

## **GIORGIO VERZOTTI**

### *BRIEFLY, FOR MARIA MORGANTI*

“Contamination” is an expression often to be found in the words used by Maria Morganti, both in the words written down in the form of a working diary and those spoken when talking about her own work. I have frequently been involved with monochrome painting - the modernist icon for what is most absolutely pure - and its “contamination” in the Post-modern world: of course I am interested in Morganti’s painting.

The contamination the artist refers to is that resulting from the superimposition of layers of monochrome colour, following procedures and periods of time that have already been described in depth: in the cup containing the sediment of earlier paint layers, and then in the continual superimpositions on the canvas, the colour is no longer pure but dirty and contains in itself the traces of the previous colour.

“Too dirty” or “tinge” is another term often used by Morganti: colour, applied in all its fullness, so to speak, is spurious from the very start because it always contains something “else” and is never, or hardly ever, in the pure state as we might expect from its various names. But then when we speak about magenta or lemon yellow, what are we saying? Not much more than a simple convention: in nature, and even more as a result of industrial production, there is an infinity of magentas and lemon yellows, and an endless variety of tones can be produced if we “tinge” colours with a touch of another. I remember a series of works by Bertrand Lavier: one an environmental installation which concentrated on the untrustworthiness of words for grasping meaning once they have been subject to translation into other languages, and the other, a series of monochromes concentrated on the inanity of the tendency to catalogue colours: two reds, even if they have the same name, can never be the same. So we can say that Maria Morganti agrees with this attitude, but she does not need to demonstrate its underlying theories just because she incarnates them and experiences them in practice. Given this practice is that of contaminating (though she is not rigidly methodical about this as she is quite uninterested in ideology) it is obvious that the very sense of the work derives from the blurring, the edges, from whatever does not correspond or stay in its right place.

An understanding of her small- or medium-scale monochromes, which are always square, must start from the edges, at the top or the bottom, where the monochrome is contradicted by the streaks left over from the underlying layers. These streaks of colour differing from those of the surface, whether harmonious or on contrast, relate the time taken for the work, its processes and means. They also tell us about the emotive basis of the operations, the radical separation from any programme except those based on a kind of instinct or impulse that make the work itself be the work’s aim, the research to be research itself. Picasso’s famous “I do not search, I find” revealed the great painter’s presumption that he knew how to give meaning (Picasso as

Lacan's Fault...). For Morganti it means quite the reverse: the processes of meaning are left to chance, and the management of chance is left to others, to later on, to a possibility.

The only "inclination" is that of the materials; this is the programme the artist sets herself as a painter, but it is a work programme and one that is mostly to be identified with her own existence, with the unity between art and life, without arrogance, a vital need already existing within her.

The application of the paint is always concerned with material itself, with visible traces of the gestures employed, however minimal. And to the lack of purity of the colours she adds the bodily presence, the here-and-now, of the material act of painting that is neither avoided nor hidden from us. Just think of Klein's Blue, of the thick, overt material, even though it is apparently untouched and like something arrived from the Empyrean, from elsewhere, the very emblem of immateriality. It is necessary to look at it in order to be imbued with sensibility. Manzoni's A-chromes too, the companion pieces to Klein Blue, seem not to be made by the human hand: often they are made from expanded polystyrene, have undergone a genetic mutation and are openly the visible fragment of an invisible whole.

Maria Morganti's painting is avowedly part of this world, of this "low" working horizon; and it is so just because it is without any kind of excess, whether phenomenological, organic, or gestural: the painting places itself in a continuum with the space and time of existence, and it narrates for us – we might even say it unrolls for us – the imaginative, creative force of emotion. It even manages to create narratives for us when the work extends into the repetitive and varied times of the diary.

I have already said that here the sense of the absolute evoked by monochrome is contradicted and reversed or, to be less insistent, at least made relative by the world of phenomena. One aspect I have experienced was that of space acting as a system aimed at reversal. The space of phenomena enters into the surface of the painting, opens it up, spreads it, and enlarges it to the size of its setting and makes it testable, and not just through thought and its favourite sense, sight. We could well outline a genealogy beginning with Fontana and leading to the Gruppo Zero, Ellsworth Kelly, Support-Surface, Analytical Painting, Blinky Palermo, Imi Knoebel, and Heimo Zoberning.

In Morganti's case, though, it is time itself that undertakes this function (and the names that come to mind are Niele Toroni, Gunter Umberg, Ettore Spalletti, and Rudolf Stingel, though I would also dare to mention Mark Rothko...), the time of the work expressed through the layers that can still be seen at the work's edges or in the long series of coloured segments that make up the so-called "diaries". In other words, the work has to be identified with its creational process and this, in turn, with the rhythm and time of its existence, its simple being.

Simplicity is another characteristic or special quality of Morganti's work: elementary creative acts, the mixing of colour and applying it to the canvas,

saturating it almost completely, and then repeating the same acts according to a programme wholly dictated by interior laws. It is an almost monastic activity, one which we can imagine being zealous, knowing that her studio is immersed in the light of the Venetian Laguna, but one that does not lead to any kind of mystic ecstasy. Ecstasy, like passion, is egoistic; instead, the exultance that Morganti aims to experience each time should also be of value to others, to the spectators, even though they have never set foot in the studio.

In other words, an opening to time, to the meaning of experienced time, also signifies an opening to others, to a full legibility of the work and its constituent rules as a condition for rendering the emotions, different each time, that have led to the choice of colour and the very existence of the painting.

Different each time because another important function is also undertaken by the exhibition space: in the case of the show of which this is a catalogue essay, everything has been generated by the artist's continual contact with the space, with the rooms of the Querini Stampalia Foundation and their specific and unrepeatable characteristics. The space occupied is, significantly, both canonical yet marginal: the spaces above the doors where in antique buildings genre pictures were placed within shaped surfaces.

The starting point for each new work is to be found in the colours of certain paintings already hanging in the rooms, in considerations about them and their emotive resonance. But really, if we consider the passage from emotion to emotion, thought to thought, and application to application, then we realise that this starting point has become the stimulus for a free research which has gone in all directions. To the viewer there is offered the possibility, not so much of discovering these directions in his own thoughts, but to look for other new ones, whether convergent or divergent.

(translation by Michael David Haggerty)