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Dissertation

***TORNO SUBITO:***  
**MAURIZIO CATTELAN AND THE RETURN(S) OF ITALY**

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the career of Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (b.1960), positioning Cattelan's oeuvre within Italian cultural heritage and historical context. I explore the links between his work and that of three seminal figures from twentieth century Italian art history: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Piero Manzoni, and Germano Celant. Although prevailing interpretations of Cattelan's artistic output situate it within a discourse of globalization, I argue that Cattelan's work engages deeply with Italian art history, politics, and intellectual history. This project therefore investigates the question of why national context is not only relevant, but essential, to understanding the work of a contemporary artist who operates on a global scale. Through examinations of Cattelan's performance-based, literary, and curatorial activities, I demonstrate how his working method was shaped by a self-conscious conversation with his Italian artistic and intellectual lineage. In dealing ironically with both history and authenticity, his work directly reflects his engagement with national identity. Chapter one considers several early performative actions by Cattelan in relation to Marinetti's Futurist performances that show how Cattelan's gestures are historically grounded and, further, how he has used such strategies to reveal institutional contradictions inherent in the contemporary Italian art world. Chapter two addresses Cattelan's magazine and periodical projects in relation to the literary output of Manzoni, analyzing how both of their interests in the circulation

and remediation of images is demonstrative of the Italian engagement with consumption. Chapter three compares the curatorial strategies of Cattelan and Celant with a focus on biennials, illuminating how both figures have individually combined Italian “anti-work” strategies with entrepreneurialism in order to maximize their own time and reputations. Cattelan’s consistent practice of returning to and recycling the forms and practices of his art-historical predecessors demonstrates that at the heart of Italian art of the last century is a deeply rooted connection to the long cultural history of Italy, which remains both an inescapable burden and a constant source of inspiration.