

CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

Transavantgarde

NOVEMBER 13, 2002

MARCH 23, 2003

*Fondazione CRT
Progetto Arte Moderna
e Contemporanea*

HOURS

Tuesdays-Fridays: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays: 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.

First and third Saturday of the month: 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Closed Mondays, December 25 and January 1st.

Free guided tours to the exhibition take place on
Sundays and holidays, at 11 a.m., 3:30 p.m. and 5 p.m.;
Saturdays at 3:30 p.m.

Tours covering the history and architecture of the
Castello di Rivoli are held on the second Sunday
of each month at 4 p.m.

On Saturdays, Sundays and holidays a shuttle bus
service is available leaving from Piazza Castello, Turin.

For information: tel. +39 011.9565280

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Transavantgarde

The Transavantgarde marked a defining moment in Italian art. In the late 1970s artists Sandro Chia (b. 1946), Francesco Clemente (b. 1952), Enzo Cucchi (b. 1949), Nicola De Maria (b. 1954) and Mimmo Paladino (b. 1948) began to explore drawing in poetic and lyrical ways that differed radically from Conceptual art, Arte Povera, performance and other earlier practices. Their art was generally heralded as a welcome break from what many felt was the excessively de-materialized and overly ideological art of the early-to-mid seventies and became a foremost example of postmodernist culture in the early 1980s. In their art, artistic tradition became a value and traditional craft, as well as the expression of personal subjectivity, were highly considered. In the Fall of 1979, art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva defined the work of these artists as the "Transavanguardia". He remarked on a return to a notion of art's autonomy as well as to pleasure and opulence and rejected a notion of linear history by suggesting a backwards gaze as a

positive value. This art was "nomadic" as it meandered through art history and it expressed a fluid subjectivity of fragments, differences, unbalance, catastrophes and constant transitions.

This exhibition at the Castello di Rivoli, curated by Ida Gianelli, marks one of the first attempts to reassess the art of the *Transavanguardia* as a whole, bringing together major works from 1979 to 1985.

Though they began with drawing, which they saw as the most direct expression of subjectivity and individualism, these artists soon broadened their scope to primarily address painting. They expanded their techniques to include sculpture, murals, frescoes, mosaics, prints, artists' books and many other traditional techniques. They embraced hand-crafted, symbolic language and emblems. A common theme was their re-engagement with the art of early Modernism from Van Gogh to Matisse, from Schiele to Klee, from De Chirico to Chagall, often addressing figuration and

the representation of the human body.

By doubting modernity and the avant-garde, and by adopting and layering different styles of nineteenth and twentieth century art from early Expressionism to lyrical abstraction, these artists created artworks that expressed an age of crisis and doubt, an age during which all certainties and utopias belonging to the Western cultural heritage were being scrutinized and questioned. At the same time, these artists re-engaged with the radical anti-intellectualism of modernity itself and, in particular, of Expressionism. Mimmo Paladino's art joins the figurative with the abstract through references to language and to myth, almost developing an art of pictograms, an art of origins. Paladino has often joined painting with sculpture by combining elements of both in works that are at once bounded by the format of a canvas or a frame, and unbounded by growth beyond those limits. His evocations of signs and symbols never suggest a narrative but remain silent and undecipherable.

Nicola De Maria creates environments of a musical and quivering sensibility. He suggests an architecture of emotions, rather than of functions. His colors and images modify the atmosphere of a place, as if they could 'wash' the room in a special light. His gentle line – sometimes used to create repeated and simple decorative patterns, and sometimes to trace the silhouette of plants, small houses and stars – recalls drawings infused with a sense of wonder. De Maria's gaze is a deeply spiritual one. In rooms painted red, blue and yellow, he often hangs little canvases, suggesting the paradox of an artwork as a non-autonomous space in the real world in which however aesthetic experience may occur as an alternate and autonomous universe, beyond the real world. Francesco Clemente paints a multiplied self, a shifting self, a suspended self, often in dreamlike states. His elongated and sinuous figures have many orifices and gaps, and the self enters into and slips out of bodies, it goes beyond distinctions of gender. It is a

hybrid self, a dreamy and vagabond self, a sexually morphing and breathing persona, somewhere between nature and culture. Fragmentation and wandering are represented in the work, background and foreground merge into one space that is not, however, flat. The imagery is juxtaposed and evoked in ways similar to imagistic poetry. The mind, rationality, are no longer the center of subjectivity, nor is the heart; in his paintings, we are rather determined by our desire, and our pleasure. Sandro Chia's universe is a more violent, eventful, and truly exuberant one. Chia's imagery is often transgressive. His subjects are anti-heroes, idiots of bucolic primitivism. They suggest metaphysical stupor and suspension. They jump or float in a universe of Suprematist memory or of Chagallian innocence. They are clumsy and exist in a cloudy, treacherous, sometimes watery and moving atmosphere. There is much brushwork in Chia's large and dense paintings that represent bizarre events in mysterious environments where

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monumentality in his art contrasts with the 'daily life' subject-matter, often anything but monumental. Enzo Cucchi is an instinctive painter who invents his own iconography, at once simple and visionary, a universe where people are dwarfed in the landscape or, conversely, where they become overbearing giants in their surroundings. His imagery recalls the rocky landscapes, dramatic ravines and hilly seaside of the Marches region. He shuns good taste, using acid colors and 'bad' painting deftly. His bold figures emerge from quick and forceful brushwork. These images of suffering figures suggest physical or mental pain and a fascination with martyrdom and saints. The houses and hills, the ships and pianos he depicts shudder in his paintings, as if warped and twisted by gusts of wind. They are distorted, hovering in a Mannerist and fractured world.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev