Cattelan

Neue Nationalgalerie
Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz

EN

NEUE NATIONALGALERIE

Neue Nationalgalerie presents *NIGHT*, the first major solo exhibition in Germany by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, recipient of the 2026 Preis der Nationalgalerie. Bringing together historical works and new commissions, the exhibition takes place within Mies van der Rohe's glass pavilion, which becomes an integral part of the installation.

With the new work *Purgatory* (2026), the exhibition debuts a scaled-down Brandenburg Gate inside the museum, repositioning one of Germany's most recognizable monuments as a space of passage, reflection, and historical ambiguity. The show then proceeds through a sequence of works and encounters. At its center is a spatial configuration in which *Him* (2001), a kneeling male figure in a contemplative pose, is positioned in direct relation to *Dawn* (2007), a female figure crucified inside a transport crate. This arrangement establishes a strong vertical axis within the space, bringing together two distinct forms of devotion and vulnerability. High overhead, thousands of pigeons with the title *People* (2026) are installed on the ceiling structure, introducing a diffuse presence and quietly reshaping the architectural space into a place of collective gathering and observation.

The alignment reorients the architecture of the Neue Nationalgalerie through a sequence of works that emphasize elevation and descent. The exhibition temporarily lends the museum the spatial character of a church: bodies gather beneath a vaulted expanse, figures are elevated into positions of contemplation and sacrifice, and viewers are drawn into a shared space of reflection. "A church is a beautiful invention because it gives shape to something invisible. The Neue Nationalgalerie already has something ritualistic: its scale, symmetry, silence and distance from everyday life. I was interested in taking that quality seriously, but without making it religious. I imagined the space almost like a contemporary church: a central nave, side aisles and a sequence of presences." Maurizio Cattelan

The title *NIGHT* evokes a condition in which things are not seen less clearly, but differently. "Night is not simply the absence of light. It is a condition. Night suspends certainty. Things don't necessarily disappear—they simply become harder to define. The exhibition is not about darkness. It is about the loss of certainty. Night is also temporary. It always contains the possibility of morning, even if you cannot see it yet." Maurizio Cattelan

NIGHT takes shape around themes of history, power, memory, identity, and belief. Across the exhibition, familiar images and figures are shifted just enough to unsettle their meaning, opening them up to multiple readings that move between irony and ambiguity.

Presented in Berlin, the exhibition unfolds in a context shaped by layered histories and ongoing processes of remembrance. In dialogue with the museum's architecture, the works activate the building not just as a container, but as part of the exhibition itself. Through a sequence of encounters that move between monumentality and intimacy, visibility and concealment, *NIGHT* invites viewers to reflect on how images, symbols, and structures of meaning circulate and transform over time.

Lisa Botti and Klaus Biesenbach

“I admit that sometimes I like to think
I’m like a stone in someone’s shoe.”

Maurizio Cattelan

The remark offers a fitting image for an artistic practice that persistently unsettles established perspectives without prescribing conclusions. Bringing together wit, ambiguity, and keen observation, Cattelan’s work continues to illuminate the tensions and contradictions that define contemporary society.

For more than three decades, Maurizio Cattelan (born 1960 in Padua, Italy) has developed a body of work consisting of sculptures, installations, and conceptual interventions that engage with questions of authority, collective memory, and social power structures. Although his works are primarily sculptural, Cattelan understands them above all as images. Their immediate visual impact gives them an extraordinary presence, making them recognizable far beyond the exhibition space.

“Scandal is an accident, a side effect. I work with images, trying to reflect the schizophrenia of reality. The scandal is raised by others, when they try to impose their own interpretation as the only possible truth.”

Without formal artistic training, Cattelan began his career as an artist in the late 1980s. He quickly became one of the most influential voices in international contemporary art. His works have been exhibited worldwide in major museums and exhibitions, including several Venice Biennales and major solo exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (*All*, 2011) and the Monnaie de Paris (*Not Afraid of Love*, 2016). Following his highly acclaimed retrospective *All* in 2011, Cattelan initially announced his retirement from the art world, but returned a few years later with new works and exhibitions.

