

Pino Pinelli: the 80s. Painting in whatever case!

Matteo Galbiati (2007)

Galleria Melesi, Lecco

The historical-critical recording and analysis of the artistic events with which one usually views and marks the succession of the salient moments of Art of the last fifty years have shown such a proliferation of events, persons, works and research that the result is an almost boulimic wish to obtain lines and tendencies which can be codified, registered and catalogued. In some way the artistic-expressive tendencies have managed to 'overcharge' the fruition of the works to the point that - as a tangible sign of our contemporary modernity - a certain sense of belonging has been dispersed and obfuscated. When hearing ordinary people no distinctions exist any longer in what one understands for the term 'modern': the operative and practiced forms prove to be scattered over a vast, impervious and almost hostile territory which, as inferred, is defined as Modernity. By way of a commonplace every work has in this way become - and is understood - as being modern when its overt expression comes into conflict with diffused sensitivity, diverging from the normal sense of taste. So much so that even today some of the historical Avant-gardes have still neither been accepted nor understood by the masses! Consequently, in general parlance what one doesn't understand has simply become modern. This uniforming levelling has not taken into consideration that divergencies, conflicts and outright distinctions have also seen the light of day in modernity itself and that the new language of twentieth-century Art which is so rich - and which had extended its comprehension to such diverse individual things - today has such a 'cross-bor-

dering' effect that it comprises everything in a unicum which is unjustly banalised and belittled.

The beginning of this process came about with the succession of those new research works, centred upon minimal and conceptual abstractions, which had rendered the act of painting both deaf and dumb, also challenging the very role - and also the specific and 'humoral' personality - of the artist. This succession of analyses opened a new scenario in Art: it accentuated the transgressive evidencing of what had come about and the interiorised supersession of the purest and most uncontaminated pictorial practice, the unmistakable prime matrix - together with sculpture - of artistic work. Following these artistic affirmations of the post-war period, in the course of the new economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, during the tumultuous 1970s a new generation of young and intellectually dynamic artists began to affirm the need to retrieve precisely the most intrinsically meaningful language of painting: that of doing, of carrying out painting.

Self-reflection concerning one's own work practice was the key point of this research: interest converged, comprising the specificity of pictorial practice as it did theoretical meditation. Work processes, the physicalness of the materials, the sign, colour, the 'timbre' of one's personality, the painter-work relation and the moves directed at effective and intellectual creation were the aspects that were expressed in this practical-theoretical tendency defined as Nuova Pittura [New Painting], Pittura Analitica [Analytical Painting] or also Pittura-Pittura. While maintaining close ties with them, one however had the disregard for the ideological, utopian and militant aspects of the avant-gardes in order to express positions of investigations which were contextualised and aimed at the dissection of the objective aspects of painting - not to mention that of pure painting. In consequence painting became both a theorised discipline and a practice acted upon directly and personally.

Pino Pinelli is certainly one of the most rigorous and significative interpreters of this cognitive drive who still today with energetic vitality and fully abreast of the present-day situation continues his

untiring research which is modelled by and on himself in a process of continuous renewal of contents and suggestions that are sensitively lucid, emotionally stimulating and constantly brought up to date. The works by Pinelli in this exhibition intend to offer the sign which as the result of the achievements of the 1980s marked a new course and phase in his artistic 'story'. Although in order to understand the change carried out in these years it is both proper and obligatory to take a step into the past.

Like all those artists whose self-imposed task was to sound, section and lay bare, the intimate genesis of Pinelli's painting starts out from this context and it is within this that his work sinks its roots without ever straying from this path. Towards the close of the 1960s, at the beginning of his artistic career and within the sphere of a different modernism, almost in opposition to the general panorama of the time, he addressed his choice to the value of the gesture and to pictorial gestuality. For Pinelli the surface of the canvas was the first support where he began his reflection: for an artist who has stolidly defended and continues to defend his position as a painter without ever challenging or rejecting this, the dimension of the painting is the atavic incipit - natural and physiological - of a work that was to totally pivot around pictorial action.

In this first phase, described by the series entitled Topologie [Topologies], the cognitive-experimental investigation was centred upon what the artist defined as topological geometry - not Euclidean - in which the colour connects to and comes into relation with geometrical forms that were firstly flat and then three-dimensional (cf. Topologia of 1972). In these works one already found the entire DNA of his art and the 'shoot' of that sign which would set it apart. The structuring of the elements and the inclusion of colour were aimed at recovering the path, the way in order to once again debate a datum/rule received as an unquestionable axiom, repositing and reinventing it by way of the formulation of new theorems applied to the painting. In this way he pushed forward the limit at which knowledge had arrived: without excesses, distortions or straining the aim, by integrally showing his desire to be able to infringe the rules, always

the object of rereading and never arriving at the point of becoming a certainty, Pinelli gradually extended the boundaries each time attained. His thought was in constant movement, as was his painting into which it was translated.

