

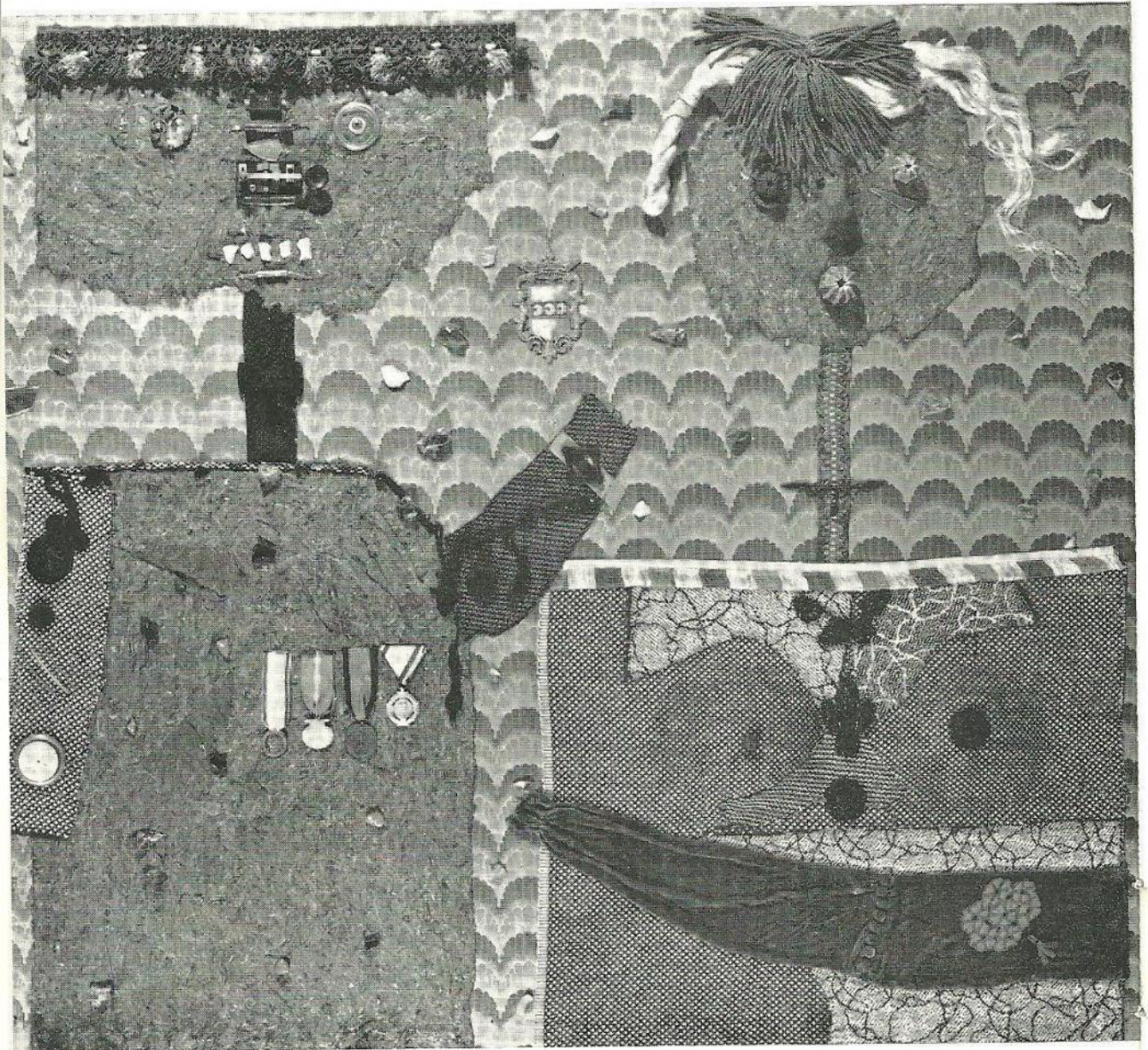
ENRICO BAJ

Sevenarts Gallery 30 Old Bond Street W1 Hyde Park 0795 · 1 to 26 May 1962

Cover: 41 A lady sensitive to the weather

ENRICO BAJ

ASSEMBLAGES
COLLAGES
PAINTINGS



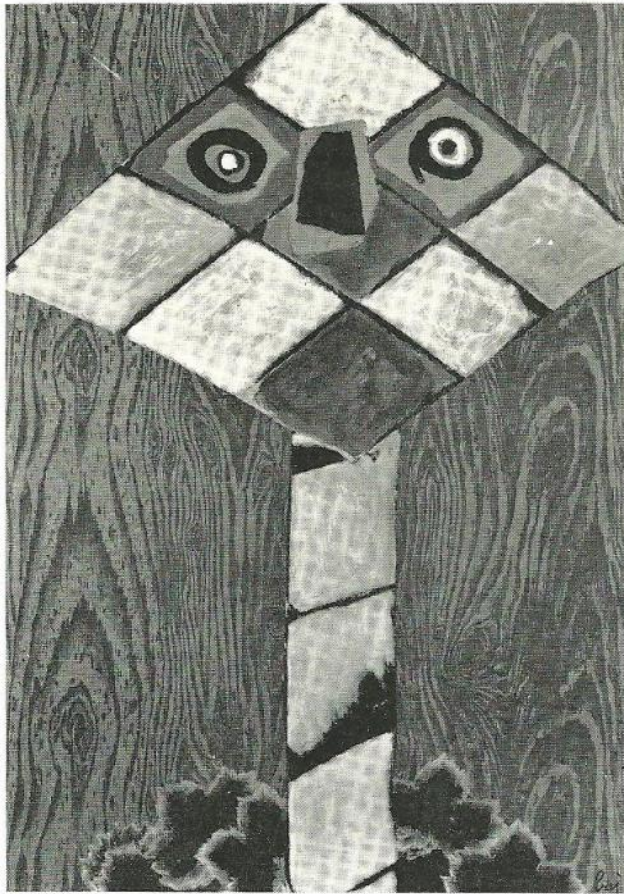
In his 1908 diary, Boccioni wrote: 'It is the terror of matter that suffocates me'. Fifty years later, allying himself on more than one side to Futurist experience, Baj will redeem the adventure of contemporary art from the confessed limits of Boccioni by directing the progress of his own work to an ever bolder and securer control of matter in general, devoting himself to experimentation with the most disparate types of reality, both those the most difficult of treatment and those seeming least adapted to integration within a pictorial work, those most resistant to artistic control. And so Baj becomes, by turns, upholsterer, decorator, glazier, stationer, and even furniture maker.

Baj has a love for material and for the work that creates of it an object, loves that craftsmanship of painting which, suffocated by contemporary industrialisation, is nevertheless to be recognised as the elementary basis of the artistic art. His love is for every 'worked' aspect of human labour, and to this sympathy is added, with a more specific, typically pictorial attention, the gusto for colour that in Baj's work has always an essential importance. In this case also, moreover, we have to do with the customary mirror-game; it is not a question of an indirect or disguised naturalism: on the contrary, as has been noted of Baj's pleasure in parody that it is of a selective order, manifesting itself as subversion of subversion, so His love for matter is not directed immediately towards things in their raw state, but towards the created thing, the worked material. The Dada ready-made is translated and transposed in 'Nuclear' terms: Baj is acquainted with nature inasmuch as it is historicised and humanised. Baj's craft-work is work done on work, the craftsmanship of craftsmanship.

