

Paola Pivi

A girl loved pearls so much she left
engineering, strung them off the wall,
and made art

30.04.2026

20.06.2026

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *A girl loved pearls so much she left engineering, strung them off the wall, and made art*, Paola Pivi's first exhibition dedicated to her pearl series.

The title of this exhibition draws from the beginning of Paola Pivi's artistic career. In her early years, Paola Pivi trained as a chemical nuclear engineer at the Politecnico di Milano before a number of coincidences brought her in the direction of art, soon enrolling in the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera. The same mind that once worked with quantum mechanics, algebra, and analysis for exams now harnessed gravity, physics, and order to approach the action of transforming materials into the sublime. The results have included a Fiat G-91 fighter jet flipped upside down at the Venice Biennale, thousands of needles strung in a system that follows a visitor's magnetic field, nine metal sculptures that pump various cycling liquids, a Piper Seneca airplane in a constant forward flip at the entrance to Central Park. And most luxuriously, pearls. Thousands, then hundreds of thousands of pearls, configured with expert sensitivity in revealing their beauty.

The pearl series began in 1998 – the same year Pivi stopped attending art school in Milan, her first works outside of academia. In a metropolis of premier fashion, innovative design, and beautiful objects, she was surrounded by a culture in which pearls became a luxurious emblem of universal elegance. Found among ancient civilizations and indigenous tribes across the world, pearls carry centuries of association – wealth, wisdom, status, rarity, and purity – with some cultures even believing the gems were tears from the heavens. Every single pearl as precious as the last.

The exhibition is the first to focus exclusively on Pivi's pearl series – a vein she has returned to throughout her artistic career – and brings together works from across the lifetime of the series. Each is built from individual plastic or plexiglass pearls strung in defined lengths and assembled on canvas in dense accumulations. The resulting surfaces look organic, almost coral-like – the product not of rigid skill alone, but of gravity gently and unpredictably layering each string over the other, letting them fall into an uncontrollable shape. Earlier pieces – some

recalling the concentric colour logic of Josef Albers – hang alongside more recent compositions in monochrome, multicolor, translucent, and iridescent hues.

Coupled with the pearls is Stop By, a carpet made from recycled plastics from the ocean and created in collaboration with Aquafil for its debut at ArtVerona in 2021, here making its second appearance. The carpet interweaves an image of a ladder derived from *Untitled (project for Echigo Tsumari)*, 2015, a monumental twenty-metres tall inflatable sculpture originally commissioned for the Echigo Tsumari Triennale in rural Japan. First installed leaning against a school, it has since appeared in the courtyard of Palazzo Strozzi in Florence and against the façade of the Grand Palais in Paris. That same image now lies flat on the gallery floor, printed onto a carpet visitors walk across: the monumental made horizontal.

Caught between hundreds of thousands of pearls and a monumental ladder motif made from plastics, Pivi takes joy in transformation, pushing objects until they fill the room, fill your attention, your awareness, your understanding of what they can be. That a girl who once studied engineering ended up here – stringing pearls off a wall, filling rooms with art – feels like freedom.

The exhibition is curated by Stefano Galeotti.

Paola Pivi

Born in Italy in 1971, based in Alaska, Paola Pivi's artistic practice is diverse and enigmatic.

For Pivi, art is an expression of reality liberated to its fullest potential, conveying the most profound emotions through diverse materials. Her art often features recognisable objects like airplanes, helicopters or mattresses. However, Pivi modifies these objects unexpectedly, encouraging her audience to reconsider their preconceived notions of what they represent. Through this approach, she creates a unique form of utopian extravagance, continuously exploring new expressive forms and pushing the boundaries of artistic creation.

Pivi's art is a statement on the human experience, exploring the boundaries between reality and imagination, ordinary and extraordinary.