Cattelan’s works exist between irony and seriousness, familiarity and alienation, challenging viewers to reflect on their own relationship with institutions, public narratives, and social systems of value.

This exhibition marks Cattelan’s return to Berlin—twenty years after he co-curated the 4th Berlin Biennale in 2006. In a city that continues to be shaped by debates surrounding history, memory, and public responsibility, his works enter into dialogue with themes that have long defined his practice: How do societies remember their past? What forms can authority take? And how are collective narratives preserved, contested, or transformed?

NEVER

Installed on the roof of the Neue Nationalgalerie, Cattelan's *Never* appears as both guardian and disturbance: a solitary drummer seated high above the city, between spectacle and catastrophe. The animatronic figure is based on the protagonist of Günter Grass's 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, a child who refuses to grow up while witnessing the rise of Nazism and the devastations of World War II, and whose drumming becomes an act of resistance and a warning against collective amnesia and political violence.

The title *Never* may be understood as a simultaneous assertion of negation and persistence, resonating with the refusal embodied by Grass's protagonist and suggesting both denial and an ongoing, unresolved presence.

Cattelan transforms this literary reference into an unsettling sculptural apparition. The boy periodically beats his drum in an irregular rhythm that oscillates between parade, alarm, funeral march, and circus attraction. Seated high above visitors and passersby, the figure introduces a palpable tension between innocence and danger, vulnerability and control: The work produces a persistent sense of unease, as though the child's fragile presence might at any moment tip into catastrophe.

At the same time, *Never* belongs to a broader constellation of self-portraits that extends throughout Cattelan's oeuvre. The artist himself described the figure as emerging "from a rib" of an earlier sculpture, in which a miniature version of himself peers out of a hole in the museum floor. Like many of Cattelan's works, the drummer occupies an ambiguous position between comedy and tragedy, animation and death.

At the Neue Nationalgalerie, the child drummer becomes both watchman and warning: a fragile figure whose drumbeat rings out across Berlin's storied landscape, reminding us that memory, fear, and spectacle remain deeply intertwined.

2003 — Resin, fiberglass, ABS, clothes, shoes, metal, drum, synthetic hair, paint, electronic and mechanical components

SCAR

A manhole cover is a commonplace element of urban infrastructure. Situated at street level, it marks an opening into the systems hidden beneath the city—networks of drainage, circulation, and maintenance that remain largely invisible in everyday life. Designed to provide access to the underground, it connects the surface to what lies below, the visible to the invisible.

For this work, Cattelan has inscribed a manhole cover with the titles of all the artworks included in his exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie. Detached from the artworks they originally identified, these titles take on a new role. Gathered on the surface of a single object, they form a constellation of words—cryptic, poetic, humorous, and enigmatic—that condenses the exhibition into language while inviting new associations.

The title, *Scar*, refers to the traces left behind by an injury or a transformative event. A scar signifies healing, yet it also remains as a permanent reminder of what has occurred. In this sense, the manhole cover can be understood as a metaphor for the city itself: Beneath its surface lie hidden infrastructures, histories, and memories that continue to shape urban life despite remaining largely unnoticed. Like a scarred body, the city bears the marks of its past, carrying visible and invisible traces of what has been built, damaged, repaired, and remembered.

2026 — Cast iron

PEOPLE

First presented at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997 with the title *Tourists*, the work consists of thousands of taxidermied pigeons installed high above the viewer, occupying the architectural structure. Cattelan conceived the work after encountering the Italian Pavilion in a state of disrepair, inhabited by birds during installation. Rather than concealing this condition, he restaged it as a form of quiet normality.

The title *People* shifts attention from the birds as subject to a broader idea of collectivity. It introduces an ambiguous parallel between human and nonhuman presence, suggesting shared forms of gathering and occupation. Suspended between intrusion and belonging, the pigeons blur distinctions between nature and culture, interior and exterior. A familiar urban image is displaced into the controlled space of the museum, where it becomes at once ordinary and unsettled.

