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Experiments in the Synthesis of the Arts.

André Bloc and Gianni Monnet and the Exponents of Concrete Art

Afro, Sophie Taeuber Arp, Giacomo Balla, Mario Ballocco, Gianni Bertini, Max Bill, Lanfranco Bombelli, Enrico Bordoni, Regina Bracchi, Carol Rama, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Arturo Ciacelli, Michelangelo Conte, Nino Di Salvatore, Piero Dorazio, Gillo Dorfles, Arend Fuhrmann, Lucio Fontana, Nino Franchina, Augusto Garau, Camille Graeser, Mino Guerrini, Max Huber, Richard Paul Lohse, Galliano Mazzon, Bruno Munari, Mario Nigro, Achille Perilli, Enrico Prampolini, Manlio Rho, Atanasio Soldati, Ettore Sottsass, Filippo Scropo, Simonetta Vigevani Jung, Luigi Veronesi

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Founded in 1951 in Paris, the Groupe Espace was an international multidisciplinary group of artists headed by André Bloc, who aspired to creating filiations in every European country “afin de préparer les conditions d’une collaboration effective des architectes, peintres, sculpteurs, plasticiens et d’organiser, par la plastique, l’harmonieux développement des activités humaines”(for the purpose of preparing the conditions of a true collaboration between architects, painters, sculptors, and decorators, and of organizing, for the plastic arts, the harmonious development of human activities).¹ The matter of the “Unity of Creation” and the “Synthesis of the Arts” had been of interest in Italian circles for some time as well. Also in 1951, the 9th Milan Triennial adopted it as a core theme, its goal being to “again propose the issue of a non-casual collaboration between the architecture, the sculptor, the painter, and the decorator”. The artists who were members of the Concrete Art Movement (Movimento Arte Concreto, or MAC), founded in Milan in 1948, assumed it as their main objective in view of a return to the vital ferment that in the 1930s had led to the regeneration of visual culture, of architecture, and of the arts in general.² The time Bloc spent in Italy and his interest in the output of the Concrete artists, clearly expressed in “Art Abstrait. Italie 1951,” a monographic supplement published in *Art d’Aujourd’hui*,³ led him and others to ponder the presence of spaces of intersection between the two cultures and the quality of the spaces of interference between the protagonists of the French and Italian artistic scene in the post-war period. These spaces also included Swiss artists who came from the experience known as *Konkrete Kunst*, some of whom would converge on the Groupe Espace Suisse headed by Alfred Roth. And indeed it was only in Switzerland and in particular in Italy, starting from 1954, that Concrete art was identified with the local Groupe Espace: “The aim of the ‘Espace’ groups (...) is to promote a closer relationship and exchange between the various artistic genres eventually achieving their complete integration (...) Le Corbusier, Léger, and Bloc called it ‘Synthèse des arts’, and this has always been the principal aim of the members of the ‘Movimento Arte Concreta’ (...)”.⁴

The term “Espace” designates an experimental space of collaboration between artistic genres and architecture, it connotes art that is conceived for a real space, which actively contributes to satisfying man’s many needs; lastly, it is not unrelated to the physical and metaphysical concept of “Space” which artists reflect on. The Manifesto of the Groupe Espace of October 1951 says that art must become spatial “par la pénétration sensible et modulée de la Lumière dans l’oeuvre, un Art dont la conception et l’exécution s’appuient sur la simultanéité des aspects dans les trois dimensions non suggérée mais tangibles” (by the sensible and modulated penetration of Light in the work of art, an art for which the conception and the execution is based on the simultaneity of the aspects within the non-suggested but tangible three dimensions).

Gianni Monnet, on his part, wondered about the the fusion of the pastic arts “in a single whole (...) with the philosophical and mathematical concept of space”,⁵ a “subjective-psychological” space that Nino di Salvatore would try to identify and reproduce in his works, that Bruno Zevi tried to qualify at a more theoretical level, that the critics of *Art d’aujourd’hui*, including Bloc himself, did not at all overlook. What does “Space” signify for these artists, which devices did they use to spatialize the canvas? In MAC’s

bulletins, in the art books produced by the group, and in the following “Documenti d’Arte oggi”, which had by then become small-scale works of art, how did the Concrete artists and graphic artists achieve unity between message and form, how did they inoculate a tangible idea of space in the space of the printed page? This exhibition is a collateral event related to the Second International Study Meeting on *Sintesi delle arti e Unità di creazione. Vita di André Bloc*, promoted by the Archivio del Moderno di Mendrisio (Architecture Academy – Università della Svizzera italiana) and by the LéaV-Ecole nationale supérieure d’architecture of Versailles in collaboration with the MASI – Museo d’arte della Svizzera italiana of Lugano, foreshadowing the historical reconstruction and critical analysis of the figure and work of André Bloc.

The purpose of the exhibition at Studio Dabbeni is to offer a view of the multifarious work of André Bloc and Gianni Monnet, of their international relations, while comparing a selection of their works with some of the ones made by Italian and Swiss Concrete artists, such as Max Bill, Max Huber, Camille Graeser, and Richard Paul Lohse.

Archive records will be used to chronologically reconstruct the evolution of experiments in the synthesis of the arts in Concrete art.

¹ *Groupe “Espace”. Extrait des status* (Archives Vittoriano Viganò, S 272/3, Archivio del Moderno, Mendrisio).

² As can be read in G.C. Argan, introductory essay, in *Arte concreta. 24 litografie originali*, Salto editore, Milan, October 1949, now in L. Caramel (ed.), *M.A.C. Movimento Arte Concreta 1948-1952*, vol. I, Electa, Milan 1984, p. 38.

³ *Art d’aujourd’hui* 3: 2 January 1952.

⁴ Letter by the Gruppo MAC/Espace dated 24 February 1955, published in L. Caramel (ed.) *M.A.C. Movimento Arte Concreta 1953-1958*, vol. II, Electa, Milan 1984, p. 33.

⁵ G. Monnet, in *Arte Concreta* 2, 20 December 1951.

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At the exhibition it is a Newspaper published 64 pages in color

Wednesday - Friday

10:30 to 12:30 15:00 to 18:30

Saturday

10:30 to 12:00 15:00 to 17:00

Monday - Tuesday by appointment