

Gabriele Garavaglia (*1981, born in Vercelli, lives and works in Zurich) studied architecture at the Politecnico di Milano and at The Bartlett School of Architecture in London. From 2015 to 2017, he attended the Fine Art Master programme at ECAL in Lausanne, where he is currently visiting professor. In recent years Garavaglia’s works have been exhibited at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2024) and Fondation PERNOD Ricard Paris (2024), zaza Milano (2024), Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles (2023), Le Consortium Dijon (2023), Shivers Only Paris (2023), Galerie Gregor Staiger Milan (2023), Museum im Bellpark Kriens (2023), CAN Centre d’art Neuchâtel (2022), Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève (2021), Swiss Institute New York (2020), Kunsthalle Zurich (2020), Istituto Svizzero Rome and Milan (2019/2020), Kunsthaus Glarus (2019) and Museum Folkwang Essen (2019). He received the Swiss Art Awards 2019. The artistic production of Gabriele Garavaglia is rooted in conceptual art and operates halfway between site-specific and storytelling. His imagery feeds on various forms of pop culture and sub-culture, such as fantasy literature, anime and manga universe, gothic language, radical environmentalism, alien communities, urban mythologies, cinematic thrill. Borrowing production processes from other creative fields such as cinema, architecture and design, video games, fashion, etc. Garavaglia’s hybrid artworks often function by connecting with the observer’s psychology and mechanisms of perception: sculptures, installations and performances, become vehicles to fictional places of feeling and understanding.

Miriam Laura Leonardi (*1985, born in Lörrach, lives and works in Zurich) studied photography in Paris at Les Gobelins, l’École de l’Image, and received her Master of Fine Arts from the ZHdK (Zürcher Hochschule der Künste). She will represent Switzerland at the Biennale d’Arte di Venezia 2026 together with Lithic Alliance, Gianmaria Andreetta, Luca Beeler, Yul Tomatala and Nina Wakeford) with their project “The Unfinished Business of Living Together”. Leonardi’s work has recently been exhibited at the Dangdai Art Fair representing Switzerland in Beijing (2025), Bechtler Foundation Zürich (2024), Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles (2023), Kunsthalle Zurich (2023), Jenny’s New York (2022), Peres Projects Milano (2022), CAPC Bordeaux (2022), Swiss Institute New York (2022), MAH Geneva (2022), Centre d’art contemporain Geneva (2021), Galerie Maria Bernheim Zurich (2021), Kunsthalle Bern (2020), Centre Culturel Suisse Paris (2019), Bel Ami Los Angeles (2018), Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg (2018). She received the Prix Mobilière 2021, the Swiss Art Awards 2017, the Atelier Mondial traveling scholarship 2016 and the Kadist Production Grant 2015 and was the recipient of several residency programs, including *Studio of the South* led by Laura Owens for the Luma Foundation Arles (2021), Swiss Institute New York (2021), Gasworks London (2019) and Istituto Svizzero Rome (2018). Texts about her work have been published in Global Times China, Artforum, Texte zur Kunst, Cura Magazine, T Le Temps Magazine, Visionaire World Magazine and T Magazine NY Times and she was one of the selected artists in Phaidon’s *Prime: Art’s Next Generation 2022*. Leonardi is a lecturer of video-art in the Bachelor of Fine Arts at ECAL in Lausanne since 2018.

Istituto Svizzero
Via Vecchio Politecnico 3
20121 Milano
istitutovsvizzero.it
press@istitutovsvizzero.it

Opening hours
Monday / Friday: 11:00–17:00
Thursday: 11:00–20:00
Saturday: 14:00–18:00

Institutional partners
Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia
State Department of Education, Research and Innovation
Federal Department of Construction and Logistics

Partners
Canton of Ticino
City of Lugano
Università della Svizzera Italiana
EFG

Deadline With The World is the first joint exhibition by Gabriele Garavaglia (1981, Vercelli/Zurich) and Miriam Laura Leonardi (1985, Lörrach/Zurich).

