

Fondazione Prada presents an anthological exhibition devoted to Gianni Piacentino (Turin, 1945). Curated by Germano Celant, the solo show is hosted on the two levels of the Podium - the building at the center of the Fondazione's architectural compound - and comprises more than 90 works, retracing Piacentino's artistic path in anti-chronological order, starting from his most recent works from 2015 and working its way backwards to those from 1965.

Piacentino's research began in an artistic and cultural background characterized by an increasing detachment from the subjectivism which had animated Action Painting and Informalism, as well as by the development of a new visual language mixing the attention to pop and consumer imagery and the appreciation for both geometrical and primary forms. His work, however, did not embrace either of the dominant tendencies of those times - Pop art and Minimal art - but, according to the original reading of his work provided in this exhibition, generated a dialectic process between the two.

In order to research the terrain where these two currents converge, Piacentino turned to the world of velocity and transportation including cars, motorcycles and planes, all products of pop culture which, while not part of the realm of pure art, are expressions of industrial aesthetics. In this respect, the artist approaches the aerodynamic fantasies of many Californian artists: from Billy Al Bengston to Craig Kauffman, from John Mc Cracken to John Goode. As Germano Celant explains: "It is in this historical climate of oscillation between art and design, handicrafts and industry, the useful and the useless, the one-off piece and the mass-produced object, that we can place the contribution of Piacentino, whose otherness and uniqueness lie precisely in the dialectic between the two poles. Since 1966 his sculptures have been aiming for a result that transcends the functional object, even though the latter remains recognizable as a possible industrial product with decorative characteristics, as it is derived from a culture steeped in applied science, handicrafts and the precision of mechanics and sophisticated engineering processes".

As Gianni Piacentino states: "At its core, my work always contains the importance of the technical and mathematical control of the result. I don't allow myself to give way to repressed feelings and emotional drives". His adherence to this is proven by his attraction for the construction discipline, which implies both elegance and perfection, as well as an inclination for complete control over the physical and chromatic features of materials. Throughout his career, the artist has led his own creative process following all the different phases implied in a given industrial production scheme, as happens in the realm of design. As Germano Celant states, his artistic and aesthetic adventure represents "an absolute escape from the imperfection, instantaneity and randomness of making art, in order to access a universe of perfection, calculation and concentration that can compete with a motor or flight vehicle, on both a sublime and an absolute level".

On the ground floor of the Podium a selection of works realized from 2015 back to the early 1970's are presented in an exhibition display made-up of three full height walls which obliquely cross the gallery space. The acrylic paintings on canvas *Seaplane Painting* open the show, along with metallic structures such as *Cantilver* and *Race*, which resemble the easels used by the artist in his studio to store his works. *Seaplane Painting*, on the other hand, integrates the figurative element of the float plane belonging to industrial iconography which stands out against monochrome-filled backgrounds and, in some cases, metallic bars similar to those employed for the construction of the aircrafts themselves. Various works paying homage to the Wright Brothers are also presented. All of them testify Piacentino's passion, from the 1970's to the present day, for these American pioneers and their engineering and technological expertise. The paintings are characterized by a flat painting technique and impersonal, purely decorative composition, consisting of image, signature and frame. Relevant space is devoted to ground vehicles from the 1970's and 1980's, which mark a clear break with Piacentino's production previous to 1968. The aesthetic of gravity and inaction which characterized his first works is replaced by the mobility of an object projected toward a journey via road, eventually turning the exhibition space into a field of action. The artist's commitment to the racing world has led him to maximize the control over the technical and visual features of his vehicles, even though the artisanal aspect of their construction has been enhanced by the use of computer software. The ground floor display ends with his works titled *Combine Painting*, which integrate canvases with various painted metallic elements arranged according to a precise layout, bars featuring the artist's initials GP transformed into an industrial logo, wings and propellers reminiscent of aviation symbolism.

On the upper floor, divided into two separate longitudinal spaces, the exhibition focuses on the dawn of Piacentino's career, from 1968 to 1965, a time that marked his initial involvement in the *Arte Povera* exhibitions (Turin, Bologna, Amalfi), which he later distanced himself from in order to follow an autonomous artistic path, documented in this anthological exhibition. This section of the show features canvases and monochromatic objects that employ colors resulting from chromatic experimentations and diverse mixtures rather than non-primary colors. From the initial canvases, which already bear a sculptural dimension, the artist moves on to the three-dimensionality of poles, overturned Ts and angular structures, and in 1966 starts working on the shape of the table, which loses its functional features through a variation of its customary dimensions and proportions. Poles, tables, portals and self-supporting structures realized in those years seem to belong to the research field of primary forms. On the contrary, they configure themselves as archetypes, as seemingly functional objects for daily life, creating a new aesthetic reality. As Piacentino explains: "I like to

study common objects and negate their function in order to turn them into entities of line and surface intended only to be observed”.

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