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## Biennale Arte 2017 57th International Art Exhibition May 13 - November 26, 2017



Today, in a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. Art is the favourite realm for dreams and utopias, a catalyst for human connections that roots us both to nature and the cosmos, that elevates us to a spiritual dimension. Art is the last bastion, a garden to cultivate above and beyond trends and personal interests. It stands as an unequivocal alternative to individualism and indifference. It builds us up and edifies us. At a time of global disorder, art embraces life, even if doubt ensues inevitably. The role, the voice and the responsibility of the artist are more crucial than ever before within the framework of contemporary debates. It is in and through these individual initiatives that the world of tomorrow takes shape, which though surely uncertain, is often best intuited by artists than others.

VIVA ARTE VIVA is an exclamation, a passionate outcry for art and the state of the artist. VIVA ARTE VIVA is a Biennale designed with artists, by artists and for artists, about the forms they propose, the questions they ask, the practices they develop and the ways of life they choose.

Rather than broaching a single theme, VIVA ARTE VIVA offers a route that moulds the artists' works and a context that favours access and understanding, generating connections, resonances and thoughts. The journey unfolds over the course of nine chapters, or families of artists, beginning with two introductory realms in the Central Pavilion, followed by another seven across the Arsenale through the Giardino delle Vergini. Each chapter represents a Pavilion in itself, or rather a Trans-Pavilion as it is trans-national by nature but echoes the Biennale's historical organisation into pavilions, the number of which has never ceased to grow since the end of the 1990s. This semantic nod addresses the often debated relevance of the national pavilions, whilst going beyond it, as each chapter mixes artists of all generations and origins. There is however, no physical separation between the various pavilions, which flow together like the chapters of a book. From the Pavilion of Artists and Books to the Pavilion of Time and Infinity, these nine episodes tell a story that is often discursive and at times paradoxical, with detours that mirror the world's complexities, a multiplicity of approaches and a wide variety of practices. The exhibition is intended as an experience, an extrovert movement from the self to the other, towards a common space beyond the defined dimensions, and onwards to the idea of a potential neo-humanism. This movement of the self towards the unknown, where experience and speculation are at the forefront is in and of itself a response to a conservative environment, defying bias, distrust and indifference.

VIVA ARTE VIVA also seeks to convey a positive and prospective energy, which whilst focusing on young artists, rediscovers those passed away too soon or those who are still largely unknown despite the importance of their work. These discoveries and recoveries give way, in each pavilion, to a communion of artists from several generations, offering perspectives on questions that were often broached as early as the 1960s and specially the 1970s. These issues are revisited by artists in today's world of constant anthropological and societal change. The artists' interpretations hinge on forms that reflect the concerns of the civil society. After all, art may not have changed the world, but it remains the field where it can be reinvented.

Starting with the Pavilion of Artists and Books, the exhibition reveals its premise, a dialectic that involves the whole of contemporary society, beyond the artist himself, and addresses the organisation of society and its values. Art and artists are at the heart of the exhibition, which begins by examining their practices, the way they create art, halfway between idleness and action, otium and negotium. The Roman otium, and its Greek predecessor scholè, originally understood as a privileged moment, is nowadays improperly translated as idleness of pejorative connotation, or leisure, which is not far removed from entertainment. The word otium, in contrast with the business world or negotium, from which the artist can never really escape, implies a space for free time, for inactivity and availability, a space of productive idleness and mind work, of quietness and action, a space where the work of art comes to be.

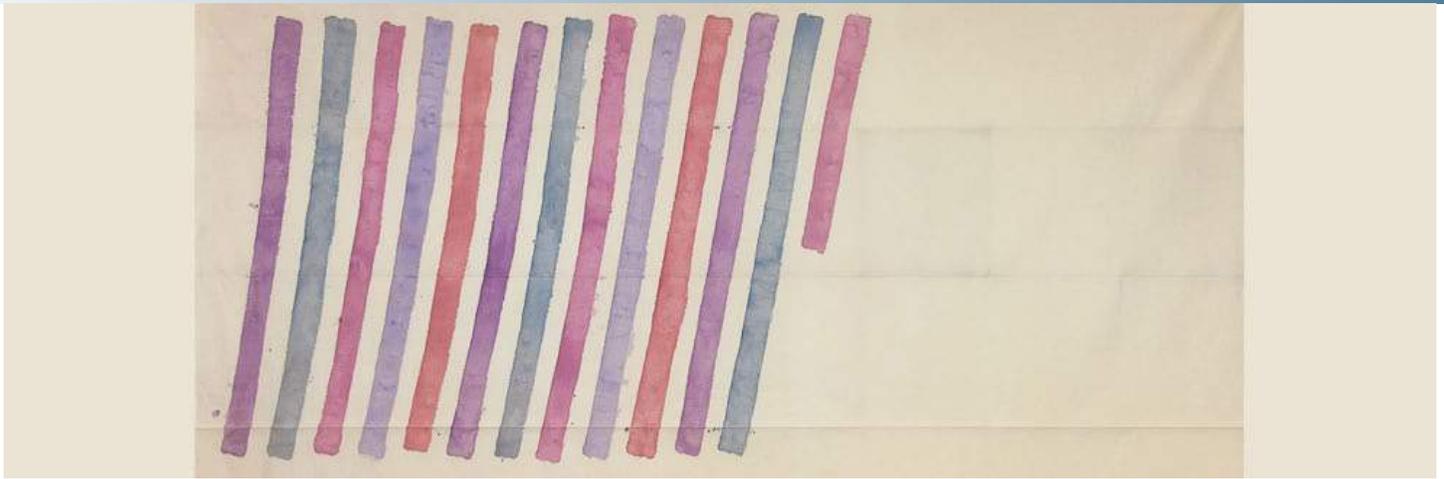
The decision to become an artist, in and of itself, requires taking a stance in society, one that is today broadly popular and widely acknowledged, but is perceived nevertheless as an act of calling into question work -and its by-product: money- as the absolute value in the modern world. Being an artist means differentiating between the private individual and the public individual, not as a person of media but as someone who is confronted with the res publica. Indeed, while the artist produces artworks that are meant to be commercialized, the modes of production of his or her disposal include an alternative within which the need for inactivity or rather non-productive action, for mind wandering and research, remain paramount. This position inevitably has consequences on the way in which free time is perceived by society: it is no longer a time to be spent or even consumed, but a time for oneself.

