

# From Nature to Sign

## Harry Bertoia

### 1915 – 2015

#### *Harry Bertoia Centennial*

*Homeland Tribute in honor of Harry Bertoia, from 7 February to 29 March 2015*

*One hundred years ago on March 10, 1915 Harry Bertoia was born in San Lorenzo di Arzene (Italy). He left his birthplace at age 15 to follow his American Dream with a cardboard suitcase. It is his homeland of Friuli which now remembers and marks this significant centennial.*

The municipalities of Pordenone and Valvasone Arzene, together with the Pro Loco di San Lorenzo and Amici di Harry Bertoia, have curated an exhibition, to be held in two locations: the **Harry Bertoia Gallery in Pordenone and the natal home in San Lorenzo di Arzene**. The exhibition pays tribute to this artist whose work constitutes an exemplar model of technique and method, precision and commitment to continuous exploration. An immigrant to the United States in 1930, Bertoia attained success and international notoriety with his Diamond chair (1952) —an icon of the global design world—and more generally with his manifold artistic production of sculptures, monotypes, and jewelry. In these areas he asserted distinct originality and experimental proclivity in both materials and form.

Harry Bertoia is among the sparse ranks of Friulian artists of the 20th century that have earned international fame and recognition. Up until a few years ago, he was relatively unknown in his homeland. That gap in recognition was filled by two successive exhibitions — the first at his natal home in San Lorenzo in 2008; the second, more extensive, in Pordenone in 2009. These exhibitions brought more awareness and appreciation of the quality of his work to the Friuli region. In 2014 as a gesture to recognize the prestige of the artist, the City of Pordenone named a new exhibition space as Harry Bertoia Gallery. This prestigious site will now host the exhibition presented by the City of Pordenone to celebrate Bertoia's birth centennial. The documentary journey at the core of the previous exhibitions is enriched with new **original material from the personal collection of Celia Bertoia, daughter of the artist. The core of the exhibition consists of 30 monotypes** —rare and exquisite prints on paper, unique items made between the late 1940s and the 1970s.

These works offer visitors the opportunity to compare original, but less-known Bertoia works which may also suggest diverse influences, including European ones that merge in his art but are interpreted in a very personal way. The exhibition monotypes are juxtaposed with **sculptures and Diamond chairs** thus enabling the visitor to perceive the relations and suggestions of the diverse artistic media practiced by the artist. A **didactic printing laboratory**, organized for the occasion, allows one to analyze the unusual and peculiar techniques employed in creating the original and precious monotypes which constitute a sort of creative diary of the artist. In collaboration with Knoll, a significant part of the exhibition is dedicated to the design of the well-known Diamond chair (1952) and to its production at the Knoll factory in Foligno, Italy. Promotional materials from that era underline the quality of visual communication published and circulated in the 1950s by the manufacturerzz a useful inspiration for an advertising and promotional strategy also for present times. Visitors to the exhibition are greeted by **vintage films**

projected onto the walls of the first floor and may virtually enter the barn studio in Barto, Pennsylvania, where they see Harry Bertoia at work with a welding torch or while he shows and plays the sound sculptures. The original cosmic musicality of these celebrated works resounds throughout the exhibition space as the ultimate essence of the art of Harry Bertoia.

In the **natal home of Harry Bertoia** in San Lorenzo di Arzene (Pordenone) the focus is centered on another aspect of Bertoia's production — **jewelry**. Three precious objects are placed on the kitchen table, seemingly brought by Harry and gifted to his family. The **photographs of 19 jewelry pieces (1940s to 1970s)** and a study drawing —courtesy of Wright—are arranged in backlit frames in another room. The effect is intense; the pieces can be admired in all their minute detail. Completing the natal home exhibit, in the old stable, a young Friulian artist, **Michele Spanghero presents his Translucide video** ideally reclaiming the legacy of Harry Bertoia's work and in his own original way actualizes the message linked to the desire of exploration and experimentation. The participation of a young artist in the exhibition highlights the ideal passing down of baton through generations: as it generally happens— or should happen - in art.

## **INFORMATIONS**

### **From Nature To Sign**

Harry Bertoia 1915 – 2015

**7 February– 29 March 2015**

### **Harry Bertoia Gallery**

C.so Vittorio Emanuele II, 60, Pordenone

### **Natal home of Harry Bertoia**

Via Blata, 12, San Lorenzo di Arzene

**Promoted by** Comune di Pordenone, Assessorato alla Cultura, Comune di Valvasone Arzene, Pro Loco San Lorenzo di Arzene, Amici di Harry Bertoia

**With patronage** Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia

**With the support of:** Coop Consumatori Nordest, Cartiere Cordenons, Electrolux Friulovest Banca, Graphistudio, Knoll Europe, SIM2 Multimedia

**in collaboration with:** ISIA Roma Design, Sede di Pordenone

**Exhibition by Amici di Harry Bertoia**

[www.arietobertoia.org](http://www.arietobertoia.org)

**Exhibition guide by Angelo Bertani**

**Texts by Angelo Bertani, Elena Bertoia, Mario Piazza**