VIA TADINO 15
20124 MILANO ITALY
T +39 02 29 404 373
F +39 02 29 404 673

INFO@GIOMARCONI.COM
WWW.GIOMARCONI.COM

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VALERIO ADAMI

Valerio Adami was born in Bologna in 1935 and moved to Milan with his family while still a child. In the early 1950s, he went to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan. His artistic beginnings were very much influenced by Expressionism and by the memory of a destroyed country after the Second World War.
In the mid 1950s he left Milan and lived between Paris and, later on, London where he met fellow artists Roberto Matta, Wilfredo Lam, Richard Hamilton, Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon who deeply inspired him, a fact that is also reflected in his works from the late 50s.
During the 1960s he became one of the leading representatives of the Narrative Figuration movement and took part in a number of group and solo exhibitions in Paris, among them the seminal show *La Figuration Narrative*. He soon gained an international reputation and was shown at documenta III in Kassel (1964), the Venice Biennale (1968) and the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas (1969). In 1965, the Studio Marconi had its first Adami exhibition.
Looking at Adami's work from the 1960s, comic books and cartoons as well as the graphic art of billboards come to mind. Further influences were Cloisonnism, a post-Impressionist movement in which bold, flat forms of color are bordered by black lines, and British Pop art with its inspiration from commercial advertisements, magazines, movies and celebrity culture.
In his paintings from that decade, Adami used shapes of flat, saturated colour bordered by pronounced black lines. He similarly used elements from everyday life, inserted them into the structure of his figurative narratives and put them into new and different relationships with each other. The stimulus for his art was the real world as an alternative draft to an artistic ivory tower:
"To clarify and give order to the way we represent the real world in which we live… To make use of everyday language, the kind used by people at the café, in the supermarket… To find the concrete origin of the most intimate impulses". (*Valerio Adami 1956-1963. The Years in Milan*, Skira, Milan 2015, p. 166).
Many works from the early 1960s depicted pure energy and frenzy: objects blown into a thousand pieces, cosmic rays and dense smoke clouds mixed with speech bubbles, stars, onomatopoetic keywords and body fragments such as lips, fingernails or legs.
In the later 1960s there was a shift away from the uber-energetic earlier depictions towards more static paintings and a slightly darker colour palette. Many of these later works featured seemingly lifeless, deserted, anonymous and impersonal urban spaces and lusciously sensuous, pastel-colored interiors. A large number of the paintings from the later 60s, was inspired by the numerous photos from Adami's visit to New York in 1966 where he took pictures of shop windows, hotel rooms, public toilets and subway stations. While in New York, he met Saul Steinberg and Allen Ginsberg and resided and worked at the Chelsea Hotel.
In the 1970s Adami's style changed considerably. Following the urban spaces and interiors of the 1960s were referential yet enigmatic paintings that juxtaposed letters and phrases with the depicted image. The human figure as a whole much rather than just body fragments became the focal point of his works. The formerly bright colour palette became much more subdued as more earthy and natural tones took hold of his paintings. The pronounced black lines became more subtle and Adami's overall interest shifted towards literature, history, philosophy, music and mythology.
From the mid 1970s until today, Adami started to examine the occidental intellectual and cultural history in his paintings. The countless cultural and literary references that populate his later works give them a strangely mysterious and enigmatic air.
Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Adami worked on various large scale commissions: he produced five large paintings for the headquarters of the First National Bank of Madison in Wisconsin (1974) and eight stained-glass windows for the town hall of Vitry-sur-Seine (1986). He made two monumental works for the main hall of the Gare d'Austerlitz (1987), and a group of paintings for the foyer of the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris (1989).
In 1994, Adami installed four large paintings at the New York Grill & Bar of the Park Hyatt Hotel in Tokyo.
Valerio Adami has traveled extensively throughout his long career and has frequently spent several months in places, such as New York City, Los Angeles, Mexico and South America, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Israel, Northern Europe, Ostend and Monte Carlo. As a result of his many trips and his various places of residence, Adami forged friendships with many of the intellectuals of his time.A number of philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Hubert Damisch reflected on Adami's oeuvre and several writers, among them Italo Calvino, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, responded to the artist's "literary paintings" with their own texts.