### **The Pavilion of Colours**

According to well-known neuroscientific studies, colours do not exist in themselves but are the result of a cognitive function performed by the human brain and eyes as they decipher reality. Colours thus appear to be a particularly subjective source of emotion, which calls to reconsider the relevance of the phenomenological approaches of art. With a fine balance between finesse and transparency, light and spirituality, haptic experience and visual explosion, loaded sometimes with anthropological, even political, connotations, The Pavilion of Colours can be described as the “fireworks” at the end of the journey through the Arsenale, where all the questions presented in the preceding pavilions come together to provide what might be described almost as an “out-of-self” experience prior to the final chapter.

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GIORGIO GRIFFA: QUASI TUTTO  
FROM 14 MAY 2016 TO 04 SEP 2016

**SERRALVES**

*'His art deserves a place in the global history of abstraction.'*  
Roberta Smith, The New York Times

Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art presents the first large-scale museum survey of the paintings and drawings of Giorgio Griffa. It is the Italian artist's first exhibition in Portugal. The exhibition is the culmination of a series of shows originating at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève (Switzerland), travelling to the Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (Norway) and the Fondazione Giuliani, Rome (Italy). Curated by Serralves Museum director Suzanne Cotter and Andrea Bellini, Director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, the exhibition at Serralves presents an expanded selection of more than forty paintings and over fifty drawings dating from 1969 to 2015. Surveying Griffa's highly abstract yet eminently pictorial production, this ambitious exhibition reveals the artist's commitment to the practice of painting as a cumulative process whose continuum is part of a broader physical and metaphysical reality.

Giorgio Griffa (1936, Turin, Italy) is part of the Italian generation of artists who came of age in the 1960s and proposed a radical redefinition of painting. From the late 1960s, Griffa set about reducing painting to its essential components of raw, unstretched canvas, pigment and brushstrokes, stripped of expressive subjectivity, radically redefining the medium and its possibilities within a world in transformation. While his use of simple materials and gestures aligns him with the work of the Italian arte povera artists and the proponents of Support/Surface in France, who were his peers in the 1960s and 1970s, his interest in the immediacy and performative dimension of painting as a time-based process was also inspired by Zen philosophy.

During the 1980s, a return to neo-expressionism and the Italian transavanguardia marked for Griffa a period of re-engagement with the expressive potential of his elemental use of colour, line and gesture that had sustained his practice in the previous decade. Inspired in part by fellow artist Mario Merz's use of the Fibonacci sequence, in the 1990s the numbers of the golden ratio entered into Griffa's pictorial language. His paintings from the past two decades bring together these constitutive elements with renewed vigour and vital urgency. The works in the exhibition at Serralves reflect these key moments in Griffa's oeuvre, including important paintings from the artist's cycle of paintings known as 'Alter Ego' that constitute a conceptual and intellectual dialogue with painters from Tintoretto to Matisse and Agnes Martin.

The exhibition also highlights the importance of Griffa's drawings from across the same period as his paintings. The drawings offer insight into Griffa's continued elaboration of ideas for his paintings and a reflection of an oeuvre in parallel in which the repetitive gesture and the sign point to the origins of painting as primordial and notational.

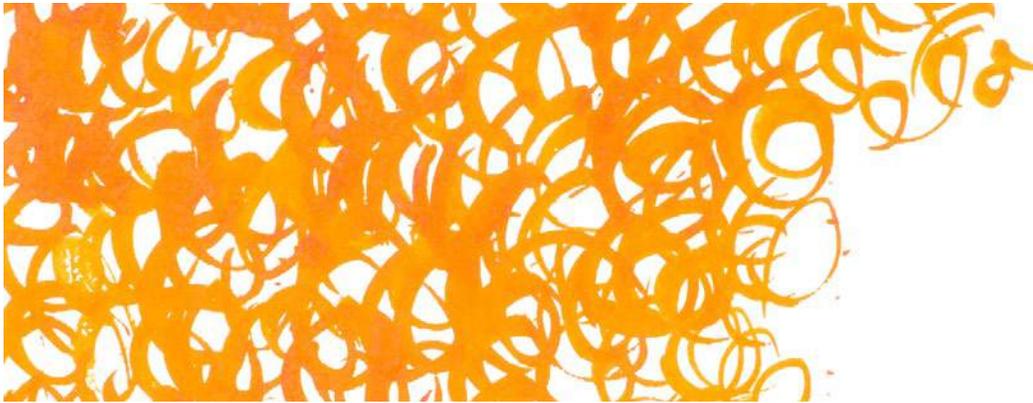
A fully illustrated book, edited by Andrea Bellini and published by Mousse Publishing, presents the work of the artist over fifty years. The book includes new essays by Andrea Bellini, Luca Cerizza, Laura Cherubini, Martin Clark, Suzanne Cotter, Chris Dercon and Marianna Vecellio, an interview with the artist conducted by Hans Ulrich Obrist, as well as writings by the artist.

'Giorgio Griffa: Quasi Tutto' is organized by the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, in association with Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève; Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen; and the Fondazione Giuliani, Rome. The exhibition is curated by Serralves Museum director Suzanne Cotter and Andrea Bellini, director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève.

