

Franco Vimercati, The World in a Grain of Sand | Galleria Nazionale, Rome

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The title of the [Galleria Nazionale](#)'s permanent collection exhibition, *Time Is Out of Joint*, a quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, alludes to the unpredictability generated when time slips out of its linear register. It is a prescient prelude for visitors approaching Franco Vimercati's exhibition, *The World in a Grain of Sand* (on view through September 10). The exhibition showcases the artist's expanded notion of time and encourages visitors to examine Vimercati's photographs in no chronological order, as the artist (who died in 2001) would have wanted.

Born in Milan in 1940, Vimercati trained as a traditional painter at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts and only began making photographs in the late 1960s. He developed an intimate, expressive language, capturing domestic objects in conceptual, austere photographs often compared to the work of On Kawara, Roman Opalka, and Peter Dreher.

A glass, a vase, an alarm clock, a pitcher, and other common household items are solitary presences in his black-and-white series. Isolating them in front of monochrome backgrounds with few or no spatial references, Vimercati temporarily released each object from its presumed quotidian duty. His aim was not to elevate the status of these objects but rather to use them to investigate the language of photography and its unparalleled capacity to document and describe. Photographing the objects over the course of months or sometimes years under different lighting and with varying degrees of focus, he created a compendium of items that are at once alike and entirely distinctive.



Franco Zimercati, *Untitled (Soup Tureen)*, 1991. Courtesy the Archive of Franco Vimercati and Galleria Raffaella Cortese. ©Estate of Franco Vimercati

The exhibition features approximately 100 gelatin-silver prints produced by the artist from 1973 to 2000, displayed alongside art catalogues, ephemera (including original notes by the artist), a video interview, and a selection of the objects portrayed in his pictures.

Among the most important series on view, *A Minute of Photography*, 1974, is one of the first conceptual works in which Vimercati investigated time. Though the series appears at first glance as 13 identical shots of an old tabletop alarm clock on a neutral background, a closer look reveals that each photograph captures the slight, progressive shift of the clock hands. In this work, the subtle passing of time – and its inherent dynamism – coexists with the stillness of each instant.

In the series *Mineral Water Bottles*, 1975, he aimed to let the photographic language define the content, reducing his own presence through a precise

repetition of shots. The 36 exposures available on the film negative determined the number of photographs in the series, each reproducing a deceptively “identical” bottle. But the spatial references are minimized, and the subtle differences are there to be discovered by a keen eye.



Franco Vimercati, *Untitled (Mineral Water Bottles)*, 1975. Courtesy archive of Franco Vimercati and Galleria Raffaella Cortese. ©Estate of Franco Vimercati

The nuances that make each of Vimercati’s shots unique testify to the complexities that details can reveal, a concept the artist probes in his iconic series *The Soup Tureen Cycle*, 1983–92. Sixty out of the roughly 100 photographs in the series are displayed in this exhibition. Each reproduces the same ceramic soup tureen in a range of conditions. Manipulating focus, light, contrast, and depth, and creating or hiding space around the object, the artist produced images that vary from composed, bright, and contrasted to dark, blurred, and tilted. The confluence of these variations demonstrates Vimercati’s ability to create an array of ultimately static yet pulsing images.

The World in a Grain of Sand offers the rare kind of still space that invites viewers to practice close, contemplative looking as they encounter these photographs. The title is a quote from William Blake’s poem *Auguries of*

Innocence, 1863 (“To see a world in a grain of sand/ and a heaven in a wild flower/ hold infinity in the palm of your hand / and eternity in an hour”), suggesting that the simple and common carry deep meanings for those who go beyond what is apparent. This exhibition lets us hope that more will be said about one of the most interesting yet understudied conceptual artists of our time.