools and the power of his works, offers a unique visual experience, shedding new light on the environmental issues that permeate our everyday existence in society.

The exhibition will feature a catalogue curated by Sébastien Delot, with contributions from the curator, Guido Rebecchini, Rebecca Wragg Sykes, and Sofia Di Gravio, published by Drago.

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OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM, closed on Mondays.
Last entry one hour before closing.

TICKETS

From October 29 to November 22, 2024:

Adult €12.50 – Reduced €10.00 – Child (ages 7 to 18) €6.00

From November 23, 2024 to February 16, 2025:

Adult €12.50 – Reduced €10.00 – Child (ages 7 to 18) €6.00

Free admission for children up to 6 years of age.

The ticket is valid for all current exhibitions.

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH: Free admission for under 30s (from 2:00 PM until closing).

ACCESSIBILITY

Palazzo Esposizioni Roma is accessible to visitors with reduced mobility via three entrances free of architectural barriers.