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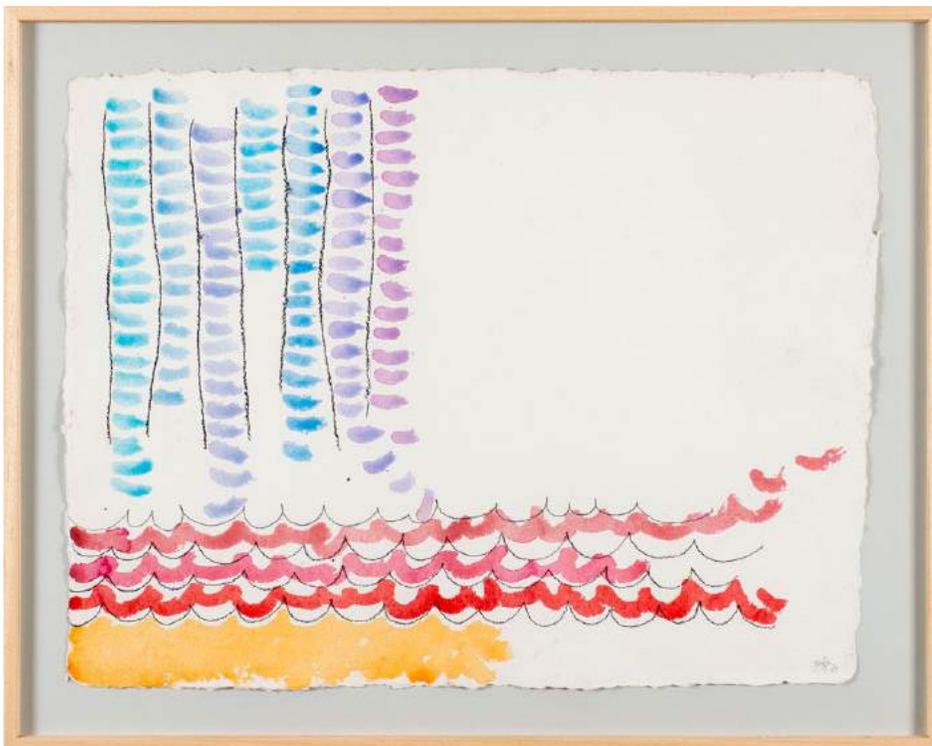
REVIEW - 18 JUN 2016

**Giorgio Griffa**

BY BARBARA CASAVECCHIA

Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal

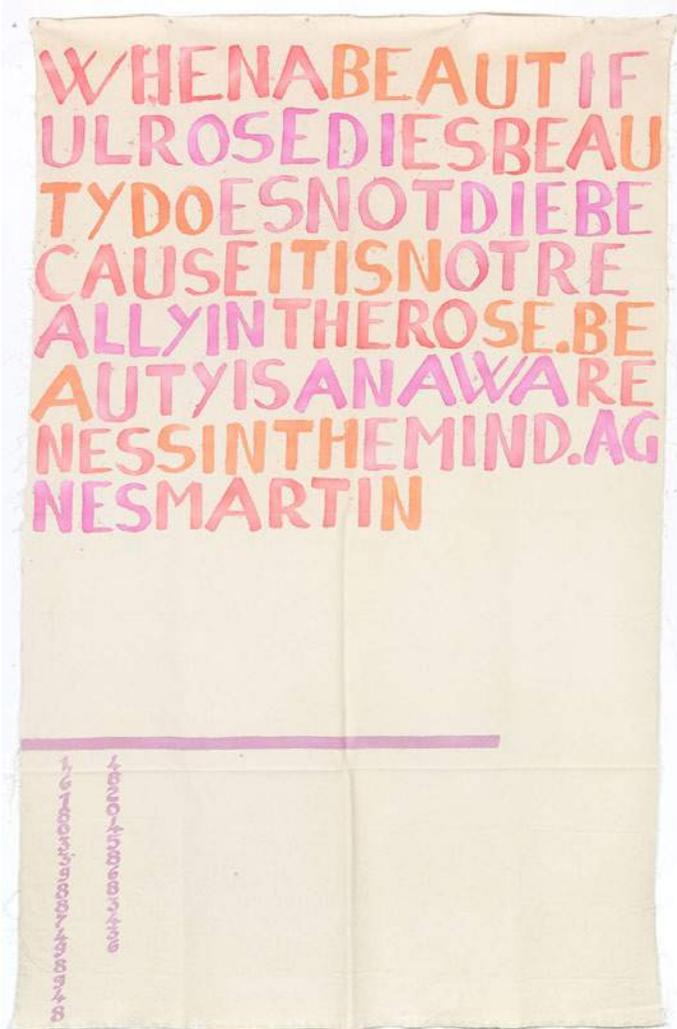
Entitled 'Quasi Tutto' (Almost Everything), Giorgio Griffa's comprehensive retrospective occupies the spaces of Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art with real grace (curated by Andrea Bellini and Suzanne Cotter, the show has come to Porto after previous stints at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Bergen Kunsthall, and the Giuliani Foundation in Rome). Griffa describes his practice as being 'in service of the intelligence of material and light', and indeed the simplicity of this Italian painter's abstract lines and fluid colours immediately strikes up a conversation with the rarefied architecture of Alvaro Siza, as the greenery of the surrounding park pours in from large windows while natural light is allowed to play on the surface of works.



Giorgio Griffa, Paper, 1989, Watercolor and pastel on paper, 51 x 68 cm. All images courtesy: Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal

Like Siza's, Griffa's work is infused with a seductive frugality: his materials are simple, his gestures elementary, his colours pure. Born in 1936 in Turin (where he had his first solo show at Galleria Martano in 1968, before exhibiting at Sonnabend in Paris and New York in 1970), Griffa paints on unprimed cloths made of linen, cotton, hemp and jute, which are laid out on the floor of his studio. The works are left unstretched, with loose threads hanging from their irregular margins, and can be folded like bed linen, resulting in a grid of creases that structures the picture plane.

Impeccably hung, this exhibition pivots on the contrast between its two main sections. The first room hosts a selection of works from the 1960s and early '70s, where parallel lines in different colours tiptoe into vast white backgrounds (Linee oblique, Oblique Lines, 1969; Linee orizzontali, Horizontal Lines, 1973). In the second room, with works from the '80s onwards, the use of darker fabrics,



Giorgio Griffa, Canone aureo 436 (Agnes Martin), 2015, Acrylic paint on canvas, 278 x 175 cm

wiggly lines and bolder shades (Campo giallo con arabesco, Yellow Field With Arabesque, 1987) indicates a loosening up of rules, resulting in a symphony of pinks, light greens, orange, red and turquoise.

