

With Vedova

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Emilio Vedova's work, I wrote in 1984, is not easily manageable, and trying to take it in from only one angle risks neutralising it. Instead, accepting it in all its complexity means losing oneself in an archipelago of islands and volcanic atolls, subject to the fluctuations of the tides of time. To set out to navigate them is to accept an atomised reading: picking out contours and peripheral areas, illuminating known and lesser known parts, in the knowledge that one is imposing a partial and reduced perspective. There is nothing monistic about Vedova: he is heterogeneous. He doesn't proceed in a tame fashion but by friction and collision. He shreds the rules to retie the Gordian knot of painting and painted sculpture. His journey is mapped out by linkages of potentiality between hidden and overt fragments. He stands at a point of intersection, a crossroads where linguistic liberties are forged, clash and set up new relationships. It is impossible to mediate him or impose interconnections in order to place him somewhere monumental, or push him into centrality: as a multifaceted and mutable organism he resists definition and is wholly independent of spatial and temporal ascriptions. Will a bird's eye view help to get an idea of him and follow his progress, like this wide-ranging show in Milan?

Yes – if we concentrate on his volcanic power, as represented in the Sala dei Cariatidi by the juxtaposition of two historic periods, the 1960s and the 1980s. The first involved a new revitalising approach to informal art, with his progression to the *Plurimi*: articulated structures, infused with a dynamism and a flexibility that break away from the two-dimensional static materiality of paintings to open his art up to 'multiple' options: a renunciation of the derivativity of wall-hung pictures, in order to become an aggressive and threatening presence against the cultural *status quo*. Dating from 1962-1965, they evolve continuously through new configurations, signalling a restless project, disturbing in its material and chromatic brutalism, positing itself as a heretical tendency with respect to the artistic mainstream in so far as engaged in a different communicative mission. In these ensembles, Vedova reveals a superabundance of vitality that anticipates the sensory and rebellious upsurge of 1968. He creates a weave of articulated contemporary tension and indignation, of violence. He announces as unavoidable the inevitable clash of visions founded on the mobilising of the human beings. No longer content with expression on a single surface, as had been the case with Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana, Franz Kline or Wols, with Alberto Burri and Willem De Kooning, he embarks on a process, that in its apparent destructiveness, none the less underpins a new understanding of art and of society. The dethronement of the fixity of the wall mounted painting in the *Plurimi* is enacted in the counterpoint of the *recto e verso* which present themselves simultaneously, in the extensible development

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of the surfaces, and in their essential mobility and autonomy that on occasion can even launch them up into space.

Exhibited in counterpoint, still within the Sala delle Cariatidi, are the *Dischi* and *Tondi*, which would emerge in the 1980s and introduce a principle of an overarching superior order, as against the relative chaos of the 1960s, through which the surprise of the release or the anguish of *Plurimi* finds a unifying resolution. The circle is an emblem of perfection, the point of origin and conclusion of the universe, and accordingly the *Dischi* and the *Tondi*, with their double painted surfaces, allow all challenges to coexist, and establish an active interrelationship made up of exchanges, echoes, and answers. And, what is more, they move freely in space: squatting on the ground or climbing the walls, they bounce off one another creating multiple intertwinements and collusions.

The Milan exhibition culminates with *Senza titolo (...als ob...)* '96-'97, 1996-1997, which presents an encounter between flat surfaces and Venetian *bricole*. Here we have an 'invasion' or 'collision', a gesture of rebellion, vis-à-vis his own history, as if the perforated disc might be a San Sebastian subjecting itself to a sanctifying or purifying ritual. A dramatic stand-off between the individual and the social which in *Chi brucia un libro brucia un uomo*, 1993, summarises the desperate cyclone of war that had led to the destruction of books ancient and modern, of libraries and archives of memory. A *disco plurimo* that mutates into a sort of circular book with mobile pages, and incarnates a burned culture. It is the journey through darkness and cruelty of a society that witnesses its own degeneration and disdains multicultural gradations, accepting the inevitability of its own decay and extinction. With this disc-as-monument, Vedova makes us fully aware of the extreme tension of art between limit and limitlessness, between the least brushstroke and the vast dimensions of the world.

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