SONIA DELAUNAY

Both prolific and innovative, Sonia Delaunay was one of the key female artists and designers of the European Avant-garde. Throughout her life she experimented with the language and rhythms of colour: "(…) with colours, it is poetry and the mystery of an inner life that emerges, radiates and communicates. On that basis, we can freely create a new language."
Delaunay developed an experimental practice that was sympathetic to the Bauhaus school and its aim to bring art back into contact with the everyday, giving equal weight to design and fine art.
Her vast and complex body of work ranges from drawings and paintings, illustrations and prints to stage design, textiles, furnishings, clothing and accessories.
Throughout her life, Delaunay insisted that there should not be any discrimination between the so-called major and minor arts, between "high" and "low" art. Through her cross-disciplinary practice Delaunay blurred the boundaries between these different art forms and bridged the gap between art and everyday life.
Sonia Delaunay's gouaches are frequently considered to be preparatory drawings since many of their patterns have later been translated into her fabrics, textiles and clothes. A large number of gouaches was, however, never conceived for such a purpose. For Delaunay, the gouaches are quite simply "an expression of states of mind, poems", that combine improvisation and imagination and use colour in a manner comparable to the use of sound and rhythm in music.
Together with her husband, the painter Robert Delaunay, the artists started to experiment with colour as they realized that the pairing of two colours which are opposite one another on the colour wheel make both colours appear more vivid: green and red, blue and orange, violet and yellow - they developed a theory of colours, a mode of art that focused on their "simultaneous contrast" and they eventually called that *Simultanism*. The term is derived from the chemist's Michel Eugène Chevreul's book of colour theory from 1839 in which he identified the phenomenon of colours looking different depending on the colours around them.
Delaunay favours gouache on paper over oil techniques as the medium allows for a more rapid and immediate approach. Between 1923 and 1927, she started to elaborate on simple geometrical forms: zig-zag patterns, serpentine lines, triangles, squares, lozenges, crosses and dots. Thanks to these unobtrusive and basic abstract forms, Delaunay could focus her interest on what was really important to her – the idea of rhythm, movement and the distribution of colours and their reciprocal relations.
Later on, Delaunay started to integrate a wider range of forms into her hitherto abstract and Bauhaus-like repertoire and opened up towards more floral and organic designs, reminiscent of her Russian roots.
Delaunay's lifelong fascination with color and rhythm emerged during her childhood in the Ukrainian village of Gradizhsk. In a memoir published in 1978 shortly before her death, she would write of "memories of the peasant weddings of my country, where the red and green dresses, ornamented with many ribbons, flew about in dancing." Fully in line with her childhood memories of whirling dresses, in the gouaches that have been translated into clothes, the classical support of the paper has been substituted by the cloth giving birth to a new concept of a moving surface. Delaunay's clothes are versatile structures which question the traditional concept of painting and sculpting as static entities. Gouaches on fabric testify Delaunay's challenge to overcome different genres: the static, two- dimensional nature of the artwork gives way to a mobile continuum more in sync with life itself.

LOUISE NEVELSON

Louise Nevelson is best known for her monochromatic, monumental, wooden wall pieces, outdoor sculptures and collages. A rare female artist in a male dominated art system, she was one of the most important figures in 20th-century American sculpture and was regarded for her groundbreaking sculptural environments and public commissions in major American cities, among them New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Her eccentric and flamboyant persona has been captured in memorable photos by Cecil Beaton.

Deeply engaged with the legacies of Picasso's Cubism, Tatlin's Constructivism and native North and Central American art, Nevelson's artworks incorporate unexpected combinations of materials and forms while their pictorial attitude reveals an affinity with Abstract Expressionism.

Nevelson began making sculptural works in the 1950s. They are usually created out of wood and range from smaller assemblages or free-standing stelae to door-sized wall works and monumental wall-mounted installations consisting of multiple box-like compartments. These box-like structures are comprised of discarded furniture and other wooden objects and pieces which she found in the area surrounding her studio - a working process influenced by Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's readymades. All of the artist's sculptural works reflect her tireless experimentation with materiality, shape, space and color. An interest in shadow and space materialized in her first all-black sculptures, introducing a visual language that came to characterize much of her work from the mid-1950s onward.