His was an action immediately characterised by the daring passionateness with which it manifested itself: an artist who anchored and so profoundly sank the roots of his art in Mediterranean origins, alive with movement and fervour. The colour is energy that volcanically germinates in his hands. Fascinating and overwhelming, the pictorial sign shows the all-embracing quiver and thrill that does not allow it to be stilled.

Almost as if looking in a microscope, on the canvases we observe whirling and seething movement, one teeming with cellular micro-organelles which writhe on the coloured surface, with their frenetic movement incising the limitation of the structures that imprison them. They vigorously advance in order to affirm their wish to go beyond the 'margin' that encloses them. And here we see that those geometries begin to show their real limit, the inability to contain and close in the gesture, the painting itself. The tension let loose on the edges does not last, the lines don't resist this incisive charge. The geometries and the three-dimensional bodies flake and, in crumbling, 'pour' out the pictorial mass over the whole canvas.

The expansive and vivifying characteristic of the matter-colour was the other aim Pinelli achieved: in his new monochromes - cf. *Pittura R* of 1973 and *Pittura BL*, also of 1973 - what we can define as a small primordial 'ooze' or 'soup' itself animated the life and vitality of the colour. In the flattened surfaces, where the drawn sign had disappeared (or where, to put it better, it had been fused and absorbed within the coloured magma), the structure of his research is brought about as concentration of thought: the energy of the colour, of the painting, defeated the form and the matter is amalgamated in it. An extremism which condenses the terms which in the previous experience were very clearly separated and recognisable.

Also in the choice of the titles - one which was to become definitive - he decisively announced the new course undertaken by his

art: Pittura. At this point it was definitely declared: it was only Painting with the capital "P". An important addition to the title of Pittura was the abbreviation of the colour that composed it (R=rosso [red], BL=blu [blue], GR=grigio [grey] and B=bianco [white]). A new code, therefore, and also a new communicative one, which made Pinelli's reflection on his work practice even more efficacious. Moreover, notwithstanding allowance made for a certain degree of alternation (although with very few concessions regarding other colours), starting from 1974 the works would be exclusively addressed to colours that expressed the bases of painting: reds, blues, yellows, blacks and whites. There are no chromatic agreements and, in consequence, compromises are rejected. Once again the act of painting - albeit in the choice of the colour - becomes univocal, with neither doubts nor uncertainties. Painting is exclusively and integrally determinative.

In having become monochromes the canvases slowly led to the most important caesura in Pinelli's work: Pittura GR which in 1976 marked the definitive destruction of the unity of the canvas. The painting was cut and reposed as the 'coupling' or 'linking' of surfaces that had acquired a specific dignity and autonomy as an object. The idea of the painting remained - although for not much longer - in the mere geometrical restitution of its profiles. That structure which was surface, then traced out sign (therefore absorbed within the mass of the colour), now became pictorial body once again in the colour. A unicum made up of element, colour and gesture. It was precisely in 1976 and following these last achievements that Pinelli became the first to conceive the work as a grand dissemination of parts: the gesture of the artist freed that unicum on the wall by disseminating its forms on the new support of the wall in accordance with a precise rhythmical, perspicacious and adroit gestuality. The new canvas, dissolved and annulled, first in the work and now also in space.

Pinelli's research reached its apex: at this point one had the 'objectualisation' of painting. No longer did it only have colour, no longer was it only two-dimensional but - and as if going beyond three-dimensionality itself - it took on body. It was from this moment on that Pinelli further placed the accent on the syntax of doing which

has to be the indispensable component of pictorial action. The introduction of flannels as support was employed precisely in this respect. Flannel became a means for beginning to make the very body of painting extreme: the idea of thickness and matter, together with the addition of tactile sensations, were combined as much in the colour as they were in the constituent material of the work-object. Painting is also a sequence of manifold sensorial gestualities.

This state of having gone so deeply inside painting accompanied Pinelli until the opening years of the 1980s which is when he reaped the greatest consequence of his tireless research: the annulling of the microcosm of the canvas for its alternation with the macrocosm of the wall.

In having freed himself from the limitation of the painting-canvas, on having gone beyond the support-fabric and in rendering painting-colour-matter a sole body, with all of this Pinelli broadened the supporting relevance by definitively achieving environmental space.