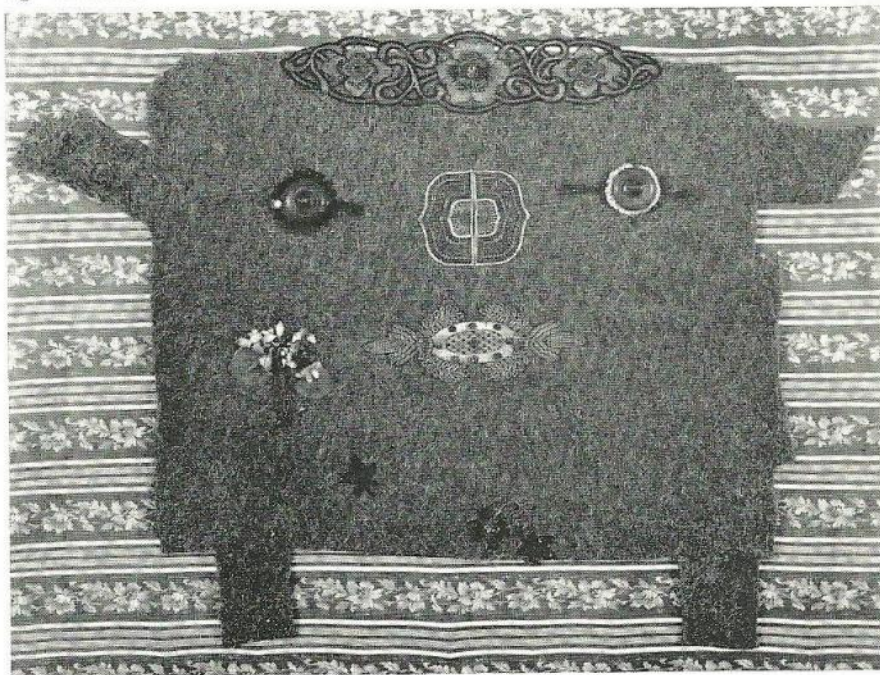
Thus we see him making use of flowered materials, loops, feminine paillettes of the twenties, decorations, medals, cords, chevrons, fringes, laces, bows, artificial flowers: symbols, if you like, of human vanity, here given new dimensions within the frame of his 'Commedia dell'Arte' and satire. Not, then, 'natural pieces' but 'social pieces'.

This whole complex armoury, whose contents are often literally made by hand, sometimes harks back to the style of an ART NOUVEAU, but one resolved into parody. These words of Henry Miller come naturally to mind: 'Only the object haunted me, the separate, detached, insignificant thing. It might be a part of the human body or a staircase in a vaudeville house; it might be a smokestack or a button found in the gutter. Whatever it was it enabled me to open up, to surrender, to attach my signature . . . I was filled with a perverse love of the thing-in-itself—not a philosophic attachment, but a passionate, desperately passionate hunger, as if in the discarded, worthless thing which everyone ignored there was contained the secret of my own regeneration'. But here, too, the element of irony that Baj injects into Miller's fetishism should not be forgotten.

And in fact, Baj's satirical streak, his conscious polemic against modernism, is accentuated by the introduction of an ever increasing quantity of worked materials: in this position taken up by Baj, which may again be dubbed anti-industrial, it is not by chance that the things and objects selected are often of the past. They are the 'good old things in the worst possible taste', but redeemed from all crepuscular sympathy, freed of all cherishable nostalgic affectiveness, emblems not of a particular historical season, a concretely characterized era, but of man's pure and simple historicity, his social-ness.