A unique feature of Nevelson's sculptural works is that they are often painted in monochromatic white, gold and especially black, which for the artist was the "color of all colors": *"… when I fell in love with black, it contained all color. It wasn't a negation of color. It was an acceptance. Because black encompasses all colors. Black is the most aristocratic color of all. (…) You can be quiet and it contains the whole thing. There is no color that will give you the feeling of totality. Of peace. Of greatness. Of quietness. Of excitement. I have seen things that were transformed into black, that took on just greatness. I don't know a lesser word*."

Acquisitions by three major New York museums in the later 1950s encouraged Nevelson's artistic development: In 1956, the Whitney Museum of American Art acquired *Black Majesty* (1955) and one year later the Brooklyn Museum followed suit with the acquisition of *First Personage* (1956). Shortly after, the Museum of Modern Art acquired *Sky Cathedral* (1958), further championing Nevelson's work with her inclusion in the seminal group exhibition *Sixteen Americans* (1959–60). In this iconic exhibition the large-scale installation *Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959) by the 60-year old Nevelson was shown alongside rising stars such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella.

Later in her career, Nevelson was drawn to industrial materials, such as Cor-Ten steel, aluminum and plexiglass, which allowed her to create larger and more complex sculptures. These materials made it possible for Nevelson's sculptures to also be displayed in outdoor spaces.

Nevelson's legacy in the fields of sculpture and collage-making has long been associated with her ability to transform the traditional environment of the home from a symbol of feminine sensibility, domestication and intimate scale to a monumental expression of creative freedom. In her quest to achieve this, Nevelson pioneered a new, ecological approach to art-making, according to which every element of the home is used for the creation of her work. From the larger, three-dimensional parts of old furniture that the artist acquired in bulk or found in the area surrounding her studio, to smaller and often more perishable items such as cardboard, paper, woodcut rejects and doorknobs, Nevelson's choice of materials was a clear expression of a recyclable, 'waste not' ideology. This approach to reuse and recycle found material as early as in the 1950s makes Nevelson extremely avant-garde and her art ever more relevant today.

Nevelson, who once famously declared that "*the way I think is collage*", began creating them in the early 1950s. The works were never meant to be exhibited publicly and throughout her life the artist largely kept her collage practice secret. They, in fact, remained mostly unknown until after the artist's death in 1988. Due to their smaller scale, these works could easily be created within the privacy of her home.

Despite her hesitation to exhibit them, the collages were an integral part of her overall work practice and provided a new avenue for exploring light, shadow, reflection, and line. The collages were furthermore inextricably linked to her larger monochromatic, painted sculptures as they practically emerged as extensions of the same creative gesture.

The collages, which combine various materials like cardboard, wood, spray paint, sandpaper, metal foil, tape, printed paper or newspaper shavings, reflect her ever-evolving interest in materiality. Nevelson used Krylon spray-paint to transform bits of wooden detritus and everyday objects into abstracted geometric forms—the negative traces these spraypainted objects left on scraps of paper and cardboard would become graphic elements in her collages.

Nevelson's collages with their unexpected combinations of found objects, paper and materials from the domestic environment are deeply embedded in the rich legacy of modernist collage making cultivated by artists such as Kurt Schwitters, Jean Arp and especially Pablo Picasso, who, from 1912 onwards, began to incorporate newspapers and smaller objects such as matchboxes into his cubist collages.

EMILIO TADINI

Emilio Tadini is considered one of the most original personalities in Italy's post-World War II cultural landscape. He was a graphic designer, novelist, poet, art critic, journalist and painter. His whole oeuvre, seemingly simple and straightforward, offers multiple layers of meaning with its dreamlike elements, everyday objects and fragmentary, often faceless and anonymous figures.

Tadini is unique in the Italian art scene, as he had adopted aspects of the Pop language when the movement was already on the wane and conceptual art and Arte Povera came into fashion. Tadini has never been much intrigued by the superficial and glossy American Pop Art but was much rather interested in the more introspective and at times even intellectual British Pop Art. Although British Pop had been the artist's point of departure with everyday objects playfully populating his canvases, his interest in the unconscious and the irrational induced him to depict scenes of fragmentation and alienation reminiscent of Surrealism.

Emilio Tadini was born in Milan in 1927. His early years were marked by a classical education and a deep interest in literature, art and philosophy, which would remain central to his life and artistic approach. After earning a degree in literature and philosophy at the University of Milan in the early 1950s, he started to write essays, novels and poetry. He has always been an avid theatre-goer and reader and has been particularly interested in American literature: both Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* had been highly influential texts for Tadini as both authors had merged the high as well as the low language into their texts.

