

“[...] it is space itself that becomes a body, both positively and negatively. Images no longer form within space pr on space, mimicking a movement, a horizontal torsion, nor do they occupy it as foreign objects. Instead, it is space that takes on a dimension, a depth; it articulates, folds, becomes aware of itself and its internal dialectic, representing it while avoiding metaphor. Color, taut and pure, remains surface, yet as the problem of perspective inevitably resurfaces, it acquires a new significance. Olivieri's 'icon' are not effigies. Rather, they are objectifications of space”.

(Roberto Sanesi, Giorgio Olivieri personal exhibition catalogue, 2-22 October 1972, Cortina Art Gallery, Milan, Italy)

“For Olivieri the surface, or “skin”, that is presented to us and not the working process that led up to it, is of basic importance. The working process for him is, and can only be, the canvas in front of us, which is nothing other than itself and which is “symbol” of nothing other than the process. It is not necessary to ask how or why he has stained or veiled his canvas because the final surface must be its own evidence and justification.

By way of even the most puritanical limitation of means - often just because of the stimulus of such limitation - Olivieri's art leads back to recurring concerns. It is interesting to note his present concentration on dominating the canvas by a minimum activity, not just at the border of the work but actually on the side. In the almost “hard-edge”, paintings of 4 or 5 years ago the same concern was present, as it was in the more recent series of paintings divided by strings or by canvas juxtaposition. It has now taken on greater importance, wedded to a different exploration of means. Certainly any over-strong activity placed against his surfaces - perfectly aut, stained with colour and delicate tonal veils leaving undisturbed the weave of the canvas - would become an interest in itself and leave the surface virtually redundant. On the other hand, to give up altogether colour/ space construction would be the elimination of that tension and ambiguity so characteristic of Olivieri and which is the very result of the balance between these two particular areas of painting. And pushing virtually all the activity to the edge is the furthest limit of that very fine balance. All this is made more acute because the latest works also require a different way of looking - one comprehensive view can often never be obtained as many paintings must also be seen from the sides. From the front visual actuality is reinforced by visual memory. Olivieri is risking things once again as he refuses to exaggerate the depth of the stretcher that would certainly bring more strongly the painted edge to the viewer's attention, and make it more easily memorable, but it would also tend to go outside painting and enter the realms of sculpture or, rather of object-making. In this way the paintings arrive at a very paradoxical point: they must be appreciated in more than one dimension and yet, because of the canvas expanse, of the physical shallowness of the paintings and of the interaction of colour both across and at the sides of the canvas, their frontality is re-emphasized”.

(Michael Haggerty, Giorgio Olivieri personal exhibition catalogue, 17 January-20 February 1976, Ferruccio Fata E Gallery, Bolzano, Italy)

“Rectangles and squares of different dimensions: these are the spaces chosen by Olivieri to impose his unbending will to order and harmony on the white canvases perfectly stretched. To each space there correspond tonalities with nuances that are often imperceptible, ranging from pale ivory to a luminous blue of the purest light.

Even in the preparation of his canvases one notes the exact measure of his extreme commitment, which shows itself in the matching of precisely chosen means to a research into the most expressive

values. In such choices Olivieri is a genuine master, and they turn into a conceptual clarity, rare enough today, among the residue of information and the more or less daring games of body-art. Here, however, one finds no polemical opposition to current fashions, often in contrast to the very definition of art. There is, rather, the will to remain outside any stylistic ambiguity, any dialectical subterfuge, and to affirm, on the contrary, the duration of some fundamental laws: the regularizers of the "divine proportion", interpreted in the spirit of the most audacious avant-garde of the beginning of this century. It is undeniable that the pure rationality of certain solutions is to be corrected by intuition and to be confirmed by culture, through a series of indicative spatial compositions.

Of this Olivieri has given a sure proof by overcoming the limits of the surface, where colour is light, by the addition of an intelligent graphic intervention at the very edges of the canvas, pinned on a wooden frame. And this intervention with multi-coloured parallel lines gives a continuity to those immaculate surfaces, gives an unexpected and changing rhythm, which continues beyond the picture onto those edges where there appears quite unexpectedly, a new visual reality, in a perspective completely outside ordinary schemes. One can, perhaps, give to this perspective solution a meaning that, for its originality, distances it from the purist concepts of "new painting". It is an attempt to be pointed out, as, by the very quality of its proposal, it is both a shelter and a subversion of the recall to the most noted constructive experiences Olivieri has devoted himself to a difficult research which, as it follows its stylistic course, assumes greater and greater dimensions without diminishing that luminous concentration, typical of a vision turned to the absolute, as a pure autonomous expression beyond any reference to the image".