Griffa lets the physical quality of his materials define his rhythm, something he often describes using terms from music and prosody such as tempo and caesurae. For example, one self-imposed rule is that a painting is finished as soon as its colours dry – much like in fresco painting where a specific area, the giornata (a day's work) is predefined as there is only a certain time before the wet lime plaster that bonds in the colour starts to harden. Even if he has spent half a century refining what he describes as 'signs that could belong to everybody's hand', Griffa's palette does in fact reveal the study of Italian old masters of fresco such as Piero della Francesca and Tintoretto, but also of Henri Matisse, Yves Klein, Mario Merz and several others, who are mentioned in the 'Alter-Ego' series (for instance, Green (Brice Marden), 2008). An outstanding work here is Canone aureo 436 (Agnes Martin) from 2015, whose subject, spelled out in lines of blush-pink capital letters, is a quotation from Martin's essay 'Beauty Is the Mystery of Life' (1989): 'When a beautiful rose dies, beauty does not die because it is not really in the rose. Beauty is an awareness of the mind.' A prolific writer, in his essay *Approdo a Gilania* (Landing in Gilania, 1998), Griffa reveals his inner model as being based on non-hierarchical thinking, in reference to what the Lithuanian-American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas described (in her work on life in the Neolithic period) as 'gylanic culture', in which genders were assigned equal importance, before the advent of patriarchy imposed separateness, domination, and the cult of the male hero.

After decades of Griffa appearing almost only in exhibitions in Italy, he now has something of an international 'cult' following having returned to the international spotlight with the success

of his 2012 solo exhibition at Casey Kaplan in New York. To retrieve forgotten masters and exiled outcasts is demonstrably a current trend, reflecting the art market's need to expand its domains as much as the desire of curators and scholars to redefine the normative construction of art history in more polyphonic terms. In Griffa's case, the polyphony directly resonates with the work – with the artist's willingness to let the 'intelligence of material and light' define his rhythm.

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**02****Giorgio Griffa**

By Aude Launay

A smudge. Right beside the motif. A motif with vague outlines, what is more. Not one but many different smudges, in fact. Tiny ones, some almost microscopic, droplets of paint spangling the untreated jute like stars. Further on, we find thick cotton tinged with marks between the brush strokes. Elsewhere the linen has so effectively absorbed the colour of the liquefied acrylic that the motif seems to be dissolved in its weft.

The manner does not allow any pentimento. The matter lets itself be penetrated. Or rather the different matters penetrate each other. From now on there is no longer any clear superiority of the paint over the canvas on which it is applied, because the two merge. The paint becomes a dye. It blends with the fibre that informs it. In one and the same movement, the colour reveals the supple geometry of the weave, acknowledging the one or two imperfections of its orthonormal layout. A contamination is at work, which is as literal as it is metaphorical.



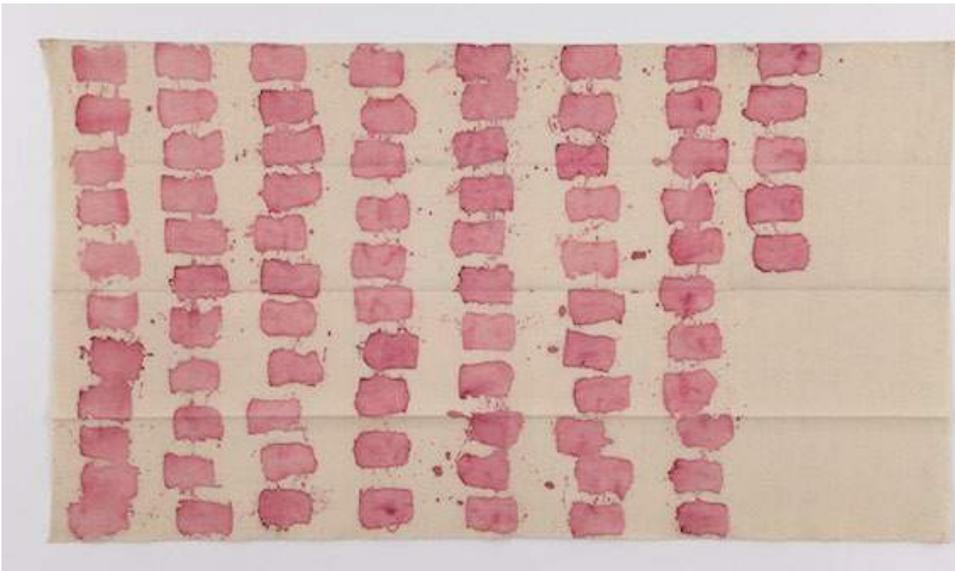
Giorgio Griffa, *Linee orizzontali*, 1973 (detail). Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas, 150x435 cm.  
Photo : Jean Vong. Courtesy Giorgio Griffa; Casey Kaplan, New York.

At first glance, it is hard to distinguish what is planned from what is accidental. What is intentional from what is providential. “Griffa works with materials rather than using them”,<sup>1</sup> writes Francesco Manacorda in a moving essay where he describes his first contact with a contemporary work of art which turns out to be a piece by the said Griffa.

Between 1968 and 1971, the young Giorgio Griffa laid the foundations which he would never stop developing throughout his career—and is still developing. A canvas spread on the floor, paint diluted to the point of becoming liquid, a succession of simple signs, one material that soaks up, another that is soaked up.

In a text written in 20002, in which he discussed his closeness to the artists who would form the Arte Povera movement, and famously declared that “the intelligence of matter [...] became the protagonist of the work, and the artist’s hand was there to serve it”, the Turin-based artist described Giuseppe Penone’s famous *Alpi Marittime* (1968) as “a tree imprisoned by a hand of iron [which] modifies its own growth until it incorporates the object, which is no longer foreign to it”. Incorporate the object, which is no longer foreign to it. The canvas thus appropriates the paint, thus getting rid of its function as a medium. And the intelligence of these matters gets to work.

