

1+1. The relational years

curated by **Nicolas Bourriaud**, associate curator **Eleonora Farina**

MAXXI | Gallery 3 | 29 October 2025 – 1 March 2026

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Relational aesthetics

Term coined in 1995 by French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud.

*In his essay "Esthétique relationnelle" (1998), he defines it as
"a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical starting point the whole of
human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."*

Rome, 28 October 2025. **1+1. The relational years** is the first major retrospective in the world dedicated to relational aesthetics, scheduled at the **MAXXI – National Museum of 21st Century Arts from 29 October 2025 to 1 March 2026**.

Curated by **Nicolas Bourriaud** with associate curator **Eleonora Farina**, the exhibition traces the evolution of one of the most influential movements of the new millennium, thirty years after its affirmation.

Born at the dawn of the Internet era and having become a global language over the years, relational aesthetics identifies a set of practices that place human relationships at their core, rather than the artistic object or the artist's private space.

Proximity, conviviality, micro-utopias and participatory processes are the principles that unite the research of the **45 artists** featured in the exhibition, including **Vanessa Beecroft, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija, Angela Bulloch, Liam Gillick, Douglas Gordon, Gabriel Orozco, Santiago Sierra, Felix Gonzalez-Torres**.

Maria Emanuela Bruni, President of Fondazione MAXXI: «Nicolas Bourriaud's lucid intuition — a 'travelling companion' of many of the artists featured in 1+1 — was, in the mid-1990s, to draw a fil rouge among these artistic explorations and experiments, to bear witness to their innovative power, and to understand that the relationship with the Other, in a world about to undergo radical and extraordinary epochal changes, would be at the foundation of art and society in the millennium about to begin. For this reason, it is important that the National Museum of 21st Century Arts presents the first retrospective dedicated to relational aesthetics».

Francesco Stocchi, Artistic Director of MAXXI: «Relational aesthetics has taught us that a work is a platform for exchange, a device that lives through interaction. The MAXXI exhibition design reflects the dynamic and open nature of the movement, activating not only Gallery 3 but also the museum's indoor and outdoor spaces. This project is a well-deserved homage to relational aesthetics, theorised exactly thirty years ago, whose effects are still visible today: a reflection on art's ability to create relationships, communities and new spaces for sharing».

Nicolas Bourriaud, curator: «When we spoke about 'relation' in the 1990s, we considered it to be the very material of art. Today, it is more so than ever. More than thirty years later, it is time to take stock: this artistic constellation can finally be historicized, even though the ideas and forms it has generated are still in motion for many young artists».

Eleonora Farina, associate curator: «We have imagined an open, situational path that invites participation, pause and recognition. The convivial actions, videos and special projects trace a map of everyday micro-utopias, in which relationship itself becomes an artistic form».

The exhibition

The exhibition spans **Gallery 3** and several spaces throughout the Museum, following a path that does not simply display the works but activates them in space, creating a **three-way relationship** between the public, architecture, and artistic creation. The terraces of the Gallery host works from the 1990s and 2000s. Upon arriving at the first terrace, visitors are greeted by an announcer who asks for their name and then announces it to those present: this is **Pierre Huyghe**'s performance *Name Announcer*. Immediately afterwards, visitors are invited to smell the contents of a small glass vial: *Love Drug* (PEA) by **Carsten Höller** contains phenylethylamine, a substance naturally produced by the brain in states of infatuation. The exhibition path thus begins with an intense emotion. The same **Carsten Höller** invites visitors to a déjà vu with two more olfactory works, *Smell of My Father* and *Smell of My Mother*, for which the artist's parents' scents were reproduced in a laboratory. Next, visitors encounter an imposing Christmas tree: this is **Philippe Parreno**'s work *Fraught Times: For Eleven Months of the Year it's an Artwork and in December it's Christmas*. From the first terrace, visitors move to the "1+1" videoroom, an adjacent space where video works by **Pierre Huyghe**, **Grace Ndiritu**, **Mark Leckey**, and **Pia Rönicke** are presented.