(Giuseppe Marchiori, Giorgio Olivieri personal exhibition catalogue, 14 January-10 February 1978, Studio la Città, Verona, Italy)

"The possibility of relation between different surfaces constitutes the unitary space of the work to which Giorgio Olivieri subjects the changeable pulsations of colour, obtaining various solutions by way of the combination and the distancing of the geometrical forms within each composition. In his recent phase of research the artist has not only been concerned with elaborating the fluid visibility of the chromatic "skin" but also with achieving different equilibriums between the painted surfaces and the supporting wall, gauging the relationships between the total form and the individual structural components.

In the mounting of this exhibition Olivieri opts in favour of a series of formal correspondences between works arranged in a sequence which tends to develop spatial counterweights in relation to the internal tensions of the colour.

The exhibition project is a way of interpreting space by way of the thresholds of painting, places of contraction and extension of the surfaces, the desire to assimilate the ambience by means of the construction dynamics and throbbings of the colour that accompany the combinations of the works. In this phase of his research Olivieri is undoubtedly mindful of the procedures followed in the 1970s when the analysis of the geometrical forms displayed composition exactness and work precision, delimiting the chromatic field with clear-cut edges, definite boundaries and flat grounds, almost as if to exalt the rigour of the pictorial surface.

To look at the roots of the past and filter the nutrients of one's own story are normal inclinations on the part of painters of his generation, above all for the person who is aware that every path run is never exhausted, given that painting is language suspended on further senses of research and always in the expectation of verifying new possibilities of invention.

While maintaining the formal vigour of that initial phase, over the years Olivieri has changed the generative process of the chromatic light and during the last decade has also elaborated the plane of the surface using fluid, disgregated matters, ones sensitive to continuous variations.

These permitted the lights that lie beneath to surface, minimum vibrations born from the smoothed grounds, restive colours achieved with encaustic treated acrylic pastes in order to obtain transparencies and depths, lightness and densities.

The slight ferment of the grounds depends on gradations of colour foreseen during the planning phase with choices that range from the obscure tensions of the unconscious to the “emersed” emotions in the resonances of the light.

In the works of this exhibition -and differing from the rigid analytical procedures- there is no risk of a mechanical vision in that the control of the compositions opens itself to the stupor of the chromatic copresences, to the relationship between opposing and interacting values with the morphology of the work-object. In fact, one of the persistent characteristics is the tactile and object-based value of the surface, a physical presence that optimises the thickness of the edges, the legibility of the perimeters, the perceptive definition of the demarcation lines of the forms and the overall profile of the diverse shapings.

In this elaboration of the geometrical articulations, moreover, what is also decisive is the passing from the construction plane to the imaginative plane, from the strictly formal attributes to the symbolic dimension of architectural space.

In this direction Olivieri has explored the archetypal form of the arch as a canon subjected to the decomposition processes of the spatial module by means of geometries that are sectioned and recomposed in a different unifying order.

In order to reinstate the integrity of the original form the artist has used from three to five elements, both in disequilibrium and divergent, in such a way as to suggest an instable space, a construction of geometrical polygons that open and “brush” each other, that are divided and join up again to the harmonic measure of the arch.

This architectural canon is a referent which strengthens the relationship between painting and ambience, form and plastic sensitivity, between the colour and the expansive light to the point that in its own way each work develops the relationship between what is structurally quantifiable and what, instead, alludes to the sphere of the imponderable.

The appearance of successive visual senses does not flow into the lyrical state of mind or into evocations of a literary type but is bound to the specific properties of pictorial language that is articulated in the complex fullness of the matter, in the internal movements of its visible identity.

In the configuration of each work a two-fold plane of the structuring of the form comes into play with, on the one hand, the fluidity of the colour that agitates the surface and, on the other, the construction definition: chromatic vibration and structural rigour join, in this way bringing about a relation with space which substantiates the total form of the image.

Full and empty, painted surface and wall, painting and ambience: these all take part in the same perceptive impact in accordance with spatial rhythms that vary depending on the contacts and divergencies between the individual parts, indispensable moments for the ordering of form-colour as sole and unique space.

The selected forms are nominated within the sphere of aniconic culture which characterises Olivieri's pictorial imaginary: figures of geometry, the embeddings of straight and curved lines, asymmetrical equilibriums, encroachments and shiftings that weaken the static nature of the spatial canons.

As part of this work logic it is fundamental to establish the intervals between the surfaces, to calculate the magnetisms between the geometrical forms, to measure the breaks and convergencies, the intermittencies between the surface and the void, between presence and absence of colour.

