

## EMILIO VEDOVA FOUNDATION

## HISTORICAL SURVEY

PARIS MARAIS

18 Oct 2018 - 05 Jan 2019

**Opening: Thursday 18 October, 6pm - 10pm**

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac presents the first historical survey of Venetian artist Emilio Vedova in France, in collaboration with the Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova.

*Emilio Vedova, A Historical Survey* can be seen through a retrospective lens spanning the years 1950 to 1985 with a special focus on the early 1980s, a key period in the artist's career. The exhibition features representative works from his most acclaimed series, including *Plurimi* (1961–63), *...Cosiddetti Carnevali...* (1977–83), *Da Dove* (1984) and *Di Umano* (1985) and *Oltre* (1985).

Emilio Vedova (b. Venice, 1919–2006) is regarded as one of the most influential Italian artists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a politically engaged artist who believed revolutionary art had to be abstract. He pushed painting into new territories with his visceral and gestural works that engage the viewer and redefine the space they inhabit. His expressive strokes and smears of paint convey a raw and violent reaction to the political reality of the post-war period.

"My works are not creations but earthquake" says Vedova "not paintings, but breaths of air..."

Self-taught, it is difficult to place him in the framework of a specific artistic movement. In 1942, he joined the Milanese anti-fascist group Corrente, which had also included fellow artists Lucio Fontana and Renato Guttuso among others. In 1946, he was one of the co-signers of the *Beyond Guernica* manifesto, which urged artists to engage with reality without being naturalistic. He then returned to Venice where his work became progressively more abstract. In the late 1950s, he was associated to French Informel and later to Action painting and the resurgence of expressionism, yet he has always defied categorisation. From 1963 to 1965, Vedova worked in Berlin where he crossed path with prominent contemporary artists such as Georg Baselitz. From 1965 to 1969 (and later in 1988), he succeeded Oskar Kokoschka as Director of the Internationale Sommerakademie in Salzburg. He exhibited at the legendary documenta exhibitions I, II and III (1955, 59 and 64) in Kassel. Vedova also was one of the most frequent exhibitors at the Venice Biennale, in 1952 he had a room devoted to his work, in 1960 he won the first prize for Italian painting and, in 1997, the Leone d'Oro prize for lifetime achievement.

Vedova's oeuvre is anchored in the city of Venice, where he was born and spent most of his life. In his 1980 studio notes he writes: 'Now the mist is falling, an atmosphere thought propitious / I always re-find the Venice of the mists - Do you know what it is to be born in Venice?'. Vedova's abstract compositions are rooted in the tradition of Venetian painting. The 16<sup>th</sup> century master Tintoretto notably had a major influence on his work. Art Historian Carlo Bertelli wrote: '[Vedova] assaulted Tintoretto with the fury of a Kokoschka'. Vedova was fascinated by the Mannerist painter's bold brushstrokes, accentuated gestures and dramatic use of light but also by his persona.

Vedova spent the winter of 1951–52 in Paris and visited Chartres. The exhibition includes two paintings inspired by the stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral. The immersive experience of diffused light and colour triggered a long-life exploration of what Vedova termed:

'time/light/space/sign'. A decade later actual glass became a component of his works. In 1984, Philosopher Massimo Cacciari stated: 'no photographic reproduction could ever give a faint idea of such a physical quality and consistence of the particulars in Vedova's works. In order to understand his production of the last years, one had to consider, together with the architecture of the Churches and of the Baroque figures; his experience with glass of the late 1960s: light that transforms substance; pure substance that pours out in ever-changing transparencies'.

In the late 1950s Vedova travelled to Spain, where he was struck by the paintings of Goya, notably for their political engagement. The poverty of the Franco-led country had a strong impact on him, he subsequently produced in 1961-62 a cycle of works dedicated to Spain for an exhibition at the Ca' Giustinian during the 1962 Venice Biennale. The exhibition includes two seminal works from this series, notably *Per la Spagna '61/'62 - 1/6*, 1961-1962, a mixed media work with a particularly Dada influence.

