

Enrico Castellani

Fondazione Prada
Milan
26 April - 14 June 2001

On 26 April at 6 pm an exhibition devoted to Enrico Castellani (Castelmassa, Rovigo, 1930) will open at the Fondazione Prada, where it will continue until 14 June 2001. The venue is the space - which is being used on this occasion for the first time by the Fondazione Prada - of about 1,000 sq m situated in Milan at Via Fogazzaro 36.

Curated by Germano Celant, the exhibition has been organized in collaboration with the artist and contains about seventy works from public and private collections, both in Italy and abroad, illustrating Castellani's output from 1958 to 1970. The exhibition is characterized by a specifically historical approach, focusing particularly on the first part of the artist's career. Beginning with experimentation into the expressive potential of the two-dimensional surface of the canvas, this concluded with *Spazio Ambiente* (*Environment Space*) of 1970 (a reconstruction of *Ambiente bianco* [*White Environment*] of 1967), an imposing "environmental vision"* attesting to the artist's new-found interest in the surrounding space. The works from European museums - some of them never previously exhibited - comprise paintings and three sculptures, and are displayed in chronological order in nine large rooms. Three works that formed part of the one-man show devoted to Castellani at the Venice Biennale of 1966 are once again on display together: *Superficie bianca 31* (*White Surface 31*, 1966); *Superficie bianca 33* (*White Surface 33*, 1966); *Superficie bianca 35* (*White Surface 35*, 1966).

The exhibition begins with a number of his early works, such as *Senza titolo* (*Untitled*, 1958) and *Senza titolo* (*Untitled*, 1959): "In 1958, when Castellani's artistic career was just getting underway, his style still reflected the influence of Art Informel, but in the space of just a few months he opted for the impoverishment of the gestural sign in favour of the progressive, systematic elaboration of such pictorial elements as the canvas and colour. The first result was the reduction of the painting to an object rather than a subject, in the sense that the linear and colour contortions of his early paintings [...] gradually made way for the elimination of his personal gesture in order to focus on the introspection of the materials. [...] This process was an attempt to resolve the conflict between his new awareness, which was individual, and the extension in space and time of this awareness when this was translated into the forms of a visual language."*

In his *Superficie nera in rilievo* (*Black Surface in Relief*) of 1959, Castellani switched his attention to the structured surface. In order to give it concreteness and vitality - hence mutable physicality - the artist put spherical elements (nuts) behind the canvas that formed reliefs, giving substance to the surface and, with their mutability, endowing it with dynamism and movement. The fortuity of the reliefs produced by the free movement of the nuts behind the canvas of *Superficie nera in rilievo* of 1959 was surpassed in the same year in *Superficie nera* (*Black Surface*) and *Superficie* (*Surface*).

These were two works in which Castellani experimented with the technique – which was to become characteristic of all his subsequent work – of putting nails into a framework behind the canvas, which was then treated as a monochrome surface so that it would be as immaterial as possible: “The nails are arranged in a regular pattern, at intervals that inevitably – in order to create a surface that is not totally raised, but rather projecting at certain points – pass from relief to hollow and vice versa [...]. The picture loses its borders, almost as if it departs from or arrives at the vertical edges in order to make the object part of a sequence, or rather a potential infinite score.”*

This exhibition includes a wide range of works dating from the 1960s. In this period, the sequences within the works changed from the vertical alternations – forming positive and negative parallel lines – to a perpendicular structure; the line that defined the sequences of reliefs and hollows was used to exalt the outward-curving surface by placing it in the corner. This gave rise to the “corner pictures”, such as *Superficie angolare rossa* (*Red Corner Surface*, 1961), constituting the extensibility of the surface – a sort of polyptych, but with regard to the volume – and the “canopies”, reliefs with the upper edge extended, such as *Superficie bianca* (*White Surface*, 1964), which constituted “a further invasion of the space”*. The spatial division of the monochrome surfaces was investigated through diptychs and triptychs, reliefs with the upper edge and sides extended, as in *Trittico* (*Triptych*, 1962) and *Azzurro* (*Sky-Blue*, 1963). In other cases the positive-negative effect is rendered by the texture of the canvas through optical motifs, as in the case of *Superficie quadrettata* (*Squared Surface*, 1961), *Superficie rigata* (*Striped Surface*, 1962) and *Superficie rigata bianca e blu* (*Blue and White Striped Surface*, 1964).

The colours initially chosen for the surfaces – black (that is, the elimination of colour), blue and red – were supplemented in 1964 with green and yellow. In Castellani’s words, “monochrome offers the last chance for painting to distinguish itself from the other arts; the surface, which has, on various occasions, described, alluded and suggested, and has been the scene of idylls, dramas and raving, is now silent. A monochrome curtain has fallen at the end of painting’s last act and it would be quite vain to linger in mystic contemplation.”** From 1964 onwards Castellani entrusted his neutral and impersonal process of pictorial research to the colour white, which occurred increasingly frequently and represented the identity of the canvas in its primary state. The elimination of colour allowed the artist to experiment with another reductive procedure by creating geometric variations on the projections and recesses – or reliefs and hollows – that created rhombuses and triangles, as in *Superficie blu* (*Blue Surface*, 1965) and *Superficie bianca* (*White Surface*, 1965), truncated triangles, as in *Trittico argento* (*Silver Triptych*, 1966) and circles. On other occasions the internal system of the relief was doubled by using mirror images of sequences and colours, as in *Superficie blu-viola* (*Violet-Blue Surface*, 1965), or *Superficie bianca* (*White Surface*, 1966), which extends horizontally in the form of truncated triangles.

The exhibition concludes with *Spazio Ambiente* (*Environment Space*), a reconstruction of *Ambiente bianco* (*White Environment*). This huge work was realized for the first time in 1967, on the occasion of an exhibition entitled “Lo spazio dell’immagine” in Foligno; although it was destroyed shortly afterwards, it was reconstructed by the artist in 1970. Consisting of a room with white walls made of monochrome canvases, which are attached to a wooden framework and delimit the space with a complex system of reliefs and hollows, the work bears witness to an

important stage in Castellani's experimental art that, by expanding from the surface of the picture to the surrounding space, becomes unphysical and immaterial.

The book published by the Fondazione Prada on the occasion of the exhibition contains texts written by the artist himself and critical essays by Germano Celant, Bruno Corà, Marco Meneguzzo, Anty Pansera, Maria Teresa Roberto, Angela Vettese and Adachiara Zevi, which analyze Castellani's work in relation to the historical and cultural context of the period, as well as a detailed chronology by Anna Costantini in which the artist's activity is related to international cultural events – especially those of an artistic nature – from 1958 to 1970.

* G. Celant, "Dietro il quadro: Enrico Castellani", in *Enrico Castellani*, Fondazione Prada, Milano, 2001

** E. Castellani, "Totalità nell'arte d'oggi", 1958, in *Zero*, no. 3, Düsseldorf, 1961

exhibition info

Title:	Enrico Castellani
Dates:	26 April – 14 June 2001
Venue:	Fondazione Prada
Address:	Via Fogazzaro 36, Milan
Opening hours:	Tuesday-Sunday, 10 am-7 pm; closed Monday
Admission:	free
Publications:	Fondazione Prada
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