Both Garavaglia and Leonardi root their artistic practices in conceptual art. Garavaglia’s works incorporate elements drawn from urban mythologies, fantasy literature, and cinematic aesthetics into politically charged installations. Leonardi’s work translates the observation of public space into a rigorous investigation of language, the artist dismantling familiar semantic codes and reshaping them into images of strong critical and poetic impact. They have conceived a project for Istituto Svizzero that responds to the exhibition context, featuring both jointly created pieces and individual works.

Deadline With The World engages with the sterile, corporate architecture of the building, transforming it into a para-urban landscape punctuated by a sequence of garage doors. The initial impression is that of readymades taken from the street but, on closer inspection, the objects are precisely designed, refined to their utmost formal clarity. The works are arranged strategically along the walls to neutralise architectural distractions such as air vents, doors, or other access points. Stripped of its pre-existing features, the Istituto Svizzero becomes an antechamber to new possible spaces.

Garavaglia and Leonardi’s works draw on the iconography of the garage as a space of promise, of the eternal ‘not yet’. It is the rehearsal room of someone playing the drums, but also the first office of the self-made man in the foundational myth of technological innovation. A full-scale bulldozer dominates the space: an eccentric trophy or a weapon ready to uproot whatever it encounters. Above the garage, a sign limiting access to the parking structure by oversized vehicles reads ‘Pull Up To The Climax’. Outside the space, someone has played golf too vigorously in the courtyard and smashed the windows.

The visual grammar of success and that of impending catastrophe alternate and overlap in *Deadline With The World*, suggesting that the world may have been built—and also programmed to end—in a garage.

Curated by Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti (Head Curator Istituto Svizzero)

Deadline With The World

Gabriele Garavaglia & Miriam Laura Leonardi

19.09.2025

30.11.2025

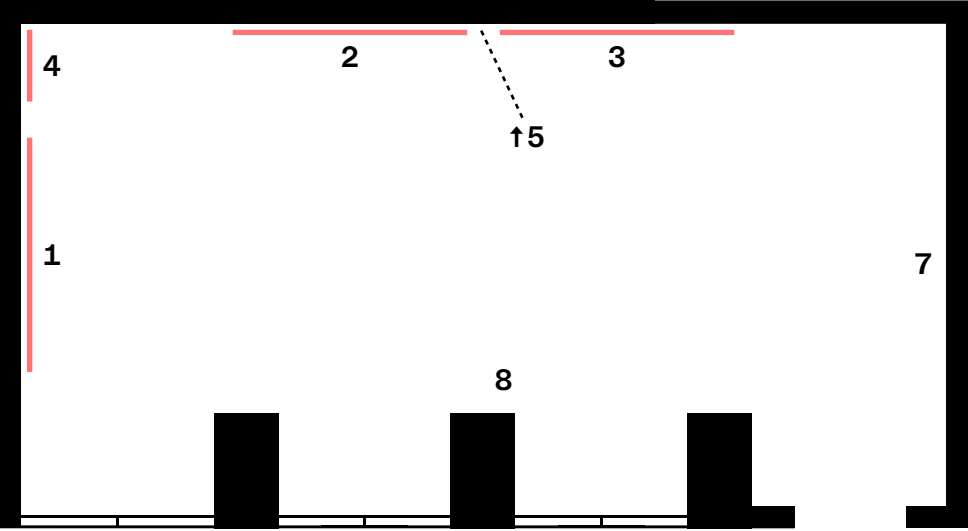


Gabriele Garavaglia & Miriam Laura Leonardi, *BAE*, 2025 (detail). Courtesy the artists.