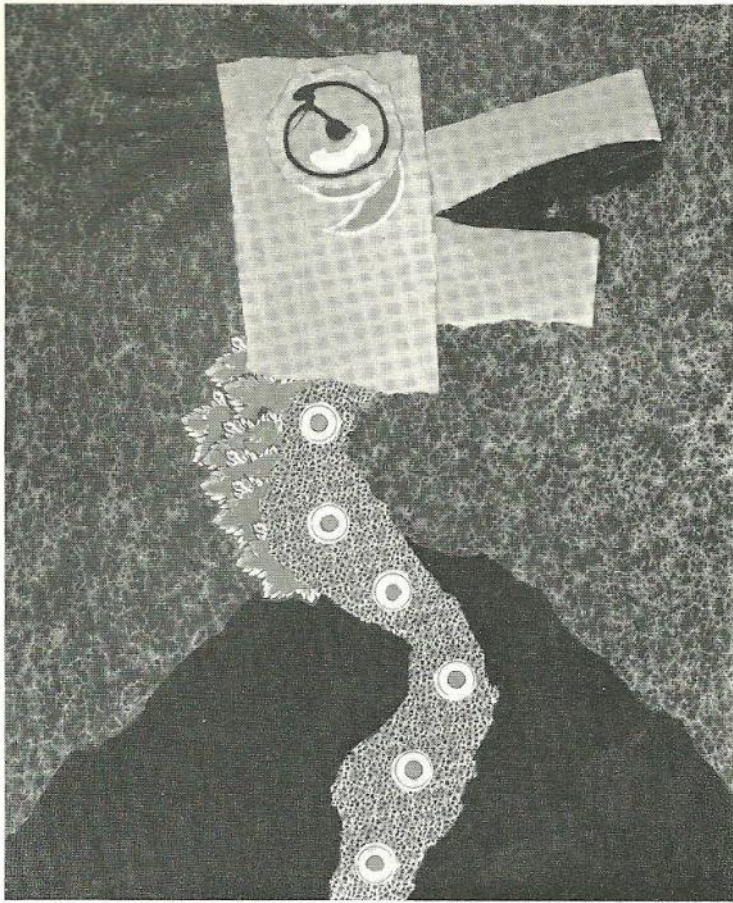
23 Animal



In a recent writing, Raymond Queneau notes: 'Baj knows perfectly how to balance seriousness and diversion, I mean that which diverts him and that which he considers serious; and this is a play of forces that cannot be explained, but only indicated, because it is precisely in this play that the secret hides away. What Baj indicates are secrets: like every painter he alludes, not reveals. Amongst other things, these secrets are those of materials kept by old shopkeepers of abolished provinces, or by old grandmothers obstinately determined to imitate the Countess of Segur. They are also obsolete signs of past glories, like medals of merit, or derisory signs of time and fate, like rusty clock-faces and cracked mirrors. They are also mattress-covers and wallpapers, last traces of the rooms where some have loved, some have died—all materials already used by life'.

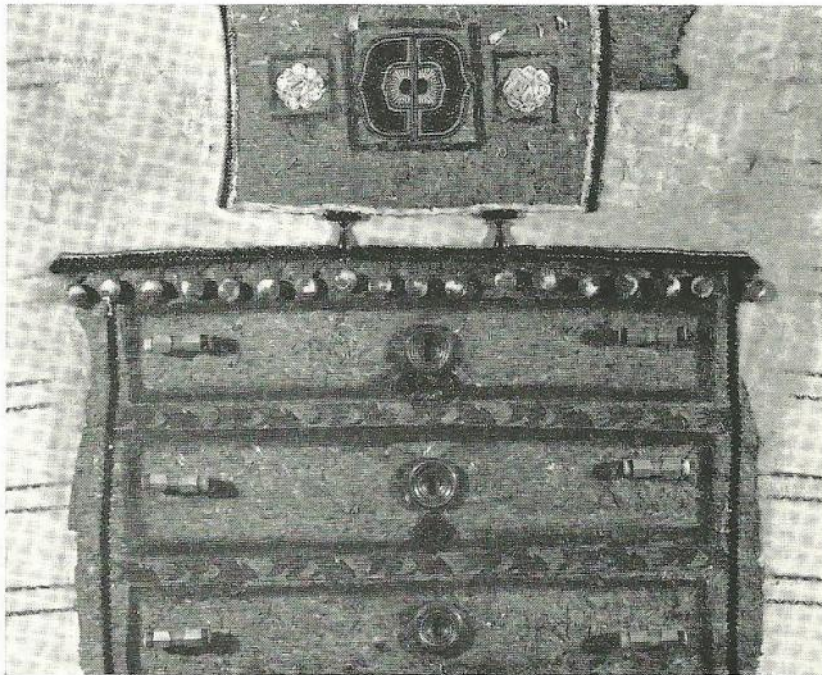
The palette that is thus gradually brought into being is enormous, and allows the painter extraordinary liberty of imaginative movement. The colours and forms of the objects and materials employed multiply themselves, creating a hitherto unseen scale, on the chromatic as well as the figurative level.