And what about the artist’s hand? It compels itself to adopt simple gestures made by man from time immemorial: straight and curved lines, long and short, and imprints... Each sign brings on the following one—the first one is, as it were, “gratuitous”, and the others result from it. Their consecutiveness is presided over by a very slow task, one which calls for deep concentration. A hand which controls itself in order to master the liquid colour, a hand which refrains from passionate movements, in a state of attentive and rational passiveness. These last words are those of the artist, who is fond of explaining that, unlike an artist such as Pollock, his gesture is “neither mystical, nor erotic, nor romantic”. That he does not impose anything—or very little. That all he has in mind is the first of the signs he will draw when he starts to paint, and then that he tries to follow the process which takes place on the canvas. “There was no project, just that first sign, and all the rest happened in the work”, to use his own words again. All the rest happened, the way we say of an event that it happened.



Giorgio Griffa, Spugna, 1977. Acrylique sur toile /

Acrylic on canvas, 180 × 320 cm. Photo: Jean Vong. Courtesy Giorgio Griffa; Casey Kaplan, New York.

The sign, here, is the event. Andrea Bellini— curator of a series of four shows devoted to Griffa between May 2015 and September 2016—very aptly points out as much in an essay dealing with the Turin-based artist’s work on paper: “The aim in both painting and drawing is to observe the event-sign in its making, instead of using the sign to tell of an ‘event’ that is outside of the work”.<sup>5</sup> If the sign is what happens, what originates and what results, then it is a fact. At once an act and the result of that act, it is what one observes. Like the world, like all the other facts, to paraphrase the opening of a famous philosophical treatise (The world is all that is the case. The world is the totality of facts, not of things. The world is determined by the facts. [...] The world divides into facts).<sup>6</sup> Paintings and draw-

ings are part and parcel of the world, and not its commentary. “We are part of the phenomenon we observe”.<sup>7</sup>

The sign here is the expression of a rhythm. Very simple, and timeless (it is the rhythm of the heart, of the breath, of ancestral percussions), but flexible, it displays no rigour.

A sort of calendar-like punctuation (it conjures up the prisoner and the lines he draws for counting the days). Like an accounting of nothingness, futile, a feigned regularity. (Dis-)counting without counting, what is there to count? There is more to scan, “it was the scansion of my measure whose memory came back to me prolonged both by the sound in the temporal corridor of the door to my sepulchre, and by hallucination.”<sup>8</sup>

Here the passage of time is indefinite because time itself is indefinite. No date stamps as with Parmentier, no identical repetition of a motif as with Toroni, nor any repetition of an evolving motif as with Kawara and Opalka, no fine measurement of data as with Darboven; an unmeasured regularity, a non-metronomic rhythm is at work. Time includes and suspends itself, all at once. Giorgio Griffa says he prefers “to underline the rhythm rather than the repetition of the sign”, because “rhythm has always been a means of knowledge (rhythm of agriculture, rhythm of the moon...)”. So he is not trying to enclose time in the canvas, but, almost to the contrary, he is placing his canvas in time.

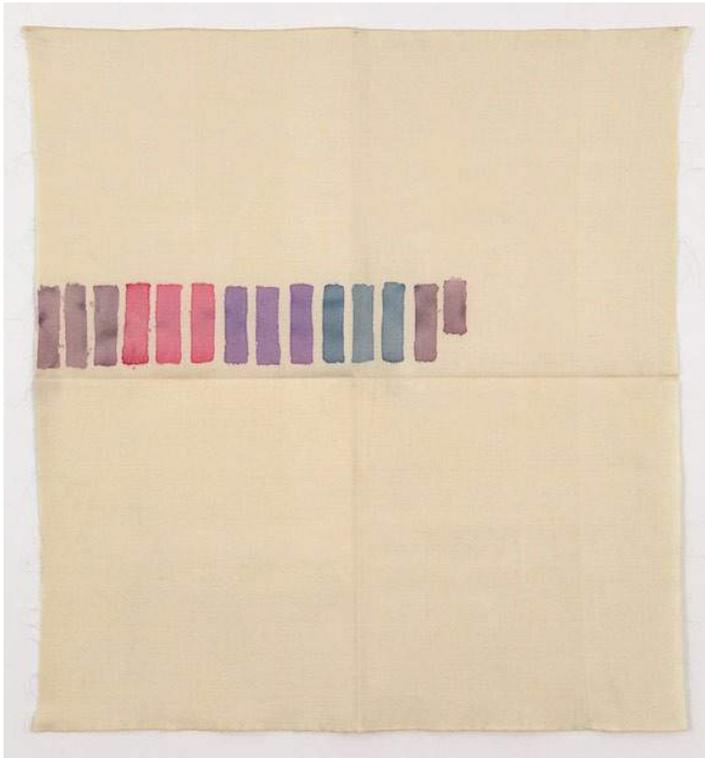
This is a writing without language, which refers to nothing external, and yet talks about the world. There are punctuation marks, commas, apostrophes, dots which are not “full stops”. Dots which evoke the start or the continuity of something, but certainly not its end. A language which produces no tale, which remains opaque, impervious to any narrative. For Griffa there is indeed a story, “but the story being told is that of this event of the sign, it is not a story outside it. It may also be that the story is different for everyone, just as it is different for each person listening to music, or for each reader of the Greek myths...” For him who readily quotes Whitman, Eliot, Joyce, Dante, Villon and Rabelais, Pound’s Cantos and Ginsberg’s Kaddish are corner stones.

