

Press release

# Emilio Vedova

## *Venezia muore*

28 January—18 March 2023  
Opening Saturday 28 January 2023, 11am—1pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Salzburg Villa Kast  
Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg



Emilio Vedova, *Venezia muore IV*, 1992. Acrylic paint, nitro paint and pastel on canvas. 226 x 176 cm (88.98 x 69.29 in).

Thaddaeus Ropac Salzburg will present previously unexhibited works by Emilio Vedova, ranging from 1986 to the realisation of his monumental painted pentptych titled *Venezia muore*, completed in 1992.

Vedova persistently challenged the potential of materials and his mixed-media approach to artmaking was a fundamental aspect of his practice throughout his career. Continuously influenced by the city of his birth, Venice, with its rich cultural heritage, he was

largely self-taught as an artist. His earliest artistic endeavours in the mid 1930s include drawings of Venetian architecture and frescoes, particularly those of Tintoretto who was a key inspiration to the artist throughout his life. Strongly guided by his moral and political beliefs, Vedova's works are characterised by his response to the political reality of the post-war period. The works in the exhibition further reveal an increased preoccupation with existential questions and show that for Vedova

gestural abstraction was a vehicle for expressing the complexity of lived human experience.

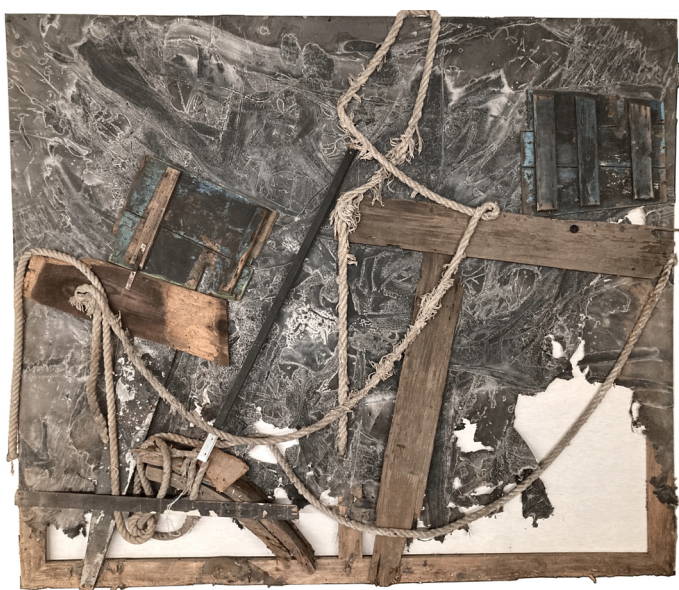
The canvas represented a field of action for Vedova's existential expressions. Influenced by alchemy and, specifically, the proximity of the sea that encompasses his hometown, the abstract paintings from this period are characterised by the artist's use of acrylic and nitro paint. The repellent qualities of these two materials allows them to settle with a ghostly materiality on the surface of the canvases, which finds its echo in works by Anselm Kiefer and Sigmar Polke. The crystallised appearance of Vedova's brushstrokes recalls the delicate crust or flower-like patterns of salt sedimentation, alluding to the sea's relentless accumulations, destructions and corrosions. The intense, gestural expressiveness of his mainly monochrome canvases and the energy of his technique evoke a profound emotional impact, conveying a feeling of distortion of the environment and one's self, as well as the overall anguish of modern humanity.

In *Venezia muore*, the monumental five-part work from 1992 that lends the exhibition its title, themes of decomposition and decay play a prevalent role. Initially envisioned as a totem-like installation of boat wrecks recovered from the swamps around Venice, *Venezia muore* refers to the decadence and downfall of the city and the enduring erosion of time. The five monochrome paintings are likewise informed by



Emilio Vedova, *Venezia muore II*, 1992. Acrylic paint and nitro paint on canvas.  
260 x 130 cm (102.36 x 51.18 in).

Vedova's personal experiences of destruction during the Second World War and the time he spent working in the devastated city of Berlin during the 1960s. Furrowed lines span a seemingly battered pictorial surface, resulting in a luminous cosmic landscape that summons themes of slow disintegration.



Emilio Vedova, *Venezia muore*, 1992. Acrylic paint, nitro paint, wood and rope on canvas and on wood.  
186 x 217 x 20 cm (73.23 x 85.43 x 7.87 in).

One work in the exhibition, also titled *Venezia muore* (1992), features sculptural elements reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's iconic *Combines* (1954—64). The rope and splinters of wood attached to the painted canvas allude to the maritime motif initially envisaged for his installation of revived boats. By combining aspects of both painting and sculpture in a single work, Vedova blurred the boundaries between these artistic categories, while evoking archaic images of deep sediments and the ever-moving waters. Throughout his oeuvre, Vedova explored ways in which, as an artist, he could respond to the turbulent political and social challenges of his time, reflected in the ideas of decadence and demise expressed in the works on view in the exhibition.



Exhibited in Salzburg for the first time, the works will be on view from 28 January until 18 March 2023. Vedova was closely connected to the city of Salzburg during his lifetime, having taught at the Summer Academy of Fine Arts for the duration of five summers between 1965 and 1969 following the departure of the academy's founder Oskar Kokoschka.



Emilio Vedova in his studio. Photo: Maria Teresa Muraro, Venice

### **Emilio Vedova (1919–2006)**

Emilio Vedova is regarded as one of the most influential Italian artists of the second half of the 20th century. He joined the Milanese anti-fascist group *Corrente* in 1942 and co-signed the *Oltre Guernica* manifesto in Milan in 1946, which urged artists to engage with reality while moving beyond figuration. His expressive strokes and smears of paint convey a raw and violent reaction to contemporary political issues. He pushed painting into new territories with his visceral and gestural works that engage the viewer and redefine the space they inhabit.

In the late 1950s, Vedova was associated with French Informel and later with Action painting and the resurgence of expressionism, yet he has always defied categorisation. Although Vedova split his time between Venice and Berlin for many years, his work remained anchored in the city of his birth and its painting traditions. His paintings from the 1950s

and 1960s were sensitive to contemporary political developments, such as Franco's nationalist regime in Spain and the revolutionary protests across Europe in 1968.

Inspired by a three-month trip to Mexico at the beginning of the decade, Vedova's works from the 1980s reveal the influence of the country's vast landscapes and monumental, richly coloured murals. The artist introduced an explosion of colour into his palette that enlivened the graphic contrasts between black and white. In later years, he experimented with diverse media on a large scale, incorporating light, glass and metal into complex works that activate the surrounding space, such as his hinged sculpture-paintings.

Vedova made his debut at the Venice Biennale in 1948 and, from that point onwards, would become a regular exhibitor: in 1952 he had a room devoted to his work, in 1960 he won the prize for Italian painting and, in 1997, the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement. He was the Italian representative at the first documenta in Kassel in 1955, and his work was exhibited there again in 1959, 1964 and 1982. He was also a dedicated arts educator, teaching at the Deutsche Akademischer Austausch Dienst, Berlin (1963–65); Internationale Sommerakademie, Salzburg (1965–69, 1988); and Accademia di Belle Arti, Venice (1975–86), as well as lecturing in the USA in 1965 and 1983. His work has been exhibited at major institutions, including the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden (2020); Palazzo Reale, Milan (2019); Centre Pompidou-Metz (2019); Museo Novecento, Florence (2018); and Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg (2016).

The Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova, created by the artist and his wife, continues to promote his life and legacy, highlighting Vedova's importance in the history of 20th-century art.

For any enquiries:

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