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## UNPREDICTABLE

### Preparing for the future, without knowing what it will be like

An art and science exhibition

Produced by Fondazione Golinelli

Curated by Giovanni Carrada and Cristiana Perrella

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## THE IDEA

UNPREDICTABLE is an exhibition about how and why new ideas create the future. Seemingly simple, the theme is actually deep and little understood. Otherwise, our society would be much more dynamic and innovative. It is also a counterintuitive theme. Why is it better to live in a changing world, even if it is unpredictable? Why is it possible to prepare ourselves for a future we cannot predict? And how?

The answers to the first question help to cultivate a positive (but not naïve) attitude towards innovation and the changes that it produces, and which are not only material but also political and moral. The future created by innovation is actually unpredictable, and that is hard to be accepted. Indeed, we have always all too often been deluded by prophets of all kinds. But it is precisely its unpredictability, along with the fact that it increases the available resources, the best guarantee of an open and socially mobile society, capable of offering a greater number of people the opportunity to live a life full of meaning and satisfaction.

The second question refers to the fact that it is true that the future is unpredictable, but it always "works" in the same way, at least in modern economies. This is why we can prepare for it by learning from the past. Understanding "how the future works", not a particular future but the future in general, is one of the keys of Unpredictable.

The general idea of the exhibition is to create a dialogue between the artworks and a series of science exhibits - primarily videos - and let the meanings suggested by art and science help visitors to get a richer and more complex idea, prompting them to develop their own reflections.

The exhibition is divided into six sections:

### 1. *The future comes anyway*

The "future" was truly born only two centuries ago, when innovators began to be free to translate their ideas into reality. Since then, when there are the conditions, what can be invented is quickly invented, as evidenced by the large number of cases of multiple invention. And the same thing happens with the scientific discoveries that drive innovation, so that today's ensemble of technologies looks like a kind of giant organism that grows, evolves, organizes itself and adapts to the environment, to the point that no one can stop it. As when we have to face a force of nature, we cannot do everything it requests, but it is perhaps better to learn to use its strength, instead of trying to resist it.

### 2. *The future creates more than it destroys*



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The world is changing in waves of creative destruction, each of which creates losers, as well as winners. Innovation, however, has always created more than it has destroyed. And if we multiply this "creative destruction" for the endless inventions of the last two centuries, we understand why billions of people can now enjoy living conditions once reserved to small privileged minorities. The secret? Political freedom and new values that allowed ordinary people to express their creativity and their entrepreneurship. The general growth in living standards and social mobility also made it possible to choose tolerance, justice, democracy. On the contrary, when growth stops, in times of crisis, or when social inequalities become excessive, societies tend to retreat into intolerance and selfishness, feelings that politicians without scruples always know how to exploit.

### 3. *The future does not let predict (luckily)*

Although the list of failed or wrong predictions is infinite, predicting the future is one of the deepest human aspirations, and an activity that never knows any crisis.

Those who sells a future - media, companies, governments, political movements, activists - want to make something happen or not happen, motivate or scare, sell, or attract attention. Almost all of them, however, are in good company. Even science did fall in the illusion that the future can be predicted. Only a few decades ago have we realized that predicting the behaviour of complex systems, such as the atmosphere, is impossible. But if even the behaviour of the atmosphere, which is governed by simple laws of physics, is unpredictable, how can we trust the predictions of events in which chance and the choices of millions of individuals can be decisive? This may look like bad news, but it is actually good news. If the future will always be a surprise, no one will ever dominate it.

### 4. The prejudice against new things

Our mind is by nature much more conservative than innovative, because it tends to overestimate the risks and underestimate the benefits of innovations. It always prefers that someone else try new things before we do. Without the desire to take risks, however, the modern world would never have been born. Then, with time, technologies improve and risks are reduced. Accepting new things can also have another type of psychological cost. We all love old things, because they tell us who we are. Our identity is made of memory, habits, things we already know or have experienced. We all need to understand the meaning of things, and the meaning is nothing but a network of mental associations accumulated over time.

### 5. *Coming to terms with nature*

We have entered a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. Our activities are in fact able to leave an indelible mark on our planet: much of the present environmental problems are the price we pay to allow a better life to more than seven billion and four hundred million people. Even the simple idea of loving and protecting nature arises only *after* our most urgent material needs have been satisfied. Luckily, innovation can now play in favour of nature, because fewer resources and less energy are needed to build and run our technological systems. And with the improvement of living conditions fewer children are made, and the world population growth is finally slowing. But none of this is automatic, and depends instead on our choices.



## 6. *Who does not innovate risks losing its past*

Those who never stop innovating, choose their own future, and can save the best legacy of their past. They can therefore grow. That's what happened for example in Great Britain. It is no longer a great power, but it is still a rich country, a great centre of culture, an example of democracy for the whole world, one of the largest producer of science and innovation, and a place where young people from around the world choose to live. On the contrary, those who stop innovating build up a gap with the rest of the world that eventually becomes unsustainable. They are therefore forced to jettison part of their past, and to change. That's what happened for example to China, which has had to cut its roots and choose a future imagined and created by others.