Le Paradis n’est pas artificiel

but spezzato apparently

it exists only in fragments.<sup>9</sup>

The fragment fascinates Griffa. What is more, one of his cycles of works bears its name, yet, even though its writing—this time around of letters and words—is also incarnated in usually fragmentary forms, it cannot be said that his painting is fragmentary. Needless to say, his canvases lay claim to the fact of being a part of a whole, but they do not have the essential tearing of the fragment, the brevity necessary for this break. Despite their flagrant unfinishedness—“the knowledge of that deep unknown that science can never fathom is assigned to the realm of poetry”<sup>10</sup>, writes the painter—they do not seem to be unfinished, they simply curtail the confinement of the all-over in itself. Griffa’s painting is a painting whose interest does not originate in a self-centred line of thinking, but comes, conversely, from altogether external questionings re-used in this medium, after being used by others, in others. The Turin-based artist has not incidentally chosen painting over and versus other kinds of creation. He has



Giorgio Griffa, *Pennello Piatto*, 1971. Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 135 cm. Photo : Jean Vong. Courtesy Giorgio Griffa ; Casey Kaplan, New York.

chosen it because he reckoned that was “all he was good for”, a bit like Beckett.<sup>11</sup>

The non finito, the unbound, unframed canvas, which frays on the wall, the infinite number which cavorts about in it, all give the eye a chance to continue the painting itself. “I don’t have the time to finish my works. I cannot apply the paint up to edge of the canvas because in the meantime life has passed by. Furthermore, the painting is only a trace of an action and it would be arbitrary to attribute it a completeness it cannot have.”<sup>12</sup> “For him, rather than having a canvas which becomes a frame or that disappears, it’s about the object”, observes Martin Clark, joint curator of the exhibition “Giorgio Griffa: Painting into the Fold”, with Andrea Bellini, “the object quality of the painting enhances the truth of the material”.

The only signs to emerge from this paint-canvas merger, which relate directly to an objective reality, are the numbers. Numbers which, first of all, appeared in the cycle of the *Tre linee con arabesco*,<sup>13</sup> in order of number the works. Numbers which, then, in the *Numerazioni*, sort of underlined the signs, the sets of signs, and rendered literal their arrival on the canvas, showing that the temporal order of the layout of the signs did not necessarily take into account any spatial organization. In 1993, the *Canone aureo*, the golden number, lent its name to a new cycle, in which the painter found an object responding to his greatest preoccupations: the shar-

ing, over and above any time-frame, of an object deeply rooted in time—in effect the number was formalized by Euclid more than 2,300 years ago, but its applications go back much further, and, at the same time, it is presented as infinite—but also of an abstract object which offers, in itself, a clue to its possible visible interpretation—as decimals are added to it, these decimals become smaller, producing a kind of numeral vortex. “This number does not progress. It spirals into the unknown”,<sup>14</sup> Griffa incidentally writes about it. And in his painting, it spirals over the canvases. It undulates, it whirls, it follows the motifs or subsequently creates new ones. “The number is a sign, an image used at the service of something other than itself, [...] [but] I could not use numbers outside their function. They would have become unacceptable decorative tinsel in my work.”<sup>15</sup> If he denies producing anything akin to decorative aestheticism,<sup>16</sup> the recourse to the golden number nevertheless incorporates his painting more overtly in the trans-temporal continuity that he is seeking, in a more direct and almost evident way, thus touching upon the question of illustration, while his painting draws close to a universal writing, exceeding the power of poetry inasmuch as it is precisely not linguistic.

Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe

and I guess that dies with us

enough to cancel all that comes

What came is gone forever every time

That’s good! That leaves it open for no regret

[...]

Is it only the sun that shines once for the mind,

only the flash of existence, than none ever was?<sup>17</sup>

It simultaneously shades off and sketches out. No stroke is assured, no line is straight; it wavers and it sways; the paper itself is sometimes torn at the edge, and as for the canvas, it brushes against the wall. Gently, letting the slightest breath of air move it a little.



Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition Giorgio Griffa: Painting into the Fold, Bergen Kunsthall, 2015.  
 Avec à gauche / With, on the left: Canone Aureo 868, 2014. Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas, 204 x 120 cm.  
 À droite / On the right: Viola sotto, 1989. Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 240 cm.  
 Au fond / In the background: PAOLO E PIERO, 1982. Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 540 cm.  
 Photo: Thor Brødreskift. Courtesy Giorgio Griffa ; Casey Kaplan, New York.

Drawing and painting alike are the arena of a struggle being perpetually re-enacted: the softness and the joyousness of the colours, the vigour and the beauty of the motifs floating in their cosy little world against their insinuation in the real world, their infiltration of the woven fibres and those of the paper. The haphazard smudges take on the role of incarnating the signs they rub shoulders with, fastening them to the support, and to life.

Never the same canvas, never the same paper, more or less never the same formats lend this scene material form. How is the feeling of a repetition to be given without ever repeating yourself? "Because nothing is ever equal, because everything changes, because contamination and variation are continual, each sign is different from the others. These signs are a bit like the reflection of people who all have a mouth, a nose, and eyes, and yet are all different."

This regularity which is not systematic has something poignant about it; in it we see man struggling with his finiteness, his incompleteness, the world which precedes him and succeeds him, his humanity in the face of stable, physical, mathematical and dogmatic theories.

Man is unstable, impermanent and fragile, with a desire to inscribe, to leave a mark behind him, but this mark is also (here) impermanent. The consciousness of this impermanence; the fragile stubbornness of these paintings with their trembling layouts, done freehand—"the hand is weak, it is not a machine, it is always making mistakes"—traversed, infused, and inspired by more or less readable references, Chinese and Arabic calligraphy, Aboriginal painting, poetry, literature—there is in the curled up corners at the bottom of the canvases something of the dog-eared pages of a much-loved book—music, other works by other artists—18 "Matisse was seeking purity, I'm seeking contamination. Everything in life, in knowledge, comes from contamination" —; this interplay of intention and chance which does not clearly submit itself to evolution but rather to variations—the cycles exist together all at once, never complete, endlessly open—goes to make Giorgio Griffa's œuvre. It is all Giorgio Griffa's œuvre.

"Reason always loses to chance, to the unknown", to conclude with his own words.



Giorgio Griffa, (Pastel on paper), 1968. 67,5 × 48 cm. Photo: Giulio Caresio. Courtesy Giorgio Griffa.



1 Francesco Manacorda, "Giorgio Griffa: The Uninterrupted Sequence of Interruptions", in Giorgio Griffa, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles / analogues, 2016, p. 46.

2 Giorgio Griffa, "Intelligenza della materia", 2000, published in *I flaneur del paleolitico*, Maretti Editore, 2014, p. 50-53, quoted by Laura Cherubini in "Indeterminate Representation", Giorgio Griffa, Works: 1965-2015, 2015, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva ; Bergen Kunsthall ; Fondazione Giuliani per l'arte contemporanea, Rome ; Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Serralves, Porto / Mousse Publishing, p. 37-38.

3 Excerpt from an interview with the artist in Rome, 5 February 2016. All the other quotations which do not refer to notes come from conversations with the artist.

4 "Giorgio Griffa : Une rétrospective, 1968-2014", Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, 29.05\_16.08 2015, curated by: Andrea Bellini ; "Giorgio Griffa: Painting into the Fold", Bergen Kunsthall, 28.08\_18.10 2015, curated by: Andrea Bellini and Martin Clark ; "Giorgio Griffa: Works on Paper", Fondazione Giuliani, Rome, 5.02\_9.04 2016, curated by: Andrea Bellini, and "Giorgio Griffa: Quasi Tutto", Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Serralves, Porto, 21.05\_4.09 2016, curated by: Andrea Bellini and Suzanne Cotter.

5 Andrea Bellini, "Transcending Painting: Giorgio Griffa's Works on Paper", in Giorgio Griffa Works on Paper, 2016, Fondazione Giuliani per l'arte contemporanea, Rome / Mousse Publishing, p.16.

6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, (1921), 1., 1.1, 1.11, 1.2. Translated from the German by Frank P. Ramsey and C.K. Ogden.

7 Giorgio Griffa, "The Divine Proportion", in Giorgio Griffa, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, op. cit., p. 32: "Heisenberg's uncertainty principle belongs to our modern age. According to this, it is impossible to know the location or speed of a particle moving in space, since the energy we expend in examining one of the aspects influences the other and makes the whole thing indeterminate. This means [...] that we are part of the phenomenon we observe : we look at the world from a window, but we are also inside it, and so our observation is modified."

8 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur*, 1869. Translated by Mary Ann Caws.

9 Ezra Pound, *Cantos*, 1954.

10 Giorgio Griffa, "The Divine Proportion" in Giorgio Griffa, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, op. cit., p. 32.

11 Samuel Beckett's reply—"That's all I'm good for" —to the question asked in the special issue of *Libération*: "Why do you write? / Pourquoi écrivez-vous ?" published in 1985. It is nevertheless important to know that we are talking here in the strict sense of the choice of a medium, Giorgio Griffa having worked as a lawyer for some thirty years in tandem with his activity as a painter.

12 Giorgio Griffa, *Kunstraüm* München, 1975, reproduced in Giorgio Griffa, Works: 1965-2015, op. cit., p. 200.

13 Cycle embarked upon in 1991.

14 Giorgio Griffa, "The Divine Proportion", in Giorgio Griffa, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, op. cit., p. 32.

15 *Ibid.* p 34.

16 "These notes are for those who think my painting is a more or less elegant exercise in decorative aestheticism. I would like to tell them that I believe and trust in the lyrical value of color and signs, but I do not think of painting, and art in general, as an escape from reality, a free zone. Just the opposite: I believe art continues to be a tool of awareness and therefore an immersion in reality", in Giorgio Griffa, *Post Scriptum*, 2005, Turin, Hopefulmonster Editore, p.7.

17 Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish*.

18 *Alter Ego* is a cycle of "homage" paintings started in 1978. The first is a triptych which conjures up the work of Matisse, Klee and Klein. Others suggest influences of Uccello, Tintoretto, Beuys, Buren, Marden, Delaunay, Merz, Anselmo...

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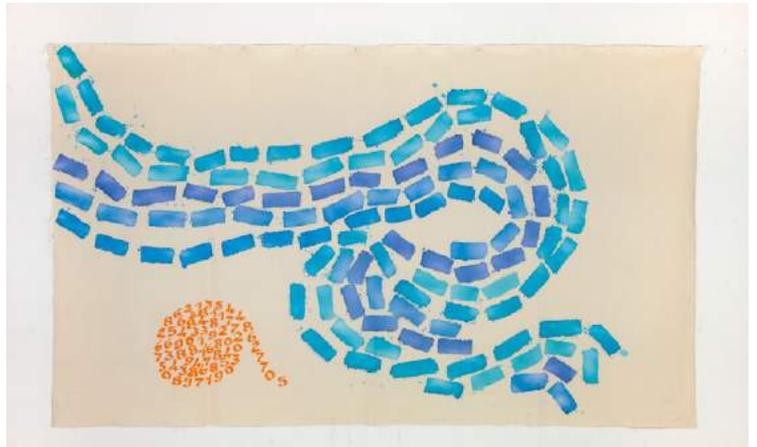
FONDATION  
VINCENT  
VAN GOGH  
ARLES

## Giorgio Griffa

From 13 February 2016 to 24 April 2016

Arabesques or numbers painted in half-tones characterize the formal simplicity and the graceful and warm minimalism of the oeuvre of Giorgio Griffa and translate a certain lyricism that is also found in the artist's poems. Griffa's unprimed, unstretched canvases covered with acrylic painting in pastel shades – "performed by the brush, by my hand, the paint, my concentration etc." – bear witness to the importance he affords to the gesture: he paints – and depicts nothing.

Giorgio Griffa's solo show at the Fondation presents old and new works, including a selection of his recent, large-format Canone aureo (Golden Ratio) canvases. Among them is Canone aureo 705 (VVG), created in 2015 specially for this exhibition and paying dazzling homage to Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* of 1889.



Giorgio Griffa, "Canone Aureo 705 (VVG)", 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 140 x 237 cm. Courtesy of the artist Photo: Giulio Caresio © The artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

This ensemble demonstrates the artist's fidelity to his thinking and action since the 1960s.