In Christian iconography, the dove is associated with the Holy Spirit, often appearing as a hovering presence above figures or gatherings. In this context, the elevated field of birds also introduces the idea of ascent and immaterial presence above the viewer, shifting the perception of the space toward a sense of uplift.

2026 — Taxidermied pigeons

PURGATORY

Berlin's Brandenburg Gate appears inside the museum in miniature: familiar in form, displaced in context, neither monument nor model. Visitors can walk around and through the structure, becoming temporary occupants of a symbol associated with triumph, division, occupation, tourism, and reunification.

Originally commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, designed by Carl Gotthard Langhans, and built between 1788 and 1791, the Brandenburg Gate was envisaged as a civic monument marking the entrance to Berlin. Positioned at the end of "Unter den Linden", it formed part of a broader urban and ideological project framed around classical references and state authority. Conceived in a period of relative peace, it was initially associated with civic order rather than military triumph.

The quadriga sculpture atop the gate, created by Johann Gottfried Schadow in 1793, shows the goddess of peace entering the city. After Napoleon's troops removed it in 1806 and took it to Paris as a trophy, it was returned to Berlin in 1814. During its restoration, Karl Friedrich Schinkel added an Iron Cross to the oak-leaf wreath, shifting its meaning toward Prussian victory and national power. From this moment onward, the monument became increasingly tied to political authority. During the Cold War, it stood isolated between East and West Berlin before later becoming a symbol of reunification. Cattelan approaches this history not as a fixed narrative, but as something continuously rewritten.

Constructed in richly toned wood, the sculpture recalls Renaissance architectural models, in which monumental buildings are reduced to carefully crafted objects. Architecture becomes representation rather than structure, with authority remaining only as image and reference.

The title *Purgatory*, originating from the Christian idea of a transitional space, evokes a state between passage and arrival, reflection and adjudication. In the context of Berlin and Germany, the work touches on histories shaped by rupture, division, and reconstruction. The Brandenburg Gate appears less as a stable monument than as a threshold between historical narratives and possible futures.

Installed within the glass-and-steel architecture of the Neue Nationalgalerie, the work creates a dialogue between two iconic structures shaped by different centuries and ideologies. The sculpture suggests vulnerability: History becomes something that can be miniaturized and exhibited but never fully contained.

2026 — Solid lime wood, plywood, resin, paint, wood stain, wood oil, wax, metal brackets and fixings

ALL

All consists of nine life-sized figures lying on the ground, each covered by a shroud. Delicately carved from Carrara marble, the work draws on a long tradition of Italian sculpture in which the rendering of drapery demonstrates technical mastery. Here, the stone appears almost weightless, the fabric clinging softly to the bodies beneath.

This treatment recalls the celebrated *Cristo velato* (*Veiled Christ*, 1753) by Giuseppe Sanmartino in Naples, whose translucent marble veil hovers between concealment and disclosure. As in that work, the surface both reveals and withholds: The presence of the body is undeniable, yet its identity remains inaccessible.

When Cattelan first encountered the completed work, he described "the tragedy and the silence of the nine bodies" under the sheets as something that "set the veins trembling under my skin." That physical response points to the work's quiet intensity. The figures suggest not an individual death, but a collective condition. Their anonymity resists identification, allowing associations to emerge—war, catastrophe, epidemic, ritual—without settling into a single narrative.

Cattelan has insisted that the work does not refer to a specific event, but to "death, the death of everybody." Rooted in his early experience working in a hospital morgue, sculpture itself appears here as something distant, "already dead." Yet this distance is not merely physical. It opens onto a space that is at once political and, as the artist suggests, "above all on the side of religion, of the spiritual."

Arranged side by side, the nine bodies form a horizontal monument without hierarchy or resolution—an image of death that is universal, anonymous, and quietly overwhelming.

2007 — Carrara marble, nine components

HIM

Him is a small yet profoundly unsettling sculpture that derives its power from misdirection, scale, and the shock of recognition. Installed to be approached from behind, the work initially appears to depict a kneeling child, hands clasped in prayer. This impression of innocence is abruptly disrupted when the viewer moves closer and discovers that the figure is in fact Adolf Hitler.

