

CARDI GALLERY | MILANO

Cardi Gallery shows eight Italian post-war masters at OVR: Pioneers

Art Basel 2021

Cardi Gallery presents works by eight Italian post-war masters at Art Basel 2021 as part of the fair's online viewing room 'Pioneers'. Through a selection entitled '*Pioneers of the Earth and the Skies*', the gallery is showing eight ground-breaking works made between 1966 and 2010. By moving away from the use of traditional media in art, and challenging the accepted art-viewer relationship, these artists played a significant role in changing the course of modern art. Throughout his whole career, Mimmo Rotella developed several new techniques to exceed the limitations of painting: the *décollage* in the 1950s, the photo emulsion and the *artypto* in the 1960s, and the *blank* in the 1980s. *Venere Imperiale*, 1966 is one of the earlier examples of *artypto*, created by cropping and mounting appropriated printing proofs onto canvas. Visually complex webs of randomly layered prints superimposing imagery, letters, and colours, these works draw from popular culture, the icons of film and advertising dotting the everyday landscape of the ever-changing capital city of a booming economy. Rotella's rebellious attitude towards the sacred space of the canvas, his embrace of the element of chance and his playfulness with everyday materials make him a pioneer in the development of Post-War art in Italy.

Similarly to Rotella, Alberto Biasi also broadens the horizons of painting through the assemblage of industrially produced materials. His *Drops in Lewisham*, 1974 evokes the imagery of flickering drops through a process of virtual kineticism where immobile PVC and acrylic strips become animated by the viewer's movement, therefore creating new shapes that steer the gaze. The viewer's presence is necessary to complete the work, establishing a key relationship, and drawing attention to a performative and temporal element of a wall-based piece.

This attitude is also exemplified by Michelangelo Pistoletto's practice and his series *quadri specchianti* such as *Uomo dal cappello giallo e verde*, 1973, where the spectator physically becomes an integral part of the painting. Just like for Pistoletto the mirror acts as a bridge between the artwork and the world of the here and now, therefore letting the everyday bleed into the work, in Mario Merz's *Untitled*, 1983 this function is brought forth by a light spear piercing an unstretched canvas. Intricately painted, the present work is a rare vertical rendition of an owl-like form drawn from the rich artist's bestiary.

In their works, these artists embrace natural, earthy elements in their poorest, simplest organic form: salt, ice. They elevate them through the association with manmade, industrial materials, such as serial prints for Rotella, plastic compounds for Biasi, stainless steel for Pistoletto, neon strips for Merz, lead sheets and a freezing system for Pierpaolo Calzolari's *Untitled (Black Salt)*, 1986. These works speak to the tactility of art, his alchemic capacity to transform and elevate not only common natural subjects and everyday materials, but to challenge vision and activate the other senses through the scent of freezing metal, the variation of temperature and the buzzing of an engine. They all reference yet depart from the pictorial language, deconstructing high art through unusual creative approaches and assemblages.

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