

PRESS RELEASE

Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni

*bianco*

6 December – 10 February 2001

This exhibition brings together under the concept of “bianco” (white) the works of three Italian Post-war artists: Alberto Burri (1915-1995), Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) and Piero Manzoni (1933-1963). These three artists alongside Francesco Lo Savio (1935-1963) and Pino Pascali (1935-1968) changed the course of Italian contemporary art with influence well beyond their national borders.

“Bianco” does not exclude black and all the tiny fragments of colour; it becomes a sign only with the extension of the potential and variegated chromatic mass to the point where the surface becomes charged, imbued with tension entered, exposed to the most subtle and sensitive observation, occurring under the skin of visibility.

The white, stratified by endless secret tones never revealed to a final reading; refers to a language that cannot be tamed. It is not made to be read, deciphered, domesticated. It must be looked at, listened to and touched...It is not concerned with a thing, it is the thing itself.

“Bianco” is the quintessence of artistic language, its defiance of definition: a mark which opens and closes chasms. In white, mourning and tragic memory are buried.

The phenomenon of white has always been acknowledged as the poetic space of vision, from Homer, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Melville, to Malevich, Burri, Fontana and Manzoni.

In Burri the apology of white began at the beginning of the fifties with the series of the “Muffe” (mould), “Gobbo bianco” (1952), and “Sacco e bianco” (1953). White on white became the way in which Burri unified the most diverse objects of the world as the “two shirts” (1957). The artist declared: “I could create a white even in the night” and indeed made works only centered on the endless variation of white. The idea of Burri is a new form of monochrome; the artist reduced to the minimum its own colour – the choice of painting as “tutto-sacco” (all-sack), “tutto-legno” (all-wood), “tutto-ferro” (all-iron), “tutto-plastica” (all-plastic). These colours which seem to be added, indeed, are removed. The black is the burn, the white is the total absence of colour, the red is the flame. To burn is the most evident way to reduce. In this sense, Burri is the inventor of the painting by “reduction”. The reduction is always a reduction as a rigorous science. His colours are born objectively; it is in fact a necessity congenital to the material used, and this choice is carried out endlessly.

At the same time of Burri, also Fontana no longer used the canvas as means of support but rather as "total representation"; a space to be accepted as it is, to go beyond, to pierce, to cut. Its endless exploration allowed him achieve a white which came from a long way away as a synthesis of his innovative and original journey on art. Burri and Fontana worked with different aims but in the same context and with the same ideals. However, Fontana looks towards the sky (the space of the "spazialismo"), and Burri towards the earth (the seething matter).

Manzoni's work moved towards a temporal dimension capable of enhancing the idea of the open work and to demonstrate the spiritual necessity of art. With the "achromes" (colourless), "linee" (lines), conceptual event, he affirmed the individuality of thought – the idea of the artist as capable of activating the fundamental elements of art, always projected towards a spatiotemporal totality. He renounced any glamorous or provocative gesture, and in this way achieved an extreme radicality. Manzoni writes: "The image has no value for remembrance, explanation or expression – the question is rather to be found – nor does it need to be explained as an allegory of a physical process: it has value only because it is – to be". My intention is to present a completely white surface (or better still, an absolute colourless or neutral one) beyond all pictorial phenomena, all intervention alien to the sense of the surface. A white surface which is neither a polar landscape, nor an evocative or beautiful subject, nor even a sensation, a symbol or anything else: but a white surface which is nothing other than a colourless surface, or even a surface that quite simply is".