

# MIGNONI

*'I think that paintings are answers. Answers for which no question has been asked'.*

Robert Mangold<sup>1</sup>

Robert Mangold's paintings explore and inhabit a mysterious and imaginary area that exists halfway between real and representational space. Comprised of only the simplest of pictorial elements, they are neither objects nor images but somehow both. They are paradoxes: pictures that hang 'before you like a wall', the artist has said, but which you can 'neither enter nor treat as an object'. Instead, they 'relate [to you] like architecture in a scale related to human size'.<sup>2</sup>

Mangold is part of a generation of painters once dubbed 'Romantic Minimalists' that includes Robert Ryman, Brice Marden and Frank Stella. Like them, Mangold built his unique aesthetic upon a formal language of abstraction first pioneered by the Abstract Expressionists of the New York School. For Mangold, it was, in particular, the revelatory impact upon him of Barnett Newman's eloquent articulation of the basic pictorial elements of scale, colour, proportion and structure that initially drove and informed his work. It was the transcendent ability of Newman's paintings to evoke a sense of the sublime with such an apparent simplicity of means that ultimately enabled Mangold to realize, he has since said, that 'painting's unique reality was neither object nor window. It existed in the space in between.'<sup>3</sup>

Adopting a similarly restrained visual language of basic geometric form and monochromatic colour, often drawn directly from the urban world around him, Mangold's subsequent paintings were an attempt to both expand and escape the limits of abstraction by integrating it with the real world. Usually arrived at through methodical stages of drawing, his object/paintings broach and transcend the supposedly separate worlds of abstract representation and physical reality as well as those between concept and execution by making a play between the graphic and illusional properties of a picture's surface and its physical features as an object on the wall or as an architectural form projecting out into the space of the viewer.

A work such as *A Triangle with Two Rectangles (red)* of 1977, for instance, is a diptych of two rectangular canvases which, when placed together on the wall, form a single monochrome surface across both of which a right-angled triangle has been drawn. In this way an intriguing dissonance is achieved between the way in which the content of the painting has come into being through the unique combination of the painting's imagery, its physical property, its title and the alignment of its constituent parts.

In other works, such as *Red/Green X within X #2* of 1982, it is the physical edges of the conjoined canvases that play an integral role within its pictorial structure and visual logic. In yet others, such as *Red with Green Ellipse/Black frame* of 1988-9 and *Green Ellipse/Gray*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Mangold, quoted in Arthur. C. Danto et al., *Robert Mangold*, London 2000, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> R. Mangold, quoted in Arthur. C. Danto et al *op cit*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Mangold, quoted in Sylvia Plimack Mangold, 'An Interview with Robert Mangold', in Arthur. C. Danto *op cit*. p. 60

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*Frame*, 1989 a certain eccentricity of form has been established by the strange, geometric correspondences that exist between these paintings' irregular shapes and apertures.

Establishing an apparent continuum between the graphic, conceptual space of the works' surfaces and the almost architecture-like real space of their physical presence, these canvases surprise the viewer into new awareness of their own presence and collaborative involvement in the work. This is because, in the end, the apparent logic of the strange spaces that Mangold's pictures articulate is one that only really functions within the mind of the viewer who stands before them. 'The elements that make the paintings are complete and don't need explanation,' Mangold has said. 'What is there is all there and is accessible to anyone.' <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Mangold, 1987, quoted in Arthur. C. Danto *op cit.* p. 11