

## *Escape from the Frame*

Cardi Gallery is pleased to present *Escape from the Frame*, an online exhibition featuring a selection of works produced between 1964 and 2019 by Arman, Agostino Bonalumi, Enrico Castellani, Ha Chong-Hyun, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis and Gilberto Zorio.

This virtual exhibition borrows its title from the Italian artist Lucio Fontana, a founder of the Spatialist Group. In the Second Spatial Manifesto he declared the aim for painting ‘...*is to escape from its frame*’. All the works in *Escape from the Frame* bring a new concept of space to traditional painting, they expand and extend the quadrilinear confines, sculpturally altering the surface beneath the layers of paint. Whether canvas, paper, board, parchment or hemp cloth, these surfaces have been slashed, ripped and nailed. Certain works protrude out from surface of the canvas, violated by foreign objects, impaled with nails or paint pushed through from the back of the canvas that oozes out onto its surface. Despite the violation of the surface many of these works are laden with the quietude and stillness of accomplished formal harmony. They challenge the acceptance of the flat canvas as a ritual prerequisite for painting and reiterate their identity as an object beyond the mere surface. Some, like Fontana’s *Concetto Spaziale, Attese*, 1964 and Castellani’s *Superficie Bianca*, 1970 contain an illusionary inner-space they invite the viewer to contemplate. Others like Bonalumi’s *Blu*, 1970 and Kounellis’ *Untitled*, 1995 project into the real space of the viewer’s domain, taking on an almost architectural quality.

Fontana slashes his still wet painted surfaces with a single downward motion first, then widens the slash by pulling it apart with his fingers. His gesture produces a revolutionary effect. The space of the formally flat surface is modified by light hitting the canvas with the most intense luminosity occurring where the slightly curving planes at each side of the cut meet the darkness within the slits. The resulting effect suggests the infinite space that exist beyond the canvas’s surface.

The way light reflects on the surface of the painting is also central to Bonalumi’s work. He uses canvas as a pliable skin-like material, bending it and flexing it into protrusions, painting it monochromatically to emphasize a highly reflective, topographically undulating surface.

Castellani, considered the father of Minimalism, creates painting by stretching a pure white monochromatic canvas over a complex superstructure of wooden dowels. The protrusions create topographical, serial patterns. By contrast, in *Untitled*, 1981 Uecker’s randomly hammered steel nails into a linen lined wooden board covered with a spontaneous application of white paint recall the all-over expanding gestural space of Jackson Pollock. However, the sense of violence invoked by Uecker’s hammered nails, the flayed slashings of the canvas that reveal the gouged wood underneath give this work another, more deeply disturbing psychological dimension that exists outside the frame. Similarly, Zorio’s *Odio*, 1970 results from a controlled act of hammer peening a parchment from the back. His gesture spells out the word “odio” (meaning at once *hatred* and *I hate*) which rises from the black monochrome painted surface of the delicate parchment.

In Ha Chong-Hyun’s work, *Conjunction*, 2019 the gesture of painting marries, indeed conjoins, the medium and the artist’s physicality. Through his “bae-ap-bub” technique, he pushes thick layers of white oil paint through the back of woven hemp canvas, colour which he later brushes or smears into an abstract composition.

Paper - although mounted on a metal sheet - also is the pictorial surface chosen by Kounellis for *Untitled*, 1995. The artist’s mark-making in black oil pastel is irregular, sketch-like, the surface is made to protrude in the middle where an iron beam is placed vertically, secured with two nails, trapping not only the painting but also fragments of another work. Expanding the canvas by means of incorporating an alien object is central to Arman’s *Untitled*, 1999. In this instance, the object becomes integral to the monochrome black painterly surface, at once defying the idea of both painting and object.