

BELLEZZA E BRUTTEZZA. IDEALE, REALE, CARICATURALE NEL RINASCIMENTO - BEAUTY AND UGLINESS. THE IDEAL, THE REAL AND THE CARICATURAL IN THE RENAISSANCE

Gallerie d'Italia – Milan, Intesa Sanpaolo's Museum

From 10 July 2026 to 18 October 2026

Exhibition curated by Chiara Rabbi Bernard with general coordination by Gianfranco Brunelli

IMAGES AND MATERIALS AT THIS LINK: [Bellezza e Bruttezza. Ideale, reale, caricaturale nel Rinascimento](#)

Milan, 9 July 2026 – From 10 July to 18 October 2026, Intesa Sanpaolo presents at Gallerie d'Italia – Milan, ***“Bellezza e Bruttezza. Ideale, reale, caricaturale nel Rinascimento”***: an exhibition devoted to one of the most fascinating themes in the history of Western art: the dialectic between beauty and ugliness, an inseparable paradigm since Classical Antiquity. The exhibition takes visitors on a journey into the heart of the Renaissance, exploring the subtle boundary between beauty and ugliness, ideal harmony and grotesque distortion, nature and artifice.

Curated by Chiara Rabbi Bernard with the general coordination of Gianfranco Brunelli and held in partnership with **Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels**, the exhibition was presented for the first time in February 2026 at Bozar – Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and now arrives in Milan enriched by significant new loans. Bringing together **more than 100 works, including sculptures, paintings, drawings, manuscripts and decorative arts**, the exhibition features masterpieces from **leading international institutions** such as the Vatican Museums, the Louvre Museum, the British Museum, the Prado Museum, Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum and the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Artists represented include Ludovico Carracci, Bernardino Luini, Paolo Veronese, Titian, Lorenzo Lotto, Sandro Botticelli, Tintoretto and Michelangelo Buonarroti.

Giovanni Bazoli, Chairman Emeritus of Intesa Sanpaolo, stated: *“After its success at the Bozar in Brussels, the exhibition “Bellezza e Bruttezza” is coming to the Gallerie d'Italia in Milan. Drawing on loans from leading national and international museums, the exhibition brings together more than one hundred works from the Italian and Northern European Renaissance, exploring one of the most evocative and universal themes in Western culture. Thanks to Intesa Sanpaolo's commitment to art and culture, this initiative also confirms the important role that Gallerie d'Italia has now acquired in the national and global museum scene.”*

Through a selection of works from both the Italian and Northern European traditions, particularly the Flemish school, the exhibition explores the evolution of the concepts of beauty and its opposite between the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, highlighting continuities, differences and cultural transformations.

Designed by Studio Lucchi & Biserni, the exhibition opens with a section dedicated to the **legacy of classical antiquity in the Renaissance**, which was fundamental in defining the concepts of beauty and ugliness. During the fifteenth century, artists followed ancient models, viewing beauty as the harmonious relationship between parts based on precise proportions. Ugliness, by contrast, was associated with departures from these rules and with a closer adherence to natural reality. The rediscovery of the Domus Aurea also introduced a different conception of ugliness, one rooted in fantasy and the grotesque.

The exhibition continues with an in-depth look at the theme of **female beauty and the realistic portrait** in the Renaissance. Portraiture reflects the relationship between the ideal and the natural: while profiles inspired by antiquity remained grounded in realism, representations of idealised beauties embodied a vision of perfect beauty. Under the influence of Flemish art and the adoption of the three-quarter pose, figures became increasingly dynamic and expressive.

A further section is dedicated to **Muses, Monsters and Prodigies**, i.e. real or legendary figures with an exceptional character, who become iconographic models. Individuals such as Simonetta Vespucci, celebrated for her beauty, or the dwarf Morgante, regarded as “monstrous”, were transformed into true archetypes of Renaissance visual culture. In the 16th century, the concept of artifice became increasingly important: art was seen not only as capable of correcting nature, but also of transforming it to the point of monstrosity. Alongside this emerged the notion of grace, a quality that transcended rigid proportional canons and embraced inner character and behaviour, opening the way to an alternative form of beauty.

Considerable attention is devoted to the theme of **beautification**, reflected in the proliferation of cosmetic treatises and recipe books aimed at defining and achieving a precise aesthetic ideal. Combs, mirrors and pomanders on display reveal how cosmetics, like art itself, intervened upon the body in order to perfect it. Yet the use of harmful substances could produce paradoxical effects, altering the face and challenging the boundary between perfection and deformity.

Within the Mannerist climate, the crisis of absolute models encouraged greater creative freedom. Art moved away from the imitation of reality and began to question traditional canons. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer paved the way for a new interest in the deformed and the caricatural, establishing ugliness as an autonomous subject. This gave rise to the concept of **"beautiful ugliness"**, whereby even the monstrous, if skilfully represented, could possess aesthetic value.

The exhibition concludes with the theme of **mismatched pairs**, in which beauty and ugliness are represented together in the same visual space. In this genre, already explored by Leonardo, the contrast between opposites becomes a fundamental expressive device, reinforcing the notion that beauty and ugliness enhance one another.

The exhibition thus invites visitors to reflect on the power of art to reinvent reality and challenge conventional aesthetic standards, celebrating the creative freedom of artifice as one of the Renaissance's most significant achievements.

The exhibition catalogue, featuring a rich selection of images and scholarly essays, is published by **Società Editrice Allemandi**.

The Milan exhibition venue, together with those in Turin, Naples and Vicenza, is part of Intesa Sanpaolo's Gallerie d'Italia museum project, led by Michele Coppola, the Bank's Executive Director of Art, Culture and Historical Heritage and General Director of Gallerie d'Italia.

USEFUL INFORMATION

OPENING TIMES: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 9.30 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.; closed on Monday; last entry 90 minutes before closing.

TICKETS: Full-price ticket: €12. Reduced €10: over-65s, groups of more than 15 people. Special reduced €6: Intesa Sanpaolo Group customers. Free: first Sunday of the month, under-26s, school groups, Intesa Sanpaolo Group employees.

INFORMATION AND BOOKINGS: <http://www.gallerieditalia.com>, milano@gallerieditalia.com, Freephone Number 800.167619

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Intesa Sanpaolo

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The Bank's museum network, the Gallerie d'Italia, is an exhibition venue for the Bank's own artistic heritage and cultural projects of recognised value.

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