

Martina Simeti

L'impronta

Riccardo Camoni, 1979-1983

curated by Mariuccia Casadio

"An artist is a pelican or nothing"

– RC

I was struck by his dogged loyalty to just a few colours. Especially red, a vivid protagonist, which sometimes interacted with black against the light background of the paper. It was the early 1980s, and I saw that his painted, monochrome forms hankered for the three dimensions: a projecting, architectural presence projected into space. Riccardo Camoni crossed paths with me and Martina Simeti, who was still a child at the time, for her father Turi's studio overlooked the same courtyard as Riccardo's studio at number 27 Viale Bligny. Martina's mother, Carla Ortelli, had also opened a gallery under her own name at the same address, one still fondly remembered by experts for its pioneering and, in many cases, ahead-of-its-time activities. This shared memory gave rise to the idea for this small posthumous solo exhibition, which I decided to call *L'Impronta* ('The Imprint'). It is a title that came to me almost naturally, because lasting leaving traces in the imagination was the dream and goal of those generations of the 1960s and 1970s. The visible world was then clearly in turmoil, in evolution, and in his work, Riccardo Camoni possessed and projected that epochal, widespread and determined desire to seek and transform.

I focused exclusively on the red, with a few touches of black, to highlight a meticulous but also extremely diverse research. The same colour takes shape in various forms, more nuanced and more decisive, adhering to the page but also in relief, constantly evolving to form painting-sculptures suspended in space. These are works created in the late 1970s and perfected in the early '80s: the time when I most focused on his highly intellectual and profound connection with art, the years I recall most clearly.

I no longer recall exactly who it was that put us in touch, but just recently I found a piece I wrote for his solo exhibition at the G7 Studio Gallery in Bologna in April 1980. So it all adds up – perhaps it was on that occasion. By way of presentation, I interviewed him and he immediately struck me as very concise in his thinking and independent in his actions, a man of few words yet never without that slightly wry smile. Whether or not it was on his initiative that we met, it left a mark, or rather, he left me with a collection of marks, given that he decided to respond to my questions, which were already overly explanatory, with graphic interventions and a few handwritten jots. "Terse, elegant, cold, elliptical symmetries," he notes. Or "I don't know why everything red is pink." Or again, "Rational arguments"; "gutter art"; "the author is an actor. My work has nothing to do with me." In between, he mentions Martin Scorsese, Stanley Donen, Busby Berkeley, and his references to great cinema take you aback, as if to say that it's not art that generates other art, that its resources are to be found elsewhere, wherever it's between the visible and the invisible, matter and antimatter or the explicable and the inexplicable.

Riccardo Camoni is etched in recollections of my close encounters with the art of that particular period. That is, the early 1980s in Italy, which was an internationally active and lively scene. This was especially true in Milan, ever the hotbed of innovation, but in that historical period, particularly eclectic and prolific. I would briefly recall that fashion was entering the scene in an incisive if not indeed revolutionary manner. From Gaetano Pesce to Ettore Sottsass's Memphis Group, and from Alessandro and Adriana Guerriero's Studio Alchimia to the Domus Academy founded by Andrea Branzi, postmodernism in architecture and design tended towards the multidisciplinary, drawing various cultural and artistic

references into the project. Furthermore, when he became editor-in-chief of *Domus* in 1979, Alessandro Mendini promoted this increasingly close link between various forms of design on his front covers and in his pages, thus strengthening the intrinsic link with all the arts promoted by Gio Ponti more than fifty years earlier, interpreting it in a perfectly contemporary key. On the other hand, in the specific field of art, comparison and interaction between Europe and America was now a given. And while prefixes such as 'post-' or 'trans-' redefined the situation in critical terms, the spread of shifts, distortions, upheavals, reversals and provocations on both sides of the Atlantic was undeniable. It was a time when movements, practices, contents and contexts of action needed to be reappraised and reinvented.

Heir to that climate, Riccardo Camoni, born in Buenos Aires in 1950 to Italian parents, made his debut at the age of eighteen in the three-day *arte povera*+azioni povere ('Arte Povera + Poor Actions') event in Amalfi, organised in 1968 by Germano Celant alongside Marcello and Lia Rumma, and immediately displayed a determination to leave his mark. This was evident in his footsteps on 100 square metres of beaten and smoothed sand in the Amalfi performance, as well as later in his pigments on paper, cardboard and other media. In those 1970s and '80s that saw artists such as Brice Marden and Mel Bochner, Richard Tuttle, Sol LeWitt and Robert Mangold, and then Keith Haring, Basquiat and various graffiti artists become affirmed and influence one another in the USA, Riccardo Camoni seems to have made similar reflections on the stroke and the material, which he practises in an intimate way, orbiting between randomness and maximum refinement, fluidity and geometry. Architectural yet poetic, rational yet passionate in the conception of his technicolour imprints. In his work, I continue to see the essence of research that is only apparently disconnected and solitary, because even today, after all these years, it fully conveys the mood of a bygone era. That mood which, from the USA to Italy, handed fundamental ideas and stimuli down to us, personal and collective investigations that go beyond the norm, and imprints of a crucial period along with all its remarkable changes.

(Buenos Aires, 1950 – Bologna, 2008)

Riccardo Camoni made his debut at a very young age in 1968 on the national art scene, taking part in the three-day event *arte povera* + azioni povere, organized in Amalfi by Germano Celant and Marcello and Lia Rumma. The artist presented a performance in which he "walked across a rectangle of sand, about 100 square meters, previously beaten and smoothed." His first solo exhibition was held in 1974 at Studio Ortelli in Milan, which introduced him to the city's art scene.

In the following years, Camoni exhibited in Italy in various galleries, including Galleriaforma in Genoa, Galleria Peccolo in Livorno, Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan, Studio la Città in Verona, Studio G7 in Bologna, La Polena in Genoa, and Plurima in Udine. In the 1980s and 1990s, his exhibition activity extended abroad: in Paris and New York at ABC Space. At the same time, he took part in institutional exhibitions, including *Pittura-Ambiente* at Palazzo Reale in Milan (1979), curated by Renato Barilli and Francesca Alinovi; *Nuova Immagine* at the 16th Triennale (1980), curated by Flavio Caroli; *Il luogo della forma* at the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona (1981), curated by Licisco Magagnato and Gillo Dorfles; and *Il cangiante* at the PAC in Milan (1986), curated by Corrado Levi. Alongside his artistic research, Camoni carried out an intense teaching activity at the Fine Arts Academies of Milan, Venice, and Bologna.