

A ARTE INVERNIZZI

PRESS RELEASE

MARIO NIGRO. SPAZIO TOTALE 1952-1955

OPENING THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2025 6 P.M.

On Thursday, 4 December 2025, at 6 p.m., A arte Invernizzi gallery opens the solo exhibition by Mario Nigro, curated by Paolo Bolpagni, which will focus on works belonging to the "Spazio totale" ["Total Space"] cycle created between 1952 and 1955.

A leading figure in Italian art after World War II, Mario Nigro (Pistoia, 1917 - Livorno, 1992) developed a radical pictorial language that combined constructive rigor with expressive intensity. His scientific and musical training had a profound influence on his compositional method: his painting is structured according to rhythmic-musical rules of repetition and variation, which generate a continuous tension between order and dissonance, calculation and emotion.

For over a decade (1952-1965/66), "Spazio totale" was the focal point of Nigro's artistic research: he visualized the interpenetration of different degrees of reality and dimensions obtained through the skilful combination of rhythmic structures with a strong expressive component, deformed by the refined tonal gradations of the background and the expanding grid. The first works belonging to this cycle date back to 1952, to which the artist devoted careful theorization by writing various essays, published between 1954 and 1955.

"[...] I have gained experience from the relations that can really exist between musical structure and abstract construction, problems that had been touched upon repeatedly but never rationally addressed. On the basis of these structures, I studied plastic elements in their forms of repetition, variation, simultaneity and coincidence, thus arriving at the conception of a total space where form and space resolve one another in a move beyond physical two-dimensionality, and where problems of invention, discovery, expression and representation will still exist. [...] The plastic elements aligned in harmony, each having equal functional possibilities within the painting, are still indications of aspiration to a concordant world. The violent contrasts in which the compositional structure originates are signs of an existing struggle."

(Mario Nigro, *Primo scritto sullo spazio totale*, 1954)

The works exhibited on the upper floor of the gallery allow for an in-depth and systematic investigation of the generative motifs underlying this cycle: surfaces, lines, interweaving patterns, sequences of signs and colors add up and subtract in an energetic and musical harmony of small squares and colored stripes, giving rise to luminous vibrations and chromatic textures that refer to fabric, architecture, and sound, in an expanded pictorial dimension. In them, space is no longer a background or a container, but a dynamic totality that encompasses form and time, construction and perception. Each "Spazio totale" is a pictorial fragment, unsuitable for defining a totality, despite being aware of it. With it, Nigro aspires to make visible that it is not possible to construct a closed system, but only an open and confused whole, where each component is free and expresses movement, but not resolution. For this reason, the variations of "Spazio totale" from 1952 to 1955 are innumerable, because they represent a method of investigation, not an answer. The aspiration is to immerse oneself, not to separate oneself from the surrounding world.

The lower floor displays representative works that highlight the artist's analysis of the issues and implications of space, arriving at a conception of painting as an act of knowledge and a concept of reality, where form does not represent

but coincides with space itself. Nigro investigates the dynamics of perception by analyzing the relationships between form, color, and structure in a construction that tends to become an environment, an energy field, a place of simultaneity and visual coincidences: the plastic elements are repeated, vary, and contribute to forming a whole in which form and space resolve each other, both in structural and chromatic terms.

Over the decades since Mario Nigro's death in 1992, major retrospectives have been organized in numerous museums, including the Institut Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt (2000), the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice (2006), Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz (2012), the Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca (2017), Kunstmuseum Bochum (2019) and, most recently, the Palazzo Reale and Museo del Novecento in Milan (2023). The catalogue raisonné, edited by Germano Celant, was published in 2009.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a bilingual catalogue with an essay by Paolo Bolpagni, the reproductions of the artworks on display and an updated bio-bibliographic section.

