

CARDI GALLERY



Sergio Lombardo, Uomo Politico (Gesto Tipico), 1961-1963

SERGIO LOMBARDO

09 October - 22 December, 2023

22 Grafton St. W1S 4EX London

Cardi Gallery is proud to present its first exhibition of works by Italian artist Sergio Lombardo (b.1939). Active since the late 1950s, Lombardo was a key member of Italy's post-war avant-garde and the Scuola di Piazza del Popolo (Piazza del Popolo School), a group of artists based in Rome whose anti-establishment stance signalled a radically new chapter in Italian art. Alongside Mario Schifano, Tano Festa and Pino Pascali, Lombardo played a crucial role in expanding the material and theoretical possibilities of painting at the time, embracing popular subject matter and making use of common industrial materials. Interlacing a critique of mass media with bold and expressive imagery, he and his contemporaries formed a new visual vocabulary that helped develop Pop Art into an international phenomenon.

In his prolific work as a psychologist and theorist, Lombardo has continued to produce writings and multimedia works over the last six decades, many of which are presented here in London for the first time.

Installed over four floors of Cardi Gallery's Mayfair building, the exhibition Sergio Lombardo covers sixty years of the artist's practice, from the ground-breaking *Monocromi* (1958-61) and *Gesti Tipici* (1961-63) to the *Superquadri* (1965-68) and ongoing series of *Stochastic Paintings* (1980-present). Tracing his early adoption of rigorous formal systems, it explores Lombardo's theory of Eventualism, a branch of study that aims to reveal the psychological underpinnings of aesthetic experience. Predicated on the charged encounter that takes place between a viewer and an artwork, Eventualism places emphasis on the audience's affective reaction, rather than on any subjective content communicated by the artist.

This principle has accompanied Lombardo's work since the beginning. The *Monocromi*, created when he was still a student, are a conscious attempt to void the act of painting from all its traditional connotations; made up of modular grids of paper coated with enamel paint, they offer a provocative gesture by reducing the canvas to its barest compositional elements, forcing the viewer to question their intrinsic meaning. In 1961 the artist developed this controlled approach into the *Gesti Tipici*, his most celebrated works, featuring the imposing silhouettes of contemporary political figures rendered in stark black and white enamel. Inspired by the ubiquitous imagery of such powerful men across television screens and in newspapers, Lombardo was moved to reproduce their features as pure abstracted forms, turning them into generic images that provoke subjugation, awe or estrangement in the viewer. In these works, the well-known physiognomy of John F. Kennedy, Charles de Gaulle, and Nikita Khrushchev, among others, is replaced by an exaggerated visual language powerfully reminiscent of authoritarian systems.

In 1965 Lombardo, reluctant to be confined to the label of Pop Artist or expressionist, distanced himself from figurative idioms and began looking beyond two-dimensional painting with the *Superquadri*. Using minimalist geometric elements, he created modular systems of sculptural forms to be assembled in endless configurations by the audience, turning the gallery space into an arena of spontaneous aesthetic collaboration. "I wanted to create a surprising situation", the artist said of the series, "in which the visitor of the exhibition had to find himself in the role of actor even if at first he had come in the role of spectator". Lombardo's psychological research in the 1970s pushed him to investigate the aleatory nature of artistic expression, focusing on the countless unpredictable outcomes involved in creative acts and their reception. First exhibited in 1980, the *Stochastic Paintings* are an ambitious ongoing project that runs parallel to this theoretical study. Using elaborate methods of random image generation, the artist devises algorithms able to produce an infinite array of tiled pictorial compositions entirely alien to human perception. In these impressive abstract landscapes, which function as large-scale automated Rorschach tests, each viewer finds different interpretations and visual associations that are at once surprising and revealing. In his most recent suite of paintings, Lombardo has applied this experimental method to the human figure, training the algorithm to generate a series of "unpredictable faces" that are "completely unrelated to human intuition", eliciting a range of psychological reactions from the visitor.

BIO

Italian artist, psychologist and theorist Sergio Lombardo was born in Rome in 1939, where he still lives and works. In the late 1950s, Lombardo abandoned his studies in Law and Humanities to pursue a career in art, quickly becoming associated with a group of young artists known as the Scuola di Piazza del Popolo (Piazza del Popolo School), named after the historic Roman square where they gathered. Alongside Mario Schifano, Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Giosetta Fioroni, Pino Pascali and others, Lombardo was part of a new avant-garde that redefined post-war Italian art by embracing popular imagery and reflecting the country's shifting cultural landscape.

Lombardo's first series of works, began when he was still a high school student, were the Monocromi (1958-60), self-defined works of "anti-art" intended to upend academic conventions. Wishing to erase subjectivity and expression from the artistic act by following strict theoretical and material principles, he composed modular grids of paper collaged onto canvas, which he then painted with monochrome industrial enamel. The artist exhibited these at Rome's Galleria La Tartaruga, an important meeting place where he befriended other members of the Scuola di Piazza del Popolo. In 1961 Lombardo began work on his most celebrated series of paintings, the Gesti Tipici (1961-63), large-scale black-and-white reproductions of influential contemporary political figures from around the world. These paintings firmly aligned him with the popular subject matter and appropriated imagery prevalent in the work of Schifano and Festa, who themselves were responding to the growing American phenomenon of Pop Art. Although not intended as overt political statements, the Gesti Tipici powerfully captured the era's preoccupation with mass media and the social conditioning of television, and pushed Lombardo to explore the psychological hold certain images exert over an audience.

In 1965 the artist moved away from the figurative elements of the Gesti Tipici and the subsequent series Uomini Politici Colorati (1963-64), embracing a minimalist language of abstract geometric forms in the Superquadri (1965-68). Playfully challenging the boundaries between painting and sculpture, Lombardo designed works to be composed directly by the audience, inviting them into a collaborative process of creation. In the following years he continued to create installations, like his Sfere con Sirena (1968-69), exhibited at the 35th Venice Biennale. Throughout the 1970s, Lombardo expanded his research into the psychology of art and established the experimental journal *Rivista di Psicologia dell'Arte*. His prolific writings on the subject together form the basis of Eventualism, a theory of aesthetics premised on the psychological encounter, or "event", that takes place between viewer and artwork. In 1980 Lombardo began an ongoing series of works investigating the concept of Stochastic Painting, using mathematical algorithms and randomization programs to generate aleatory patterns and compositions. He has been a member of the Professional Association of Psychologists of Lazio since 1992, and in 2015 he was appointed Master Academic Emeritus by the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

In 1970 Lombardo was included in the 35th Venice Biennale, where he exhibited the installation *Sfere con Sirena* (1968-69) as part of a dedicated room in the Central Pavilion; he later took part in the 1993, 2009 and 2013 editions. His work has been shown in numerous international institutions, including the National Museum of Modern Art of Tokyo (1967), Jewish Museum of New York (1968, 1999), Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (1969, 1995), Philadelphia Civic Center (1973), Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome (2001, 2007), MLAC of the Sapienza Università di Roma (1995), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2015), Dallas Museum of Art (2015), Philadelphia Museum of Art (2016), and Tate, London (2016). In addition, his works are held in the permanent collections of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna di Roma, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Turin among others.

#SergioLombardo

PRESS

pressUK@cardigallery.com

T. 0245478189