

OAF 2025 | CARLO ZINELLI

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Carlo Zinelli (1916-1974) is one of the most important figures in Art Brut, with a body of work now featured in major museum collections worldwide. After having gone to war and then living in isolation, in 1947, he was admitted into a psychiatric hospital in Verona, Italy. It was there that, ten years later, he found a space for creation during an art workshop held at the hospital.



From this experience, he developed a unique visual language: dense compositions filled with silhouetted figures, repeated motifs, and fragmented inscriptions. His spontaneous linework, shifts in scale, and fractured narrative evoke an inner reality where reality and the imagination intertwine. Praised by the French artist who coined the term "Art Brut", Jean Dubuffet, Zinelli left a lasting mark on art history through the raw power of his vision and the depth of his work. The strength and vitality of his art have fueled contemporary creation for decades. His works are featured in the collections of MoMA, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, and numerous other museums around the world.

Carlo Zinelli's work operates as a frozen scene, a structured space where everything seems to follow a secret logic. The seated symmetrical figures appear to take part in a silent ritual. Their stillness contrasts with the density of the motif, a graphic profusion that engulfs the composition.



The black and white set a clear, almost rigid framework, disrupted by touches of red. These isolated elements (small silhouettes, scattered details) create points of tension, like cracks in the painting's balance. The medallions with birds, a recurring motif in Zinelli's work, add a symbolic dimension and a mysterious presence floating above the characters.

Everything in this piece relies on repetition: accumulated forms, multiplied silhouettes, motifs echoing each other like a visual litany. Zinelli is not trying to tell a linear story but rather to build his own language that is made of rhythms and echoes. His world is both rigorous and overflowing, orderly yet saturated.

The result is a disquieting impression; the image feels familiar yet elusive, structured yet unstable. The work does not offer answers, but asserts itself as an enigma, a mental landscape where reality and imagination intertwine.