Milano

Istituto Svizzero

EN



- 1**
Gabriele Garavaglia, *Pro Overnight*, 2025
Aluminium, wood, sound system, audio file,
360 × 230 cm, 5’ (loop)

2
Gabriele Garavaglia, *Mean Machine*, 2025
Aluminium, wood, UV print on vinyl wrap,
360 × 230 cm

3
Gabriele Garavaglia, *Star Trap*, 2025
Aluminium, wood,
360 × 230 cm

4
Gabriele Garavaglia, *Exit*, 2025
UV print on vinyl sticker,
110 × 220 cm

Gabriele Garavaglia, *Dial (Slow-motion Fall)*, 2025
Video loop, 16.97 × 2.08 m
On view 15.-21.09.2025 on the roof of Centro Svizzero

- 5**
Miriam Laura Leonardi, *Pull Up To The Climax*,
2025
Silkscreen on 2k painted A4 aluminium plates,
10.5 m x 29.7 cm x 70 cm

6
Miriam Laura Leonardi, *Open Season*, 2025
Golfballs, UV print on self-adhesive vinyl,
Variable dimensions

7
Gabriele Garavaglia & Miriam Laura Leonardi,
BAE, 2025
Archival print on wallpaper,
300 × 210 cm
Edition of 2 + 1 A.P.
Courtesy Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen

8
Gabriele Garavaglia & Miriam Laura Leonardi,
*Don’t Know What I Want, But I Know
How To Get It*, 2025
PE bin, metal, holographic fan, animation loop,
cables, fake pearls,
Variable dimensions

With the support of
Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung
Stanley Thomas Johnson Stiftung
Stiftung Erna und Curt Burgauer
Kanton Solothurn (for Miriam Laura Leonardi’s work)

The Centro Svizzero is a rationalist-style complex built in 1952 to accommodate the principal institutions representing Switzerland in Milan after the original headquarters was destroyed during the Second World War. The functionalist architecture of its tower, once an emblem of modernist confidence in the years of post-war reconstruction, now aligns seamlessly with the operational and symbolic demands of contemporary Milan, and with its rhetoric of efficiency. The exhibition *Deadline With The World* is grafted onto this architectural and narrative infrastructure, appropriating the corporate lexicon—starting from its title—that characterises not only the imagery of the building but that of the city at large.

Rather than the corporate furnishings one might expect, the spaces of the Istituto Svizzero feature a para-urban environment with roller-shutter garage doors, waste bins, and an emergency exit. *Deadline With The World* replicates the visual markers one might find at the back of a building: it is as if the visitor had taken the wrong lift and ended up in the hidden basements of the neoliberal dream. In the main installation, three large roll-shutter doors occupy the walls of the gallery. Each one hints at a garage behind it, possibly expanding the space into new scenarios.

The first such door in *Deadline With The World* suggests a rehearsal room, occupied by someone playing drums, either preparing for a concert or nurturing a private passion. The scene embodies the myth of the garage as a dimension of suspended potentiality, a verb tense perpetually projected into the future. A meritocratic regime governs this realm of the ‘not yet’, cultivating the illusion that personal effort is a sufficient condition for self-realisation. In residential parking structures in Italy, garage unit no. 17 is the cheapest one since 17 is an unlucky number in this country. In *Pro Overnight* (2025), access to the promise of social mobility is possible, but invariably comes at a price.

The full-scale bulldozer filling the second garage may be read as an eccentric trophy or a weapon poised to obliterate whatever it encounters—or perhaps both. Generated through artificial intelligence, *Mean Machine* (2025) combines the apex of technological innovation with a foreboding of the destruction of the reality around us. It is the epilogue of the myth of the self-made man, for whom the garage is an archetypal space: in quasi-Christic imagery, the humility of a corporation’s birthplace is directly proportional to the authenticity and genius of its founder. *Mean Machine* alludes to the way big tech’s grand narrative of progress has collapsed into the privilege of being able to keep a bulldozer on hand in anticipation of imminent catastrophe.

In *Pull Up To The Climax* (2025), the term ‘max’—which is followed, in a parking structure, by a number indicating the maximum allowable vehicle height—is resemanticised into a motivational exhortation of the opposite kind. Instead of an injunction not to exceed imposed limits, it exhorts you always to give more, to ‘pull up to a climax’ you never reach, an incitement to unrelenting effort without the guarantee of fulfilment, sanctioned by the dogma of productivity. The sign also functions as a threshold, beyond which only a certain category may pass. Access is denied to those unwilling to conform to the logic of extreme performance, a cynical revelation of the arbitrariness of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

Pull Up To The Climax directs our gaze upwards, above the other works, towards the ceiling of the Istituto Svizzero, which appears absurdly high in relation to the hall’s intended function. In this flaw in the building’s functionalist logic, the value of the empty space above our heads lies not in its use, but in the luxury of its non-use, in the conservation of its potentiality. The upper half of the space is occupied by *Open Season* (2025), an installation that engages the building’s large windows, fractured by golf balls now embedded in the glass. It appears as the result of a game gone awry, or perhaps an unexpected protest by a group of golfers.