EXHIBITION: MARIO NIGRO. SPAZIO TOTALE 1952-1955

CURATED BY: PAOLO BOLPAGNI

EXHIBITION PERIOD: 4 DECEMBER 2025 - 25 FEBRUARY 2026

OPENING HOURS: FROM MONDAY TO FRIDAY 10 A.M. - 1 P.M. 2.30-6.30 P.M., SATURDAY BY APPOINTMENT

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MARIO NIGRO

BIOGRAPHY

Mario Nigro was born in Pistoia on 28 June 1917. From the age of five, he devoted himself to studying the violin and piano.

In 1929, Nigro's family moved to Livorno where, in 1933, aged sixteen, he began to teach himself to paint. Alongside his passion for art, he pursues scientific studies and in 1941 he graduated in Chemistry from Pisa University, where he worked as an assistant in the Institute of Mineralogy. In 1947 he took his second degree, in Pharmacy, and in the following year he was appointed as Pharmacist at the Spedali Riuniti in Livorno.

Between 1946 and 1948, his artistic research found common ground with themes and interests related to the new abstract art movement.

In 1949, the year his son Gianni was born, he put on his first solo exhibition at the Libreria Salto in Milan, where he met Lucio Fontana and the Milanese circles of the Movimento Arte Concreta (MAC). His work of these years enjoyed immediate international success, as can be seen in his invitation to the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* in Paris in 1951 and 1952, while in Italy he participates in the most important exhibitions of the M.A.C. Movimento Arte Concreta. In 1952, Nigro joined the Roman Art Club association and opened a branch in Livorno. From the end of 1952, he created his first works in his "Spazio totale" ["Total Space"] series, in an investigation that was to develop over the following decade. He carefully codified this from a theoretical point of view in a series of writings published in 1954 and 1955.

In 1956 a dramatic tension with a strongly expressive basis developed in Nigro's work; this was linked in particular to the invasion of Hungary by Soviet forces, which created a crisis of ideological choice in the artist, who had always been involved in contemporary political and social events.

Between 1958 and 1959 he resigned from his post as a pharmacist and he moved to Milan to devote himself to painting.

Despite a serious car accident in 1960, which caused him to temporarily step away from his artistic career, in 1961 he participated in the *Morgan's Paint Prize* and in 1964, at the invitation of Lucio Fontana, he was present for the first time at the Venice Biennale with his cycle of "Collage vibratili" ["Vibrating Collages"] and "Spazio totale", returning with a personal exhibition in 1968.

Between 1965 and 1975, the artist developed works on an environmental scale and, from the second half of the 1960s, started the minimal progressive perspective projections of a new cycle, called "Tempo totale" ["Total Time"]. From the early 1970s onwards, his works increasingly focused on elementary principles: line and color. At the same time, Nigro participated in numerous exhibitions both in Italy and abroad, holding his first solo exhibition in Germany in 1971. In 1973, he participated in the 10th Rome Quadriennale; in 1978, he presented the work *Ettore e Andromaca* [*Hector and Andromache*], in ten elements, at the Venice Biennale. In 1979, he was the first Italian artist to be invited for a major solo exhibition at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan. In 1982, he showed his work *Emarginazione* [*Marginalisation*] at the Venice Biennale. In 1984, the municipality of Pistoia devoted a large retrospective exhibition to the artist and in 1986 he was again invited to the Venice Biennale.

In the second half of the 1980s, the expressiveness of his works became increasingly intense in the series of "Ritratti" ["Portraits"] and "Dipinti satanici" ["Satanic Paintings"], inspired by the fatwa against Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. In the early 1990s, he continued his research with the series of "Meditazioni" ["Meditations"] and "Strutture" ["Structures"].

He died in Livorno on August 11, 1992. In the same year, he was posthumously awarded the *Camille Graeser-Preis*; in 1994, the anthological exhibition *Mario Nigro. Retrospektive. Die konstruierte Linie von 1947 bis 1992. La linea costruita dal 1947 al 1992* opened at the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum und Kunstverein in Ludwigshafen am Rhein and the Quadrat Bottrop Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, the last exhibition the artist had collaborated on.