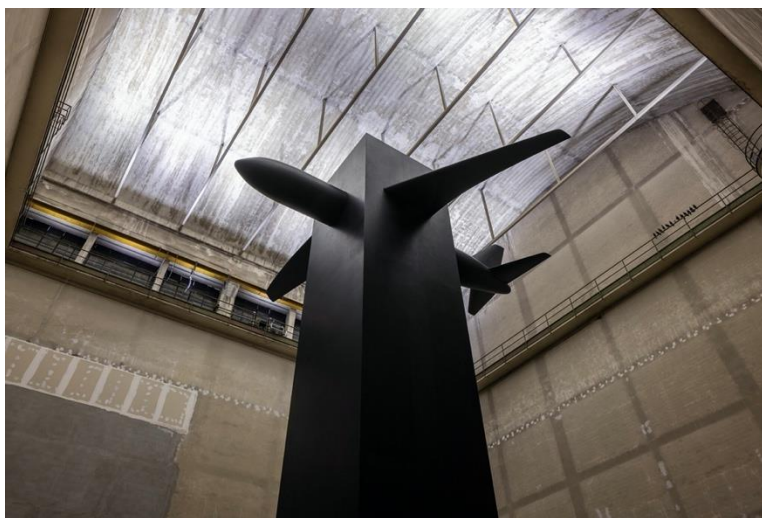


**The New York Times**

## *Maurizio Cattelan's New Work Pays Visceral Tribute to the Pain of 9/11*

*A sculpture at an exhibition in Milan provides a graphic reminder of the terror attacks.  
The Guggenheim Museum's former chief curator said it may best be appreciated,  
for now, outside New York.*

by Matt Stevens (July 15, 2021)



A sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan that is part of his installation, "Blind," now on view in Milan.  
Credit: Maurizio Cattelan, Marian Goodman Gallery and Pirelli HangarBicocca

The Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan has seldom shied from creating works that raise eyebrows. He is, after all, the person responsible for that \$120,000 banana, and the popular, highly symbolic gold toilet that went missing in 2019.

In his latest solo exhibition unveiled Wednesday at Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan, Cattelan has set out to deal with less irreverent, more existential themes like the fragility of life, memory, and collective loss.

But his work remains provocative as ever: The third part of his exhibit, "Breath Ghosts Blind," is a hulking resin monolith being pierced all the way through by an airplane — a visceral and graphic reminder of 9/11 from a man who was in New York that day.

"'Blind' is something I've been thinking about for years," Cattelan said, according to a transcript of an interview that will soon be published in the catalog of the exhibition. "I had to walk home from LaGuardia, which took hours, and the things I saw stayed with me."

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“Achieving a certain distance, not just in space but in time, becomes a necessary step in order to remember,” he added in the interview, in which he noted that it felt like “an important, almost necessary step for ‘Blind’ to be presented for the first time in Italy.”

Over the last 19 years, art depicting the deadliest attack in the history of the United States has been fraught, carrying with it the weight of thousands of lives lost while also taking under consideration the thoughts and feelings of those who survived.

Some direct, confrontational works have come under scrutiny. In 2002, for instance, Eric Fischl’s bronze sculpture, “Tumbling Woman” — of a naked person falling to her death from one of the towers — was removed from view after only a few days in front of Rockefeller Center following public outcry.

At the same time, more abstract representations, such as the memorials constructed at ground zero and at the Pentagon, have largely been embraced.

Does Cattelan’s work come at a time, as the 20th anniversary of the attacks approach, when perspectives have evolved?

As recently as 2017, the Guggenheim Museum’s then-chief curator, Nancy Spector, said she had been “hesitant at best” when Cattelan approached her about a possible sculpture of an airplane embedded in an edifice.

“The timing (and maybe the location) was off,” Spector, who has since left the museum, wrote in a forthcoming essay for the HangarBicocca catalog. “After 9/11, especially for New Yorkers, nothing felt safe.”

Even four years later, Spector, in the essay, acknowledged that, “‘Blind’ will, no doubt, elicit strong emotional responses.” But, she added: “The fact that this monolith of a sculpture will be first shown in a museum context in Milan as part of the artist’s exhibition — and not in the midst of New York City — will allow the work to breathe, as it were, and test itself publicly as an object of deep and complex meaning.”

The Guggenheim declined to comment.

Roberta Tenconi, the curator at HangarBicocca, and Vicente Todolí, the artistic director, said in an email that they “did not have any doubt” about showing “Blind.”

“Art is an expression of freedom and the role of a museum, we believe, is to be a place for sharing different voices and for generating thoughts and reflections on the world we are living in,” they wrote in a joint email.

“‘Blind’ definitely recalls a dark and tragic moment in history, and it is there to remember the fragility and the vulnerability of all human beings,” they continued. “Exhibiting the work in New York is a decision up to the cultural and art institutions there.”

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In 2011, the Guggenheim, under Ms. Spector, put on a 21-year retrospective of Cattelan's work that included 128 of his sculptures, including one of Pope John Paul II being hit by a meteorite and another of Adolf Hitler kneeling in prayer.



The Cattelan exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum in 2011, with a cascading installation.  
Credit: Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

“‘Blind’ is a work about pain and its social dimension, it is there to show the fragility of a society where loneliness and egotism are on the rise,” Cattelan said in his interview with HangarBicocca’s curators. “I must say the pandemic made death visible again in our lives: It’s something we’re always trying to suppress and forget.”

Spector’s essay admires Cattelan’s new sculpture even as she acknowledges the intensity of its imagery. “Like a true memorial,” she wrote, “‘Blind’ holds sacred the thousands of lives lost.”

“It is not meant as an ironic gesture,” she wrote. “But as with the most searing of Cattelan’s radical, destabilizing sculptures, it stares evil in the face and dares to question the role authority might have played in the perpetuation of such immorality.”