Tristan Sauvage 'NUCLEAR ART'



3 Enough!
I've had enough of it!

24 Furniture with Mirror



- 1 Inspiration comes when least you expect it 1961 $18\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$
- 2 Mystical Portrait 1961 21×15
- 3 Enough! I've had enough of it! 1961 $21\frac{1}{2} \times 17$
- 4 Personnage 1961 $18\frac{1}{2} \times 28$
- 5 Portrait 1961 $28 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$
- 6 Homage to Darwin 1961 $28 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$
- 7 Suspect animal 1961 $20 \times 27\frac{1}{2}$
- 8 Taking a walk through the flowers 1961 19×27
- 9 Beware of the dog 1961 $19\frac{1}{2} \times 28$
- 10 Furniture Piece 1961 $26 \times 18\frac{1}{2}$
- 11 Table 1961 19×26
- 12 Finally a guy who knows something about painting! 1961 $27\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$
- 13 Unquiet personage 1961 $27\frac{1}{2} \times 19$
- 14 Small fantasy 1961 9×12
- 15 Small mysterious monument 1961 $14\frac{1}{2} \times 11$
- 16 Italian brands 1961 12×9
- 17 Personnage who protests against the Government 1961 $15 \times 11\frac{1}{4}$
- 18 Bouquet of flowers 1961 $13\frac{1}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$
- 19 Small patriotic anecdote 1961 $18 \times 14\frac{1}{2}$
- 20 French Theatre 1961 $19\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{3}{4}$
- 21 Lady in evening dress 1961 $36 \times 28\frac{3}{4}$
- 22 Furniture 1960 $27\frac{3}{4} \times 33\frac{1}{2}$
- 23 Animal 1960 $46\frac{1}{2} \times 35$
- 24 Furniture with Mirror 1960 $32 \times 39\frac{1}{2}$
- 25 Furniture with three drawers 1960 51×38
- 26 He was happy with his toy 1961 $27\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{3}{4}$
- 27 Say it with flowers 1960 $29\frac{1}{4} \times 36\frac{1}{2}$
- 28 My love 1960 $28\frac{3}{4} \times 36$
- 29 Cross General with decorations 1960 38×51
- 30 Little portrait 1960 27×24
- 31 Mirror 1959 $19\frac{1}{2} \times 22$
- 32 Lady 1961 $29\frac{1}{2} \times 37$
- 33 Lady with her bird and dog 1961 $49 \times 51\frac{1}{2}$
- 34 Portrait of a Lady 1960 $29 \times 36\frac{1}{2}$
- 35 King and Queen 1960 $50 \times 44\frac{3}{4}$
- 36 A person with a beard 1960 $15\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$
- 37 Child of mirrors 1960 20×26
- 38 Excited child 1960 25×19
- 39 Don't cry! 1960 $23 \times 27\frac{1}{2}$
- 40 Here you are! At last! 1960 25×19
- 41 A lady sensitive to the weather 1960 32×40
- 42 Mountain Portrait I 1958 $20 \times 16\frac{1}{8}$
- 43 Mountain Landscape 1958 $26\frac{3}{4} \times 32\frac{1}{4}$
- 44 Mountain Portrait II 1958 16×20
- 45 Portrait 1956 $31\frac{1}{2} \times 39\frac{3}{4}$
- 46 Figure 1955 $24 \times 14\frac{1}{2}$

All measurements are in inches

40 Here you are! At last!



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Wladimir Favorsky *woodcuts*

Ota Janecek *paintings, watercolours, drawings*

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