

*Yes, colour, as it shifts, occupies the space and we enter. The frame that enclosed the space is no longer there. By taking it away, colour takes on the space and invades the space. And when this happens, it's miraculous.* - Ettore Spalletti, 2006

More than 70 works, three museums and a single title for three exhibitions created to show the variety, complexity and depth of the work of Ettore Spalletti, master of Italian contemporary art: this is *UN GIORNO COSÌ BIANCO, COSÌ BIANCO* curated by Anna Mattiolo for MAXXI in Rome, Danilo Eccher for GAM in Turin, Andrea Viliani and Alessandro Rabottini for MADRE in Naples.

Ettore Spalletti, one of the greatest masters of contemporary art, has experienced, over the course of forty years, some of the most significant moments in the history of international art, developing an original language, capable of creating a dialogue between modernity and classicism. The artist's desire is to touch three places, three museums, distant from each other, in a single moment, as a single exhibition in three ideal spaces in three different cities. The three exhibition layouts were designed by the artist in close dialogue with the museum spaces, narrating each aspect of his work, from painting to sculpture to environmental installations, within a layout that is not chronological but decided by the input offered by the works.

The event, thus composed of three exhibitions, originates from a complete project that is subdivided and crosses Italy from the north to the centre to the south - from Turin to Rome to Naples. It is not only the first major exhibition dedicated to the artist by Italian public institutions committed to contemporary art, but also the most comprehensive retrospective of the artist, represented at its best at MADRE in Naples, through a broad and articulate retrospective presentation.

A project that can legitimately be defined, for the plurality of its institutional representation, as a "Republican" project. This "historic" synergy between a national museum like MAXXI, a regional museum like MADRE and a civic museum like GAM, was created from the common desire of the three museums to celebrate the great Italian artist, Ettore Spalletti, and contribute, with this three-part project, to the construction of a collaborative model between Italian museums. The goal is better performance of the indispensable task of the museums in our country, that of supporting the Italian art scene nationally and internationally. The three resulting exhibitions, inaugurated within a few weeks of each other, present the public with the whole spectrum of the artist's work, from his early efforts to more recent installations. Each exhibition is presented, in relation to the museum space, as a stand-alone event, even in the context of the architecture of each museum. However, at the same time, they are chapters of a single story that, through Spalletti's works, unites the different latitudes and longitudes, different landscapes, different emotional and cultural horizons of our

country or, as the artist himself says, its different "lights".

The exhibition opened to the public at MAXXI - National Museum of 21st century Art in Rome on March 13, 2014 (until September 14, 2014) with a layout characterised by a large environmental installation especially designed for this occasion, focusing the exhibition on the relationship between work and space, a central aspect of Spalletti's work.

The partnership between GAM, MADRE and MAXXI is accompanied by a catalogue (*Electa*) created for the project by Studio Spalletti, which traces the artist's entire career, including critical texts by Carlos Basualdo, Danilo Eccher, Gabriele Guercio, Anna Mattiolo, Gloria Moure Cao, Alessandro Rabottini, Andrea Viliani, and an extensive bio-bibliographical note.

The exhibition at MADRE features over 40 works occupying the entire third floor of the museum, covering the complete expression of the artist's work, from its beginnings in the sixties up to the most recent works. The exhibition layout however is not chronological but influenced by a complex relationship between works from different periods. This display choice, which configures the exhibition as an apparent retrospective, reflects a central theme of the entire body of Spalletti's work, namely the elimination of time intended as a linear element and its exploration as an eternal present, as a perceptual experience rooted in materials and shapes. For Naples, Ettore Spalletti created a generous and deeply personal exhibition, which puts his own history into perspective and shows his present as moments of dilated, almost distilled time. The exhibition in Naples aspires to be a retrospective, but without adopting a chronological system, reinterprets, reintroduces, re-establishes this display model. As always with the works of Spalletti, which work against and beyond the idea of time, in particular the contemporary, the dates of the works do not count as much as the intimate relationship between the works themselves and their deep implication, each with its own "personality" but part of a reciprocal dialogue that determines the set-up, a real all-encompassing and immersive work of art. What emerges as a unifying element is the experience of materials that Spalletti has always used, highlighting the specific expressive capacity of each and the complex colour-shape structure of the languages of painting, sculpture and architecture. Materials, colours, shapes used by Spalletti express a timeless feeling, or identifiable with time spread over the history of art, while at the same time physically present, punctual, instant, connected to our own perceptual experience.