The 1980s saw the continuation of that turning point which completely freed the artist's work, extending its boundaries with neither measure nor limitation. These works inaugurated a cycle that is still underway, one which proceeds in the constant renewal of this research that has always remained lucidly coherent. His works become imprints that highlight the surface where they are found, radicalising the overturning and upsetting within a traditional conception of pictorial practice. This 'conquest' of the surface - not of the canvas but of the wall directly in a spatial sense - definitively freed painting from being an act that is ineluctably tied to two-dimensionality.

The colour-matter synchronised and synthesised the syntax of Pinelli's work practice with the works becoming fully three-dimensional. However, to correlate them with sculptural or installation operations would be an unforgivable mistake, something undoubtedly to be rejected. Pinelli's energy did not focus on the fragment that was not dispersed, it did not break up into a single unit but constantly referred to a bursting and generous investigative activity regarding the sense and act of painting to which he is so closely tied.

The signs became alphabets of forms, the expression of a new language by now soundly and unremittingly achieved. On the telluric surface of these coloured eruptions which emerged from the wall it was impossible not to still find intact that emotional charge of his first pictorial works. The gesture, marked by the brush stroke, now showed itself characterised in the new compositions as the latent evidence of the presence of that same act - the common matrix - which he had conceived at the beginning. Rather, it is not only significant but also obligatory to find that he was even more profoundly within painting. If one could compare the previous pictorial strength to cellular bodies teeming in a restricted space then here the new Pitture [Paintings] became acknowledgements of the structures which moved those same bodies. To use a scientific comparison, Pinelli moved on from an analysis using an optical microscope to one which was even more intense and penetrating in the form of an electronic one. In the painting he now individuated the chromatic body, amplified as urgency of his analytical research which in the macrocosm of space accentuated the microcosm of that same painting.

Nested on the surface and in the form was the burning and anxious tension, the unchanged force of again proposing painting which in this situation had become the 'objectualisation' of his same sign. In always having conscientiously taken on the responsibility of his risks, in these works he once again found the strength and certainty with which to extrapolate the matrices that evidenced the obstinacy to pursue the distinct and proud up-to-dateness of colour-painting irrespective of time, definition and criticism.

An almost soft, yielding material that became the sum total of experience and that at this point relived through corporality. It was in this direction that the artist conveyed the plurality of his expressive universe. Following a complementarity of the cues of his reflections the works became malleable, articulating themselves in different and autonomous superstructures, although also rigorously coherent with respect to the unitary nature of the research that had produced them. One had the possible and simultaneous disseminations, almost microscopies of the gesture of the brush stroke (cf. Pittura R of 1984), the

rhythmical alternations of geometrical forms (cf. Pittura R of 1986), the experimentations on form and colour (cf. Pittura R, G, BL of 1986), the simulacrum structures (also ironical) of the breakage process of the canvas-painting (cf. Pittura R and again Pittura R, both of 1986)...

The flashing and different repetition or the alternated change in form became terse and pulsing open gestures which extended the possibility of a connection with the spectator. In fact, like a skillful director Pinelli has made us more fully investigate inside painting. Taken outside of its schemes, he has made it invade our own space. In this sense, as a painter he has always paid the utmost attention to the role of the person who observes a work, insisting on every kind of sensitive opportunity which could bear on the sensorial relevance and importance of the work. The real need is that painting has to be perceived by way of aspects which at times also elude the wishes of the artist and irrespective of whatever reference, conjecture or interpretation of the work. A Painting that immortalises its intellectual, philosophical, theoretical and artistic importance without employing a unit of time. Painting always remains valid. Also in these - although only apparent - transgressions and invasions of the forms carried out by Pinelli.

A sole boundary is posed as the ultimate borderline: that of our mind which if on the one hand can towards the infinite extend the extreme limit of our knowledge must, on the other hand, know how to dissolve and free itself every time from its own conquests and from being the mercenary of itself. As in the works by Pinelli from which one has to evince this precious lesson: Painting always finds its own vigour and possibility for rebirth. Likewise, and by meriting this, we have to attain and conquer that time which draws us into its infinite and imperishable visual, tactile and sensorial giddiness. Only then can we immerse ourselves and sink into the vortex of both Pinelli's artistic practice and his Pitture in order to once again find the emotion that catalyses an insistently pursued commitment for the affirmation of values that have never fallen, never been superseded and never been betrayed. Painting always remains a solution that is still valid and capable of narrating, even during the most disarming Modernity. With

calm, Pino Pinelli's eyes still obstinately address this Painting which in his hands is a weapon with which to deflagrate and spread his gestures and values all around us. Overwhelming us.

A production that since the 1980s - although also before - is inescapable. Pino Pinelli lucidly remains a painter or, as he defines himself, a blind warrior who both searches for and stretches out to light. Although in whatever case - and always - with Pittura!