

Projectroom: Turi Simeti

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From March 12 to April 11 2015, Almine Rech Gallery hosts an unprecedented project room dedicated to Turi Simeti, one of the last representatives of the generation of Milanese artists who shook up the second half of the 20th century. In June 2015, the gallery will also present the first retrospective of the artist in Brussels.

Born in 1929 in Sicily, Turi Simeti settled in Rome in 1958 where he regularly visited Alberto Burri's workshop. He started painting and made his debut in *Art Informel*. In 1960 as Milan very rapidly became more attractive to artists, Simeti met Fontana, Manzoni, Castellani and Bonalumi. In this climate of vibrant discussions, the artist took part in the changes occurring at that time in European art history. His participation in the "Zero Avant-garde" exhibition organized by Fontana in 1965 lists him from the outset amongst the Italian Spatialists: Fontana's sliced canvas, Bonalumi's protruding extroflexions, Castellani's sequence surfaces, the T Group's sets of geometric pieces; they were all driven by the need to go further, getting in contact with the emptiness and by the quest of new possibilities offered by it.

These first Milanese years lead to a considerable number of experiences where the surface of the canvas became a space to be conquered with radical elements, both from minimalism and monochrome. The theme of the end of the art and its renewal is endlessly taken up: "we constantly reinvent painting" (*Reinventiamo continuamente la pittura*). Turi searches and develops new techniques without premeditation. He draws his basics from his experience with collages initiated in 1961, using envelopes that he burns. This technique makes visible an undefined shape that has to be removed by fire afterwards. The final shape gradually comes into sight from this composition. Emerging from the shadow into the light, it results from the oval a nomadic shape (called free) or an erratic one (called authoritarian), which becomes Simeti's signature.

Through the variations of pieces of oval cardboard cut up and then glued onto the canvas, Simeti makes us perceive the non-homogeneity of the monochrome painting. From these first three paintings: "12 ovali bianchi", "44 ovali bianchi" and "108 ovali neri", created in 1962 and 1963, we obtain surface effects and reliefs as well as shadow and light effects that, though they endow the creations with an esthetic – and even decorative – side, demonstrate great precision and fine radicality. Simetti also succeeds to dematerialize the presence of the object by playing on the principle of repetition and light modulation.

The oval has become the brand that makes his works as recognizable as Castellani's. The ellipse appears as the essential archetype, the origin of all forms. Elena Pontiggia sees in this shape the Cyclopes' eyes, wide open to the immensity of a metaphysical space.

Following his own plastic rules with "Rilievi bianchi" on 1967, Simeti stands out by a new vocabulary: the hollow shape. The collage disappears from the surface of the canvas, "dematerialized" only by the light effects. Unlike his initial works where the added oval object was the main element of the canvas, the "extroflexion" oval becomes the core around which the pictorial element of the artwork is organized.

The elliptic shape is obtained by a handmade wooden matrix, then glued onto the back of the canvas. Castellani, for his part, modulates the surface of the canvas with "introflexions" and "extroflexions" thanks to nails placed on the back of the canvas. Simeti's modulations create a tension in the tissue at various degrees and the angle of the oval is then articulated by the elliptic rotation of the axis. The side of its tilted surface, or the conical section, its position on the canvas and its possible combination with other light patterns create multiple effects and offer unlimited new spaces.

Every matrix is unique; it is not a repeated shape by a tool. There is not one single print, but several ones. In all logic, the oval serves two functions: the repetition and the distribution. The repetition produces a series where the difference circulates; it is a creative principle that does not imply a beginning or an end. The repetition of the same pattern forms a present that runs out. A distribution element joins this repetition to regulate the space relation among the "retroflexions".

On the basis of these two principles, the shape shows a dynamic space, giving the possibility to materialize the absence. Therefore, thanks to his elliptic method, Simeti makes appear the homogeneity of the light movement through secants, curves and inflexions.

Malevitch's works are always on his mind and they inspire his wish to find the origins of the shape and the movement. The tilted surfaces attract the brightness, from the shadow to the light. The partial emergences of the oval follow the undulations of the waves. A line disappears while another one invents its shape, plunging us in some kind of short-lived removal, a carrying movement of displacement and conveyance.

Natacha Carron