The display layout alternates works never shown before to the public with others which represent fundamental moments in the artist's career. The works that until now had never left the artist's studio include the great sculptural installation *Foglie* (1969), which reveals the theme of the relationship

between natural data and abstract language that features an unusual colour range in the subsequent creation of Spalletti. A room will also be dedicated to the architectural maquette of models - many of which were built, others expressed as potential ideas - that show the complete cohesion of colour, shape, space and architecture, which so profoundly defines the idea of painting expressed by the artist. Next to these models of spaces, books created as unique specimens will be exhibited, revealing interest in the format of the artist's book as a space of experience, as an object to explore in terms of shape, concept and touch, capable of containing the fullness of the display experience. In addition to these original works, the exhibition features a wide range of works that have punctuated the creative adventure of Ettore Spalletti : among the first, we find *Presenza stanza* (1978), the source of the speech - which later became central - on the relationship between painting and sculpture as articulation of colour and volume in space, as bodies which abandon the wall and the pedestal in order to experience a live and sensitive relationship with the architecture and the viewer. *Colonna di colore* (1979) is a solitary sculptural entity that transforms colour into the cornerstone of architecture, combining in itself the memory of a classic temple with the modernity of pure volume; while in *Contatto* (1976) the pigment as fine dust (thus in its original form) establishes an almost symbiotic perceptual relationship with the display space and the viewer, just as the title suggests.

The selection of works on display also explores in detail the dialectic between abstraction and figuration as a formal and conceptual pivot around which all the work of the artist revolves, through the presence of works such as *La bella addormentata* (1975), *Senza titolo (montagna riflessa)* (1985) and *Pianta* (1988), paintings that show landscape experience to be a central element. The theme of the mountain, evoked in the titles of these works, implies the perception of an imposing mass that changes colour thanks to the different undertones of the atmosphere through which we contemplate, revealing the theme of vision as something alive and mobile, describing the unrepeatable flow of existence, whether it is the Gran Sasso that dominates and protects the landscape of Abruzzo or Vesuvius which dominates the bay of Naples from every view. The rare works that reveal a more obvious figurative matrix are accompanied by the more numerous works that distil experiential data into the contemplative space of monochromatic paintings: the whites, blues and pinks of Ettore Spalletti result from a sensitive "memory" that transform the heavens and the incarnated, even the heavens and the incarnated of paintings from the past, into pure expanses of colour. The almost musical alternation of materials used by Spalletti – such as alabaster, marble, onyx, gold leaf, metals and precious stones, paper and pure pigment, all featured in the exhibition - configure the exhibition as a journey into the aesthetic, symbolic and expressive potential of the materials themselves, which the artist has always explored in their purity, as chromatic and perceptive "totalities", agents able to expand the horizons of painting.

Finally, the central element of the exhibition at MADRE is light. The exhibition in Naples opens in early spring, so one of the elements most present is light, the return of light after months of darkness, its subtle but continuous change, its warmth, its regenerative vitality, its multiple effect on the works, in the rooms, in the eyes of the visitors, which blends the outside with the inside, merges the museum with its context . The architecture of MADRE itself thus becomes part of the exhibition, with the rhythmic setup of its rooms, windows overlooking the streets of the neighbourhood of San Lorenzo, the church of Donnaregina Vecchia, the hill of Capodimonte and Castel Sant'Elmo, tiny wedges of the sea and Vesuvius in the distance. It is perhaps possible to evoke, considering the intellectual, physical and spiritual concentration at this exhibition, the effect a walk in the cells of the monastery of San Marco in Florence has on visitors, decorated with devotional frescoes by Fra Angelico, like taking a leap in time that in reality leads to the same supreme spiritual synthesis, to the small studio where the still lifes and the suspended landscapes by Giorgio Morandi were conceived.

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