This carefully staged moment of revelation produces a disturbing tension between vulnerability and historical atrocity. The figure's expression remains deliberately ambiguous: It may suggest remorse, supplication, detachment, or even emptiness. By presenting Hitler not as a dictator in uniform but as an ordinary, almost fragile figure, Cattelan removes the familiar visual markers of power and ideology. In doing so, he shifts the focus toward a more troubling reflection on human nature itself—the possibility that evil is not distant or exceptional, but disturbingly close and comprehensible.

Cattelan has described the work as an attempt to confront "absolute evil" while acknowledging the difficulty of representing it. *Him* does not offer explanation or moral clarity; instead, it operates through psychological tension and emotional contradiction. The viewer is left to navigate an uneasy space between rejection and a fleeting, involuntary empathy. In this sense, the sculpture functions as a kind of test, exposing the limits of our moral certainties and the complexity of our responses to images of evildoers.

Displayed at the Neue Nationalgalerie, the work gains additional resonance. In Berlin, a city deeply marked by the history of Nazism, *Him* becomes more than a provocative artwork—it becomes a site of confrontation. The sculpture's kneeling posture may also evoke the historical memory of Willy Brandt's 1970 visit to a Holocaust memorial in Warsaw, where he spontaneously dropped to his knees: a gesture of humility, guilt, and acknowledgment of the victims of Nazi crimes. Yet in Cattelan's work, this language of repentance is radically destabilized. The viewer is left uncertain whether the figure is seeking forgiveness, showing remorse, or merely staging its appearance.

Rather than commemorating history, *Him* unsettles the present, prompting reflection on memory, responsibility, and the enduring challenge of representing evil without diminishing its reality.

2001 — Polyester resin, silicone rubber, pigment, natural hair, suit, boots

DAWN

Dawn shows a young woman enclosed within a wooden transport crate, her body bound and vertically aligned. What would normally remain backstage becomes the work's visible structure: The figure appears as something already packed, in transit, or withheld.

Cattelan has described how this condition emerged from the work's own presentation history. First shown at Kunsthaus Bregenz in 2008 with the figure suspended and facing outward, the work recalled a 1977 photograph from Francesca Woodman's *Angel* series, in which the body appears and disappears within architectural space. Later, encountering the work inside its transport crate, Cattelan decided it should remain "exactly like this, without being taken out of the crate." Preparation and display collapse into one condition, and transit becomes form.

Suspended from the ceiling in the Neue Nationalgalerie, the work invites Crucifixion-informed readings. The figure's outstretched arms and the pins through the palms ground this interpretation in the body. Both this work and *Him* (2001), which features a kneeling figure looking upward, establish a vertical axis in the exhibition space, shaping an arrangement that recalls a church-like structure of verticality and shared attention.

The title *Dawn* evokes a moment of transition between night and day, a threshold rather than a fixed point. In conjunction with the figure's suspended, cruciform posture, it creates an association with elevation, exposure, and sacrifice.

2007 — Resin, clothing, natural hair, packing tissue, wood, screws, wooden anchors

NOVECENTO

Suspended from the ceiling of the Neue Nationalgalerie, a life-sized taxidermied horse hangs motionless in midair, its elongated legs seemingly straining toward the floor. Stripped of movement and agency, it appears caught in a state between ascent and collapse, power and surrender.

Since the 1990s, Maurizio Cattelan has repeatedly used taxidermied animals to explore human vulnerability, psychological projection, and the emotional weight carried by cultural symbols. The horse—traditionally associated with nobility, military power, freedom, and heroic representation—occupies a central place in Western art history, from ancient equestrian monuments to images of conquest and national identity. In *Novecento*, however, this emblem of vitality appears exhausted, immobilized, and defeated.

The title refers both to the Italian word for the twentieth century and to Bernardo Bertolucci's 1976 film *Novecento*, which traces the rise of fascism and the social upheavals of modern Italy. Created on the eve of the new millennium, Cattelan's work can be understood as an allegory for a century marked by war, ideological violence, political disillusionment, and collective fatigue. Far from being triumphant, the horse becomes a monument to paralysis—a body that is filled with latent energy yet incapable of action.