The installation extends into the courtyard, expanding *Deadline With The World* beyond the prescribed limits of its designated space. Emptied out, the central hall retains only its architectural value, while the works are concentrated along the perimeter. Despite their immersive nature, Garavaglia and Leonardi’s works wrestle with the question of two-dimensionality, compelling a recalibration of our expectations: at what point does a painting cease to be defined as such? The wall-based works also serve a strategic function, concealing infrastructural elements that typically interfere with aesthetic experience, such as air vents and electrical panels. Among these latent intrusions, the office of the Istituto Svizzero lies hidden behind the third door.

This separation of the institution’s offices from its exhibition space constitutes a kind of counterpoint to a traditional institutional critique. If Michael Asher, in the 1970s, tore down the walls dividing the offices from the gallery to expose the structural dynamics of the art system, in *Star Trap* (2025) the office is trapped behind a roll-shutter and transformed into a garage. This form of post-institutional critique signals the failure of transparency as a means for disclosing the workings of power, producing instead a conceptual tension between the cult of labour and its invisibilisation. Within the exhibition space, the tools of institutional critique are adapted to contemporary attention disorders in an attempt to reproduce a white cube that will always, inevitably, remain imperfect.

The only apparent way out of the space is a red door marked ‘exit’. Seemingly salvific, the installation overlays the imagery of escape with that of death. *Exit* (2025) references a Swiss organisation providing end-of-life assistance services. The exhibition seems to offer a commentary on Switzerland as a neutral place not aligned with the rules of other countries—a concept developed through surreal and deliberately exaggerated means in *Don’t Know What I Want, But I Know How To Get It* (2025), a rubbish bin containing a hologram of the anarchist logo engulfed in flames. The object bears the number N°8001, the postcode of a Zurich district renowned for its luxury shopping streets. Parodying the nomenclature of haute couture perfumes, N°8001 is also a proposition—that even an odour might be marketed as a high-end fragrance.

The exhibition culminates in a sinister pair gazing at us from a motorbike, unnaturally positioned vertically like the graph of a company whose performance is soaring. At first glance, the two figures, a zombie and a pregnant woman, might appear to be AI-generated; they are, in fact and in different ways, products of analogue processes. The title *BAE* (2025) refers to a slang term used in a romantic or friendly relationship, as an abbreviation of ‘babe’ and an acronym for ‘before anyone else’.

The zombie of contemporary pop culture originates in Caribbean folklore, a resurrected person now subjected to the will of a master. It retains its metaphorical power as the figure of alienated labour, subsequently gaining the aesthetic and symbolic weight accrued in horror films. In *BAE*, the zombie is juxtaposed with the topos of maternity, in an iconography of the pregnant woman recalling the *virgo gravida*, an image seldom depicted in Christian votive art, consistently discouraged in favour of representations of the Madonna with the already-born child. Together, they compose a family portrait where post-life and pre-life figures coexist, together with the mother, local producer of the primordial product.

For several days on the roof of the Centro Svizzero’s lower building, a jumbo screen shows *Dial (Slow-motion Fall)* (2025). The LED wall, typically employed for advertising, is repurposed here to depict a colossal lift, presenting a slow countdown in an endless loop. The descending floor indicator appears to be a time line, a grand timer projected directly onto Piazza Cavour. The alarmed anticipation of reaching zero finds no release: the repeating loop generates a state of perpetual emergency, the sensation of imminent collapse a new form of status quo. *Dial (Slow-motion Fall)* is a huge collective-anxiety-management device, keeping us occupied, deadline after deadline, until the end of the world.

Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti