

STUDIO DABBENI
CORSO PESTALOZZI 1
CH-6900 LUGANO
C.P. 5465
TEL. 091 923 29 80
FAX 091 923 12 11
e-mail info@studiodabbeni.ch
www.studiodabbeni.ch

ENRICO CASTELLANI FRANCOIS MORELLET GIULIO PAOLINI

Opening:
Thursday 19 April 2007 - 18.00
Duration:
19 April – 2 June 2007
Opening Hours:
Tuesday - Friday
09.30 - 12.00 14.30 - 18.30
Saturday
09.30 - 12.00 14.30 - 17.00
Sunday/Monday Closed

Enrico Castellani, François Morellet and Giulio Paolini, three important figures in contemporary art who share various analogies in their work, meet for the first time at Studio Dabbeni.

Enrico Castellani (1930) will present four “white surfaces” expressly created for the exhibition. The extraversions and introversions that modulate his surfaces—always rigorously monochrome—are placed in relation to the light, establishing a relationship between light and shade that is precise, calibrated and meditative.

François Morellet (1926) is represented by works of art that clearly summarise the twofold personality of the artist. In one of his essays from 1991, he confessed that he dreamed of being “a Baroque Minimalist”. Within this provocative assertion is contained the very substance of the work on exhibit, where chaos and chance are juxtaposed with rigor in an uninterrupted dialogue between the artist’s past and present.

“Finale di partita” (“Endgame”) is the strongly evocative title, mindful of literary references, of the work that **Giulio Paolini** (1940) conceived explicitly for the exhibit. Paolini starts out with a squared surface that is fragmented into a set of elements that take on an independent existence, while always referring to a “whole”. The fragments are like pieces of a dismantled chessboard that are scattered upon the walls of the rooms on the first floor of the gallery according to a careful order, which confers fascination and tension to the space.

ENRICO CASTELLANI

After completing his studies in architecture in Brussels, in 1956, Enrico Castellani began practising an informal type of painting from which he distanced himself almost immediately, turning his research to a systematic elaboration of the pictorial components of the canvas and of colour. Castellani’s vision of Jackson Pollock’s of painting from 1957, and above all that of Mark Tobey at the Biennale of Venice the following year, characterised by small white marks that were a prelude to monochrome painting were a determining factor in this passage. Fundamentally, it is the lesson of Mondrian that “brings the total liberation of art from any residual claim on the past, from being decorative, evocative or representative, in order to reach a form of art that is reduced to the semantics of its particular language”¹. That is how Castellani expresses himself in *Azimuth*, the magazine created by he and Piero Manzoni, together with Vincenzo Agnetti, with whom he had a close friendship during the years he worked in Franco Buzzi’s architectural studio. A very brief period of a little more than two years elapsed between his début and the linguistic maturity reached by Castellani. The work that marks this maturity, and which synthesises the elements which we find in all following work is *Black Surface in Relief* (1959). In this work, whose title provides an objective description, the use of absolute black is an aspiration to a total zeroing, in consonance with the tendency that was manifested at that time towards expression by using an impersonal language which affirms neutrality and silence, the zero and the void as the only dominion of art. Behind the canvas the artist places spherical forms which give dynamism to the surface. Thus, the affirmation of the surface is brought about by extraversion and by way of an internal energy that denies the role of the artist. A further step is taken by the disposition of nails behind the canvas, placed in a precise order by mathematical criteria. This creates a surface that juts out in some places, characterised by extraversions and introversions.

Since 1960, Castellani's sequences take on a perpendicular structure in which the vertical is crossed with the horizontal. Sometimes it is the line itself which juts out, when it extroverts on the angled surfaces: as in the pieces *Red Angled Surface* and *Black Angled Surface*, both from 1961. The angular surfaces are placed in relation to the angle, and then, to the architectural volume. This study led to "*White Environment*" (1967) presented for the exhibition "Lo spazio dell'immagine" in Foligno: where the surfaces take up many walls and define an environment that is in tune with what was happening in the European and American art scenes at the time. The following *Environment Space* (1970) is conceived as an "immersion" into the painting, by which one finds oneself completely surrounded.

Two important exhibitions were held, respectively, at Palazzo Fabroni in Pistoia (8 June-11 August 1996), curator, Bruno Corà and at the Fondazione Prada of Milan (26 April-14 June 2001), curator, Germano Celant.