The artist has described the work as a form of self-portrait, reflecting a period in which he felt trapped between ambition and inertia: "It was like having a very good car, with the engine revved up, but in neutral." That tension between potential and helplessness permeates the sculpture.

Installed in Berlin, *Novecento* also resonates with the city's own twentieth-century history—a landscape shaped by rupture, violence, division, and reconstruction. By transforming a familiar symbol of strength into an image of suspension and exhaustion, Cattelan upends the traditional language of monumentality. The work becomes not a celebration of power, but a meditation on vulnerability, historical burden, and the uneasy legacy of the modern age.

1997 — Taxidermied horse, leather saddle, rope

CHARLIE DON'T SURF

A young boy sits alone at a school desk, turned away from the viewer. At first glance, it appears that we are witnessing a classroom punishment. Only on closer inspection does the severity of the scene become clear: Pencils pierce the boy's palms, introducing an unexpected reference to the Crucifixion.

Created in 1997, *Charlie Don't Surf* presents this figure in a hooded sweatshirt and isolated posture, suspended between childhood discipline and physical suffering. Cattelan once remarked, "I was wondering what hurts more: a pencil through a hand or failing first grade," underscoring the work's central tension between physical and psychological pain.

The sculpture explores themes of academic repression, shame, and the anxieties produced by institutional authority. The figure of Charlie, a recurring name in Cattelan's work, embodies vulnerability, discipline, and humiliation. Isolated at his desk, the boy appears trapped in a moment of punishment, confronting the viewer with the latent violence embedded in educational and social systems. The work suggests that fear of failure and public embarrassment can be as painful as bodily harm, transforming a familiar school scenario into a powerful metaphor for emotional trauma.

Cattelan has frequently described failure as a central concept in his work, calling it a "permanent background" shaped by a lifelong fear of not meeting expectations. Rather than avoiding failure, he transformed it into a strategy—what might be described as an "aesthetic of failure," in which vulnerability and inadequacy become tools for generating empathy and managing expectations.

In a 2001 interview, Cattelan openly reflected: School had been "a torture," and his inability to follow rules made him feel like a failure for much of his life. Art, he explained, became a space to experiment with a new set of rules, even though the fear of failure remained.

In *Charlie Don't Surf*, this fear takes physical form, transforming a simple classroom scene into a haunting image of vulnerability, authority, and the painful consequences of not fitting into institutional systems.

The title, taken from Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, transfers an expression of military bravado into the context of the classroom, introducing a sense of ironic displacement.

1997 — Silicone rubber, school desk, chair, mannequin, clothing, shoes, pencils

DUST

A standard fire extinguisher contains the cremated remains of a friend of the artist. Retaining its familiar appearance, the object conceals human ashes, transforming a device associated with emergency, rescue, and preservation into an unexpected vessel of remembrance.

The title, *Dust*, refers both to the material reality of cremated remains and to the words from Genesis: “for dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19), echoed in the Christian funeral rite as *“ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”* The work evokes the inevitability of death and the cycle of return.

By appropriating an ordinary manufactured object as a work of art—a strategy rooted in the tradition of the readymade—Cattelan shifts its meaning from utility to reflection. The familiar fire extinguisher becomes a quiet memorial, investing an everyday object with a profound sense of presence and absence.

The work was realized in accordance with the wishes of the deceased.

2026 — Steel, plastic, rubber, glass, cremated human remains

AFTER

After consists of a six-metre-long iron pipe with a sleeping dog resting at its centre. At regular intervals, the pipe is struck, resonating like a bell. The industrial object becomes a sounding body that measures the passage of time. With the title *After*, Cattelan evokes a state of “afterness”—a moment suspended between past and present, movement and stillness. Combining monumental form, sound, and an everyday scene, the work creates an image of rest, transience, and the relentless flow of time.