In 1960, Vedova created moving light sets and costumes for Luigi Nono's opera *Intolleranza '60*. This led to the first *Plurimi* in 1961–63: foldable panels of wood and metal, painted on all sides. From then on he experimented with more diverse media and larger scales, incorporating, light, metal and glass. About the *Plurimi* Art Historian Celant writes: 'With the *Plurimi* [...] perceptions become enriched in the multiplication of visual and physical perspectives and, after throwing representation into crisis with spurious, intense signs, he reaches the point of demolishing the unity of the painting's perimeter, disordering its existence to propagate the violence of creative disunity in all places.'

Between 1977–83, Vedova produced a cycle of paintings titled *Cosiddetti Carnevali*. This group of works were only shown as a group a decade later at the monographic exhibition at Castello di Rivoli. In his journal Vedova writes 'I am fascinated by the carnival [...] because of its gestural expressiveness for its fantastic element, the "imcomposto" (what is irregular), for its dynamics, its irrationality and its passion. I love its "organic" and emotional quality, its lack of restraint and drama, its ambiguity, its "liberating power", when anything is allowed and possible, within the course of a few hours.' For Vedova, the carnival allows us to experience freedom, exaltation and torment in an endless confrontation with the world and

ourselves. In ...*Cosiddetti Carnevali...* 77/83 - n. 7 (1977-1983) the play between black and white and the two plaster masks seem to express a duality which is present throughout his oeuvre – symbolising a torn self in a divided world.

A whole floor of the gallery is dedicated to the 1980s, a decade widely recognized as the acme of the artist's career. In the 1980s Vedova widened his palette, incorporating brighter colours, moving away from the more restrained tones of the previous decade. In 1980, Vedova travelled to Mexico, where the colours and immense landscapes left a lasting impression on him.

The following year, Vedova began a cycle of paintings titled *Teleri*, a term borrowed from *Teler*, typical of Venetian 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> century art. The exhibition presents works from two particularly significant series of *Teleri*: *Da Dove* (1984) and *Di Umano* (1985). In these works smears of yellow, green and red energise the pictorial plane and enhance its emotional force.

In 1985, Vedova began to work on discs, circular shaped double-sided paintings – scaled to the size of his own body, like Da Vinci's Vitruvian man. Characteristic of Vedova's painting is *l'ubiquità del centro*, the omnipresent centre. Vedova challenges the circle, a symbol of perfection and harmony, of a sacred order. In the series *Oltre*, on view in the exhibition, he takes a step further by placing the circle in a square-shaped canvas. In the *Oltre* the space surrounding the white circle is painted grey, however the paint cannot be contained, it spills over the border, it overflows, expressing an emotional surge and collapsing the limits of painting. Vedova writes: 'ultimately material must respond to feeling'.

Emilio Vedova is represented in collections worldwide, notably at The Albertina, Vienna, Austria; Les Abattoirs Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Toulouse, France; Berlinische Galerie and Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany; Museo Nacional De Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA and Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy.

Vedova participated in the documenta exhibitions of 1955, 1959 and 1982. In 1951, he was awarded the prize for young painters at the first São Paulo Biennial. In 1959 he returned to the São Paulo Biennial, just before a major show at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, which then travelled to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. After participating in the Venice Biennale in 1950, 1952 and 1954, he won the first prize for Italian painting at the Biennale in 1960 and in 1997 the Leone d'Oro prize for lifetime achievement.

Major solo-exhibition of his work were held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Washington (1965); Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City (1980); Museo Correr, Venice (1984); Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich (1986); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (1998); Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venezia (2007); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (2007); Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (2008), Museo Novecento, Florence (2018).

Notable group exhibitions include *Paintings, sculptures, environments from expressionism to the present day*, Ludwig Museum, Cologne (1986); *Berlinart 1961-1987*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (1987); *The Italian Metamorphosis (1943-1968)*, Guggenheim Museum, New York (1994); *A History of Italian Art in the 20th Century*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2001); *Figure e immagini del XX secolo italiano*, National Museum of Art, Beijing (2006), *Italics : Arte Italiana fra Tradizione e Rivoluzione 1969-2008*, Fondazione François Pinault - Palazzo Grassi (2008), *In-finitum*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice (2009); *Georg Baselitz - Emilio Vedova, Art of another kind*, Salomon Guggenheim Museum, New York (2012); *Georg Baselitz - Emilio Vedova*, Küppersmühle, Duisburg, Germany (2016), *Postwar*, Museum der Kunst, Munich (2016/17).

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