FRANCOIS MORELLET

Starting in 1948, Francois Morellet expresses himself initially through painting characterised by strongly decorative organic forms that derive from the artist's passion for primitive art. Various influences would determine the further development of his art. First of all, his knowledge of Mondrian, and then his meeting in 1950 with Max Bill, and his consequent understanding of Concrete Art, which fascinated him: "For me, Concrete Art is a continuation of Mondrian, that is, the first conceptual painting, a type of art that must be conceived before it is made and whose execution must be as neutral as possible...neutrality, the void"². In the same way, another important influence was the discovery of Van Doesburg and his radicalisation of the principles of NeoPlasticism, which oriented him towards Systemic Art. In 1951, during a trip in Spain, he discovered Muslim Art, which he admired because "it knew how to eliminate naturalistic callings, pictorial sensibility and composition all at the same time"³. In 1958 Morellet introduces a fundamental element to his studies, "chance", which placed aside reason, contrasts with subjectivity. He negates geometry that is too closely linked to mathematical exactness. Given these premises, the artist focuses on the juxtaposition of shapes; he overlaps them and makes them interfere with one another making art that is characterised by an extreme reductionism. He is one of the first artists to use neon, starting in 1963, and placing it near Minimal Art. From 1968 on his experimentation goes beyond the surface of the painting running onto architecture: "frames" of tape adhere to the plastic supports and modify visual perception. Later, with the use of perimeters or sketched lines, the artist duplicates existing architectural elements. Straight or curved neon tubes are placed on the wall or on the floor according to a pre-existing grid but always according to chance. Morellet describes his operations as "architectural disintegrations". Since 1990 he takes up neon or argon tubes again placing in sight the technical instruments used which become part of the work (as he had already done at the end of the 1970's). During the 1990's, Morellet brings the principles of "order" and "disorder" to extremes reaching Baroque results. It is a phase that the artist defines as "Systematism and Kitsch". The trifling vein, always implied in his work, brings him to extremes in his destructuralisations, collecting the single elements he has used up until that moment to then disperse them within a pattern once again according to the principle of chance.

Among the recent important exhibitions are the Angers Museum (25 June – 12 November 2006) e presently, a one-man show at the Stedelijk Museum in Ghent (27 February – 1 April 2007)

GIULIO PAOLINI

Giulio Paolini's thoughts often return to his first piece: "*Geometric drawing*" from 1960, a painting in tempera on which he drew a geometric squaring of the surface on the canvas. It is interesting to remember "*Note di lavoro*" ("*Work Notes*") in which the artist describes his artistic research: "*Geometric drawing* is distant in time but always transparently visible in many of my works up to the present. I'm talking about the ability of the image to

absent itself, to evade the painting, but leave the perception of the drawn line, the geometric squaring of the surface on the canvas, in order to let the canvas breathe, to evoke every other image that could virtually appear on the surface"⁴. He also adds "*Geometric design* still seems to constitute a pattern, secret and invisible, but perceptible, that makes up my work"⁵. The artist has often been linked to Arte Povera, but in reality is more closely tied to the conceptual sphere, and undertakes a complex inquiry into artistic instruments: "The enigmatic quality of the instruments obliges us to read them as ineffable subjects. The painting stops transmitting an image and becomes a mute presence, representing the same elements that it is made of"⁶. Another element that distinguishes his work is his drawing on Art History as an accumulation of images, ancient or recent, that the artist cites, reproduces or fragments, in an attempt to make an unknown image appear which constantly escapes definition. Paolini's artwork makes up a kind of "evocative theatre" in its representations of mythological figures and memories. The artist uses photography, collage and plaster casts, making complex sets in which the elements are repeated, put close to each other, are united by being superimposed, fit into each other, or again dispersed, starting from the centre of the composition. An important consideration made by Paolini concerns the role of the artist or author. It is a role which he considers secondary, with respect to the work itself; a role as "actor" or servant to the scene in the inexhaustible and grand spectacle which is Art History.⁷ "I believe that the artist doesn't live in space, but in time. It is the work, not the artist, which takes on sense and significance over time...so the author must only return to his work because it is the work which is always immobile and perfect, ineffable, suspended in time: and I labour to seek this each time"⁸.

Important exhibitions: "Giulio Paolini, Esposizione Universale", held at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, curator, Dieter Schwarz; "Giulio Paolini, 1960-1972", held at the Fondazione Prada, 29 October- 18 December 2003, curator, Germano Celant; "Giulio Paolini, Fuori programma", held at the GAMeC Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, curator, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, 6 April- 16 July 2006.

1- Enrico Castellani, "Continuità e nuovo", in "Azimuth", no. 2.

2 - François Morellet in "Enrico Castellani e François Morellet", edited by Adachiara Zevi, catalogue of the exhibition held in Malgrate, Lecco (CO), November 1989- January 1990, s.p..

3- François Morellet in "Enrico Castellani e François Morellet", s.p..

4- Giulio Paolini in "Giulio Paolini 1960-1972", curator, Germano Celant, , catalogue of the exhibition held at the Fondazione Prada, s.p..

5 - Giulio Paolini in "Giulio Paolini 1960-1972", p. 15.

6 - Giulio Paolini in "Giulio Paolini 1960-1972", p. 46.

7 - Giulio Paolini in "Fuori programma", a cura di Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, catalogue of the exhibition held at the GAMeC-Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo, 6 April-16 July, 2006, p. 9.

8 - Giulio Paolini in "Fuori programma", p. 27.