The painting assimilates these dialectical moments in order to give force to the different movements of the image, to its faculty of continuously modifying itself in so far as each work has a construction rule that generates imaginative shiftings which are bound to the fusion between form and colour.

To talk about fusion does not mean that the chromatic choice depends on the structure of the support. In fact, the red, green or yellow does not necessarily correspond to a specific form. These connections vary in the imagination of the painter who on each occasion chooses certain luminous values in order to verify their functionality within the defined context.

Olivieri does not address colour dependent upon the form, nor the form in relation to colour. This relation is due to choices belonging to the diverse spatial weight that form and colour establish in the course of the research work.

The value of this cognitive tension may occur within the structure of the rectangle, with linear cuts from one point to the other of the surface, such as the curvature present in an exemplary composition based "On blue" (36 x 130 cm).

The horizon is narrow or dilated, marked by a flexible and slender line of separation, a segment of an arch as an harmonious line that insinuates itself and does not decompose the surface: the two divided parts are perfectly integrated.

A solution of the same type characterises two forms of identical size "Senza Titolo" (148 x 100 cm): the one marked by the "sensorial yellow" (gold) and the other by "mental grey" (silver). Surfaces that have a vertical side cut that creates an acute angle with an oblique segment that flexes towards the right side.

This spatial anomaly suggests the restless geometry of a threshold that allows one to glimpse a "fissure" in the monochromatic field, an intuitive dialogue between the painted surface and its hidden, rearward and invisible part.

In a work based "On red" (103 x 116 cm) the division of the surface plays on four elements whose oblique sides dilate from the centre outwards, creating a blade of white light that cuts the totality of the monochrome.

An analogous tension is found in a variation of four pieces based "On grey" (165 x 236 cm) in which the divarication of the surfaces is carried out in the four directions by way of a crossing that cuts the work in an asymmetrical way, opening the space to a greater interference with the white of the wall. This division of four elements in a horizontal and vertical sense is developed by way of a series of monochromatic cardboard works of various size which evidence the point of contact of the angles and the gradual distancing of the surfaces. Besides the use of four elements, the variations can be based on three combined and superimposed elements, usually of the same colour but sometimes also in three different ones: these are variations that form part of the play of possibilities which the artist always keeps open.

On the other hand, Olivieri organises a sequence of surfaces in the form of the triptych having a horizontal movement and a regular rhythm, functional for the specific reading of the surface's chromatic values. This type of concentration also takes place in the use of the diptych, a unity of forms which exalts the bipolar tension of the surface, the duality of the primary colour - red, for example - that affirms its centrality and the elementary choice of strong significance from among the solutions adopted.

Also in these cases the empty parts are functional with regard to the unity of the form and colour. They become virtual signs of the pictorial reality which constantly modifies the range of the different planned equilibriums.

A greater incorporation of the empty takes place in a composition of four elements based "On dark green" (185 x 200 cm), a compact lower part made up of two slightly oblique symmetrical rectangles. This is added to by an upper zone in which two shaped and angled forms arch themselves at different heights, pushing forward the angled points to include as much of the empty as possible.

The structure of the work openly declares its boundaries although at the same moment placing them in a state of crisis: it throws them off balance, it renders their ambivalent structure dynamic: in fact, while he defines the order of the composition the artist contemporaneously goes beyond this, releasing it elsewhere.

Every element of this singular work is prepared by Olivieri so that the relationship between the forms breaks the composition scheme, making the eye waver beyond the edges, towards the limitless zone of the visible, accentuating the relationship between pictorial knowledge and infinite space.

Similar to this continuous upsetting of the limit is the combination of three different elements "Sul giallo" (190 x 110 cm). This is a composition which derives from the structure of the previous work,

even though it seems to form part of an imaginary architecture: sign of a lost spatial harmony that painting questions by way of a detail, of one part far all.

The luminous value of the colour and the arched shaping give maximum dilation to the space, the chance of simultaneously entering and leaving the field of the painting, even at the risk of being inside a non-definable situation, subject to other mutations. Olivieri is very closely tied to this emblematic condition and its infinite possibilities of moving beyond. The artist is convinced he does painting without preclusions, being fascinated and surprised by new spatial intuitions, by the desire to explore still possible geometries, suspensions of colour in their becoming”.

ALWAYS POSSIBLE GEOMETRIES

(Claudio Cerritelli, Giorgio Olivieri personal exhibition catalogue “Geometrie sempre possibili” (Always possible geometries), 19 January-23 March 2011, Artestudio Gallery, Milano, Italy)