2026 — Iron, wooden wedges, taxidermied dog

BONES

Bones presents a monumental white eagle lying motionless on the ground, its wings spread wide as though arrested in mid-flight. Suspended between monument and ruin, the sculpture transforms a familiar emblem of power into an image of vulnerability and collapse.

Traditionally associated with sovereignty, military authority, and imperial ambition, the eagle occupies a particularly fraught position in European and German historical iconography. Cattelan strips the symbol of its heroic certainty. Enlarged to titanic scale, yet rendered inert and exposed, the bird no longer appears triumphant but rather fallen. Its stark whiteness evokes both classical sculpture and memorial architecture, while the position of the body suggests exhaustion, defeat, or mourning.

The ambiguity of the work remains central: the eagle may be resting, wounded, or dead. Rather than presenting a fixed narrative, Cattelan leaves the image open, oscillating between beauty and catastrophe, stillness and warning. A creature historically associated with elevation and dominance is brought down to the ground, confronting viewers at eye level with its physical weight and fragility.

The fallen eagle appears less as a monument than as its aftermath—a spectral body that reflects on the instability of symbols and the persistence of historical memory.

2025 — Statuario Michelangelo marble

PENTECOST

A taxidermied donkey is harnessed to a heavily loaded wooden cart, its body pulled upward under the weight of an excessive and unbalanced cargo. Stacked with bundled materials, the cart tilts into space, producing a tense, unstable equilibrium between forward motion and resistance. The donkey appears to be caught at the precise threshold where effort becomes unsustainable, its posture expressing strain, inertia, and imbalance all at once.

Since the early stages of his practice, Cattelan has repeatedly returned to the figure of the donkey as a way of reflecting on labor, endurance, and the imposition of burdens. One of his earliest exhibitions involved presenting a live donkey in a gallery in New York in 1994, where it occupied the space as both presence and disruption, challenging expectations of display, authorship, and institutional control. From that point onward, the animal became a recurring figure in his work, shifting between comedy, vulnerability, and exhaustion.

In *Pentecost*, the donkey is no longer an active participant but a fixed sculptural body defined by disproportion. Movement is suggested but structurally compromised: The cart implies direction and purpose, while the animal's posture signals resistance and fatigue. The result is a system on the verge of failure, held in place by its own imbalance.

As in much of Cattelan's work, humor and unease coexist without resolution. The image may initially read as absurdly exaggerated, yet it quickly shifts into a more ambiguous register, in which questions of labor, productivity, and the limits of endurance become unavoidable.

The title *Pentecost* refers to the Christian holiday celebrating collective transformation, when the Holy Spirit is said to have enabled communication and shared understanding among the apostles. In this context, the title introduces a subtle tension between ideas of activation and the image of physical strain, where movement and exhaustion coexist within the same system.

2002 — Taxidermied donkey, wood, metal, fabric, paper, rope, rubber

LA RIVOLUZIONE SIAMO NOI

La rivoluzione siamo noi (We are the revolution) presents a miniature figure of Maurizio Cattelan, dressed in a suit modeled on Joseph Beuys's iconic felt attire and hanging on a metal clothing rack. The work references a 1972 poster by Beuys, in which the artist strides forward above the phrase that serves as the title of both works. In Cattelan's version, that forward movement is interrupted: The body is lifted off the ground, immobilized, and turned into an object of display.

The piece engages not only with Beuys's public persona but also with his concept of "social sculpture"—the belief that art could extend beyond the artwork itself as a form of collective transformation. The suit and title recall Beuys's conviction in art's transformative potential, yet Cattelan presents this idea in a diminished and inverted form: Instead of expanding into social space, the figure is suspended, contained, and withdrawn from action. Heroic movement is replaced by stasis, assertion by restraint.

As Cattelan has explained, "I literally put myself in Beuys's shoes. But I'm no good at keeping my feet on the ground. I also felt a lot smaller. I didn't think I was putting myself in a humiliating position. I have always been in a humiliating position, so it was like doing my regular job."

The work is installed here in the former cloakroom designed by Mies van der Rohe; it is typically shown in a corner or marginal position, reinforcing its sense of containment and constraint.