On the second terrace are the large installations of 1+1: **Kutlug Ataman**'s *Column*, part of the MAXXI Collection and presented for the first time since the 2009 exhibition; *When Do We Need More Tractors? Five Plans* by **Liam Gillick**, a pyre and a series of action plans written on the wall that allow the work to be recreated at home; *untitled 1990 (pad thai)* by **Rirkrit Tiravanija**, the relational work par excellence, where the remains of an artistic action carried out by the artist cooking in the exhibition gallery are displayed; *Exit Seating* by **Angela Bulloch**, a series of airline seat instructions related to emergency exit rows, created for the first Turner Prize trial in 1997. The ramp guiding visitors through this path is lined with large two-dimensional works by **Maurizio Cattelan**, including the famous *Untitled* with gallerist Massimo De Carlo hanging on the wall, **Vanessa Beecroft**'s *VB74* from the MAXXI Collection, and works by **Santiago Sierra**. On the third terrace, visitors are welcomed by a pile of chocolates and a stack of red sheets: these are **Felix Gonzalez-Torres**' works. From here, a series of wall-mounted works opens, almost like a contemporary gallery, including works by **Christian Jankowski**, **Monica Bonvicini**, **Gillian Wearing**, and **Cesare Pietroiusti**. The Gallery concludes with **Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster**'s video *Riyo*, displayed on a large LED wall. Also by the same artist is *Tapis de Lecture*, where visitors can stop and choose one of the 400 books available on the emerald-colored carpet. Along the ramp descending toward the glass wing, visitors are surrounded by over 4,000 names written on the wall: this is **Douglas Gordon**'s *List of Names (Random)*, a work reflecting on the memory of all the people he met from 1990 to 2017. In the glass wing, the project enters into dialogue with some precursors of relational aesthetics, such as **Lygia Clark** with her "relational objects," **Ian Wilson**, **Sophie Calle** with *ROOM 44. February 17th / March 1st*, recently acquired thanks to the contribution of the Friends of MAXXI, **Hélio Oiticica** with his Parangolé costumes, and **Franz West** with the *Passtrücke*, accessible to visitors, offering a perspective that extends from the Eurocentric context to a global one.

The path also includes two special projects: In the video gallery, *Pakghor & Palan*, a social kitchen and urban garden by the Bangladeshi collective **Britto Arts Trust**, activated weekly during the exhibition (info at maxxi.art); In the well, the immersive installation *na moita* by the Brazilian collective **OPAVIVARÁ!**, reflecting on the theme of meeting and sharing. In **Piazza Alighiero Boetti**, **Jens Haaning**'s audio work *Romanian Jokes* broadcasts Romanian-language jokes through a speaker, while on the façade of Via Guido Reni, passerby photographed by **Braco Dimitrijević** a few days before the opening are featured in his famous series *The Casual Passer-by I Met*.

Further details:

On the occasion of the exhibition, a **catalogue** will be published in a bilingual Italian/English edition, containing essays and interviews that investigate the spread of relational art across various geographical and cultural contexts and how Bourriaud's *Esthétique Relationnelle* (1998) was received and reinterpreted globally.

The exhibition will come alive every week with the already mentioned Pakghor & Palan project by Britto Arts Trust, where, thanks to collaboration with Slow Food Roma and the Multi festival, international communities present in Rome will run the kitchen as a place of meeting, exchange, and storytelling. Every weekend, Gallery 3 will also host **performances** of Pierre Huyghe's *Name Announcer* and Alicia Framis's *Confessionarium* (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.). Gallery assistants, ticket office staff, and educators activate Gianni Motti's work *GM Assistant* daily, wearing yellow t-shirts with the famous logo. Finally, the ongoing project *Frottage*: a sociable device by the artistic duo Premiata Ditta (Anna Stuart Tovini and Vincenzo Chiarandà), which begins in the Flaminio neighbourhood, where the Grande MAXXI is taking shape, will involve associations and citizens over the course of the exhibition.

The exhibition will be accompanied by **an extensive program of events dedicated** to exploring the thought and practices of relational art. It begins on **Wednesday, 29 October at 7:00 p.m.** with **an artist talk** by **Britto Arts Trust** and **OPAVIVARÁ!**, who, together with Nicolas Bourriaud, will present to the public the new works created for the exhibition. **On 26 November at 6:00 p.m.**, Nicolas Bourriaud will give a lecture offering the public a reflection on the role of the artist as a social catalyst in a world experiencing continuous cultural and technological transformations (info at maxxi.art).

MAXXI PRESS OFFICE press@fondazionemaxxi.it tel. +39.06.324861