He has been an art critic for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and has translated texts by Stendhal, Céline, Faulkner and Melville into Italian. Because of his love for literature and the written word, Tadini has always been a cross-disciplinary artist. Or as one of his friends and contemporaries, the writer Umberto Eco, has put it: "Tadini was a writer who paints, a painter who writes". He was in constant search of new languages and forms of expression – both on the blank page and the blank canvas.

Tadini's works from the early 1960s were still very much influenced by Max Ernst's Surrealism and the mythical creatures of a Hieronymus Bosch. In the mid 60s he broke open the picture and reassembled the strewn around figures and objects into energetic depictions and vibrant paintings thereby creating a pictorial stream of consciousness. Already these early paintings show the disintegration of the narration and the focus on individual recurring objects like certain pieces of furniture, lamps, sunglasses, ties, shoes or faceless figures. For Tadini these objects become archeological relics: "Without the presence of human figures as such (…) the objects seem to tumble slowly into an archeological dimension."

Tadini started to commit himself to a new figuration which he saw as an effort to "represent the complexity of the relationships that constitute reality".

Prompted by a profound interest in Freud's psychoanalysis and especially his *Interpretation of Dreams*, he developed paintings with multiple layers of meaning which focused not solely on the depicted objects per se but much rather on the relationships between them. He called this new representation *integral realism*, a term that included both the conscious as well as the unconscious.

Also Pop Art, especially the British interpretation of it, became an important influence for Tadini. In 1966, his Milan gallery, Studio Marconi, had collaborated with the Robert Fraser Gallery in London and had organized a group exhibition with the likes of Peter Blake, Patrick Caulfield, Richard Hamilton, Derek Boshier and Eduardo Paolozzi. Tadini has therefore had first-hand access to these artists and their works. A shift in his own practice is clearly visible during these years as also he started to integrate popular images, references to art history and elements from high and low culture into his paintings.

Though often associated with the Italian Pop Art and *Narrative Figuration* movements, Tadini's work stood apart for its intellectual density and literary structure. His canvases often resemble visual novels: populated by floating figures, fractured architectural spaces, and enigmatic signs. Human silhouettes, mannequins, stairs, windows, and fragments of language are staged in painterly theatres of meaning, ambiguity, and memory.

The art historian Arturo Carlo Quintavalle notes: "Pop Art (…) was not a direct participation in everyday reality, (…), because Tadini analysed not so much the quotation of objects as carried out by those artists but rather the intentionality and purpose behind the quotations, which he felt was "mystifying". (…) Irony and protest were at the basis of British Pop art, whereas underlying the American version was simply the uncovering of mass mythologies, and enunciation."

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Tadini amassed a large photographic archive of objects, urban landscapes, interior views, still lives, figures in all sorts of poses and advertisements. He subsequently started to use these images by projecting and tracing them onto canvas thereby combining two media. He transformed the surface of the painting into a projection field onto which he projected his images.

These canvases are characterised by a combination of elements from low and high culture, art historical references and pop cultural images. Some of his best-known series from the late 1960s, *Vita di Voltaire*, *L'uomo dell'organizzazione*, *Circuito chiuso* and *Color & Co*., were made using this technique. Also for *Viaggio in Italia* from the early 1970s, Tadini resorted to his photographic archive.

The series *Color & Co*., which was prepared for an exhibition at the Studio Marconi in 1970, is an homage to Tadini's profession. Even though disconnected objects like a football, a tie, an open envelope or a metronome hint at a life outside of the artist's studio, the main focus of these works is on the numerous paint buckets holding the artist's most precious asset and the large, monochrome bathtubs brimmed with paint. For Tadini "(…) in this series the paint itself has become one of the objects that forms part of the narrative."

As in Tadini's previous bodies of work, he does not depict stories but paints a selection of disconnected everyday objects onto his canvases. The art historian Francesco Guzzetti notes in his 2021 published book *Emilio Tadini: The Reality of the Image 1968-1972*: "Like still lives, Tadini's paintings propose nothing more than the pure object, rendered in the denoting quality of paint and in the internal arrangement of the space of the painting".

Georg F. Schwarbaner puts it in a nutshell: "Each object, each symbol, every fragment of a sentence and of a word has its specific meaning. Tadini's compositions resemble an image-encyclopaedia of our century."