2000 — Chrome plated steel, high impact polystyrene, wool felt, platinum silicone, epoxy resin, natural hair, steel

FIRST

First presents a fragile white egg pierced by an iron nail and fixed to the wall. With a single precise gesture, the work brings together opposing conditions: softness and violence, vulnerability and force, birth and destruction.

Traditionally associated with life, fertility, and potential, the egg here appears already damaged—as though death had arrived before life. The nail both penetrates and supports the shell, holding it in place while simultaneously violating it. The image oscillates between preservation and collapse.

The work's unsettling power lies in its simplicity. Reduced to two ordinary objects and one irreversible action, the sculpture evokes sacrifice, stillness, and suspended time. The cracked shell becomes a quiet image of fragility under pressure: delicate, exposed, and permanently altered.

2025 — Statuario Michelangelo marble, nail

WE

We presents two identical figures of Maurizio Cattelan, dressed in black suits and slightly smaller than life-size, lying side by side on a wooden bed. The work continues his sustained engagement with self-portraiture but shifts it into duplication, proximity, and quiet disjunction.

The repetition of the artist's body introduces a subtle instability in identity. Rather than a single subject, the work offers a doubled presence in which difference is difficult to locate. The title *We* suggests collectivity, yet this collectivity remains unresolved: It points toward relation without fully forming it. What is shared between the two figures is not action or narrative, but condition.

From a distance, the arrangement can evoke the presentation of bodies in the context of a final viewing, the quiet display of the deceased to family members. However, the figures' open eyes disrupt this association, projecting alertness and preventing the scene from settling into a strictly funerary reading.

Cattelan says: "Sometimes I feel like I'm two people, and this is the theme of *We*. ... A double self-portrait conceals confessions, not always conscious, about your inner self." In this sense, the doubling of the figure is not a multiplication of identity but a slight displacement of it. The self appears simultaneously familiar and estranged.

2010 — Polyester resin, polyurethane, rubber, paint, synthetic hair, fabric, clothing, shoes, wood

THE PREIS DER NATIONALGALERIE 2026

There are moments when the decision to honour an artist is more than simply a recognition of an exceptional body of work. It becomes a statement of principle.

By honouring Maurizio Cattelan, the Preis der Nationalgalerie 2026 is making just such a statement. At a time when artistic freedom is increasingly under pressure worldwide—not always through overt censorship, but often through more subtle forms of political, economic or social influence—Cattelan's work reminds us that art exerts its greatest power where it remains free: free to provoke, to question, to challenge and to open up new perspectives.

With the reorientation of the Preis der Nationalgalerie and its relocation to the Neue Nationalgalerie, a format has emerged that transforms the prize into a standalone exhibition. It offers the prize-winners the opportunity to fully develop their artistic position and present it to a broad public.

Maurizio Cattelan embodies this ambition in an exceptional way. His work invites us to reconsider familiar certainties. It is precisely this that makes his work so relevant today. And it is for this very reason that his award has significance far beyond the art world.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the BMW Group for its longstanding support of the Preis der Nationalgalerie. This sustained commitment creates the space in which significant contemporary art can emerge and realise its full impact.

CREATIVE FREEDOM REQUIRES TRUST

For more than five decades, the BMW Group has been committed to art and culture around the world. At the heart of our cultural engagement is the conviction that creative freedom is an essential prerequisite for artistic excellence and innovation. That is why we support the arts through long-term partnerships and with respect for their independence.

For us, sustainable cultural engagement means giving artists and cultural institutions the freedom to break new ground and bring extraordinary ideas to life. Our focus is not on individual projects, but on creating the conditions in which creativity can realise its full potential.

Maurizio Cattelan's exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie embodies this approach. It demonstrates the power of art when it remains independent and has the courage to ask questions, challenge expectations and bring different perspectives into dialogue.

IMPRINT

MAURIZIO CATTELAN. *NIGHT* is curated by Lisa Botti, curator at Neue Nationalgalerie, with Klaus Biesenbach, director of Neue Nationalgalerie, in close collaboration with Maurizio Cattelan.

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MAURIZIO CATTELAN IN CONVERSATION

How does it feel to return to Berlin?

MC Berlin has been part of my life for more than twenty years. In 2006, together with Ali Subotnick and Massimiliano Gioni, we curated the 4th Berlin Biennale. Instead of centering it in a museum, we built it around Auguststraße, turning a single street into the exhibition. Since then, I've returned to Berlin many times, but I've never had a solo exhibition here until now. Because of that, this doesn't feel like a return. It feels like completing a relationship that has been developing for a long time.

The Neue Nationalgalerie is a building loaded with history and architectural weight — what was your first instinct when you started thinking about working with this specific space?

MC Every exhibition space is a challenge, but the Neue Nationalgalerie is a particularly unusual one because the building already feels like a work of art. Mies van der Rohe created an extraordinary architectural achievement: a space with almost no hierarchy, no clear beginning or end, and no real distinction between inside and outside. The glass walls dissolve the boundary between the museum and the city. It is, in many ways, the idea of a museum without borders. At the same time, that radical openness can become a challenge for artists. Most exhibitions rely on walls, sequences, thresholds and divisions—precisely the elements Mies tried to eliminate. The question, then, was not how to fill the space, but how to give it rhythm without betraying its openness. Rather than competing with the architecture, I first tried to understand its logic. Working in the Neue Nationalgalerie means accepting that the building is never just a container. It is always an active participant in the exhibition.

Some of your earlier works have unexpected German references. Now that the exhibition is actually happening in Berlin, does the city itself change how you think about the works?

MC Germany has appeared in my work at different moments, sometimes unexpectedly and sometimes quite deliberately. It appears through figures and cultural ghosts: *Him, La Rivoluzione siamo noi, Never,* and now *Purgatory*. These works are not really about Germany as a nation. They are about images and symbols that have shaped our collective imagination. Berlin inevitably changes the pressure around those works. The city brings its own memory, its own wounds and its own intelligence to them. I don't think the works change. The city changes the questions people ask of them. That is one of the reasons exhibitions still matter: meaning is produced in the encounter between the work, the place and the people looking at it.

Mies van der Rohe's building has been called a temple. With *NIGHT*, are you trying to work with that idea, or against it?

MC I wouldn't say I am working against the idea of the temple. The Neue Nationalgalerie already has something ritualistic: its scale, symmetry, silence and distance from everyday life. I was interested in taking that quality seriously, but without making it religious. I imagined the space almost like a contemporary church: a central nave, side aisles and a sequence of presences. That structure helped give orientation to a building that is otherwise open and non-hierarchical. *NIGHT* is not about faith. It is about doubt, suspension and the moment when certainty begins to disappear. The temple is there, but it is unstable. It is a place where belief has been replaced by questions.

Why *NIGHT* specifically — what does that word unlock for you that "darkness" or "shadow" wouldn't?

MC Night is not simply the absence of light. It is a condition. Darkness is visual. Night is psychological. A shadow belongs to an object. Night belongs to everyone. The most important things in life also happen at night: birth, death, dreams, fear, desire, love and solitude. Night suspends assurance. Things don't necessarily disappear—they simply become harder to define. The exhibition is not about darkness. It is about the loss of certainty. Night is also temporary. It always contains the possibility of morning, even if you cannot see it yet.

What inspired the new *Purgatory*?

MC *Purgatory* emerged from the architecture of the Neue Nationalgalerie itself. Once I began to imagine the building as a contemporary church, I realized the exhibition also needed its own entrance. The museum already has an entrance; I needed to invent the exhibition's entrance. In that sense, *Purgatory* creates a space within another space. It introduces a threshold inside a building that deliberately resists clear thresholds. The Brandenburg Gate felt like the right image to begin with. It is one of Germany's strongest symbols, but also one whose meaning has constantly shifted throughout history. By reducing its scale and repeating it, the monument becomes less monumental. It becomes more approachable, almost familiar, without losing its symbolic weight. Many of my works operate this way: they reduce authority without removing its complexity. *Purgatory* is neither condemnation nor salvation. It is a state of suspension, a place where transformation is still possible.