Exhibition curator: Bice Curiger

### Giorgio Griffa's biography

Born in 1936, Giorgio Griffa is one of the most radical and eloquent artists of the Italian neo-avant-garde. Although situated on the fringe of major contemporary trends, he associated himself at the start of his career with the movements Arte Povera in Italy and Supports/Surfaces in France. Griffa rose to prominence in the late 1960s for his paintings concentrated upon their fundamentals – canvas, brushstroke and colour – and for his capacity to reconcile analysis, poetry and lightness. Working on raw canvases laid flat on the ground, he applies his pale acrylic paints with brushes and sponges that release "the intelligence of the material". Convinced of the continuum of creation, the artist entrusts his line to the canvas in a gesture without end.

His process of creation includes innovative references to his predecessors, including Van Gogh, as well as to the divine proportion defined since antiquity by the golden ratio.

Griffa's works are presented in solo and group shows around the world and are held in major collections of contemporary art in Europe and the United States.

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Opening Thursday 4th February 2016  
6:00pm to 9:00pm

**Giorgio Griffa: Works on Paper**  
curated by Andrea Bellini

from 5th February to 9th April 2016

*The compulsion to repeat may manifest a lack of hope, but it seems to me that to continue to make the same thing over and over in order to arrive at different results is more than an exercise, it is the unique freedom to discover.*

Aldo Rossi, A Scientific Autobiography

On February 4th 2016, Fondazione Giuliani will present the first exhibition of Giorgio Griffa dedicated entirely to works on paper, curated by Andrea Bellini. The curator intends to highlight the significance of this aspect of the Turin-based artist's practice, presenting around fifty-five works whose chronological arch spans from the end of the 1960s until today. Beginning in 1967 and continuing through to his most recent works, Griffa's artistic research – one of the most important figures of Italian abstract painting and the neo-avant-garde – is based on three fundamental coordinates: rhythm, sequence and sign. A working methodology that the artist also consistently practices with drawing. As the artist himself maintains in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (published in the exhibition's catalogue), each drawing does not represent a "plan for a painting", even if in many cases it provides ideas for later paintings, but instead constitutes an independent aspect of his work, a sort of parallel activity to painting. His delicate drawings and watercolours, often in different formats, express the power of his large canvases. Like those, they represent the constant verification of his visual language and its narrative and lyrical possibilities, expanding his repertoire without wanting to be definitive or closed exercises.

What is universal about Griffa's works on paper, and his paintings, is the idea of the "memory" of the sign, the desire to want to individuate and practice a simple gesture that man has known and repeated for at least thirty thousand years, ever since the Palaeolithic period. Paper ceases to be a receptacle of the finished image, a definitive place, and instead becomes a physical fragment of a discontinuous, expanding space. His working methodology is simple but rigorous: the artist chooses each time the elementary components of his intervention, a sort of protocol of the making of the work. Depending on the size of the paper and the material (graphite, Indian ink, watercolour) he needs to choose the length of his signs, and thus their rhythm and direction. The next thing to do is to decide on the "place" where these signs should start. Very often the artist begins to trace the signs starting from the top left, as one does with writing, but the work could also begin from right to left, or from bottom to top. The drawing does not invade the surface according to an overall plan, but is rather destined to fill the space slowly, following a direction, rhythm and chosen frequency. The drawing up of the traits takes place in a state that the artist himself refers to as "passive concentration": his hand and mind follow the chosen protocol in a state of meditative concentration, almost like in a Zen exercise. In the exhibition at the Foundation, one can follow the entire development of Griffa's work, from the most minimal period from the end of the 1960s to the 1970s, through the more decorative and free period of the 1980s, until the last twenty years, when he has begun works with numbers (dedicated to the golden ratio) and more complex gestures.



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Giorgio Griffa: The 1970s

January 7 – February 6, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 7, 6 – 8 PM

*We used to have two worlds: a living world with men, animals, plants, and a world without life, minerals and objects. And the universe was way up there. Now everything is alive, the whole universe is life, it's just the when and the how that changes, everywhere particles work non-stop, eagerly, inside us and in the rocks, the wind, the full and empty spaces, ubiquitous ever.*

-Giorgio Griffa

Turin, December 7, 2015

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce Giorgio Griffa: The 1970s, the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. Through an ever-evolving trajectory established within the past 40 years, Griffa (b. 1936, Turin) has adroitly revealed the elemental principles constituting painting as medium. Stemming from the artist's circumnavigation of margins that dither between calculation and intuition, a distinguishable visual language emerges in uncovering the intrinsic materiality of painting. Griffa's discourse, which has become increasingly dynamic in more recent years through color variation and the illustration of characters, symbols, and numbers representative of the Golden Ratio, (also the focus of a solo exhibition to be on view this February at Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles, curated by Bice Curiger), originated from a simple mark; the unadorned line that reaches horizontally from left to right. The collection of works presented in this exhibition hail from that beginning: a period from 1970-79 in which logic was first established and the formation of a line initiated a decades-long career. Driven by notions of time, rhythm, and memory, Griffa reflects on the faculty of an anonymous, restrained gesture and its capacity to be both distinctive and integral.

Griffa's exhibition at the gallery in 2012, titled Fragments 1968 – 2012, was his first in the US since 1973 and marked his re-introduction to the New York art scene in over 30 years. In 2015, the artist has become the subject of an acclaimed traveling retrospective presented by institutions Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Fondazione Giuliani, Rome and Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto. In conveying the works' progression within each survey, from the precision of early paintings that follow the artist's unyielding rationale to the release of the brushstroke and evolution of signage, an inability to categorize the work within any single art movement persists. Bordering art historical thresholds, from Arte Povera (a concurrent movement in Griffa's native Turin and home to the artist still today) to Minimalism, whilst engaging with diverse influences and histories, Griffa defies any subjective categorization. As evidenced by this circumvention of an unequivocal classification, be it figuration or abstraction, narrative is similarly resisted.

In Griffa's observations, metaphorical and symbolic imagery exist as an overlay functioning on top of the canvas, superimposed rather than prevailing as integral to the material itself. In 1968, as a means to escape these limitations, Griffa relinquished the stretcher by laying the raw canvas on the floor so as to effectively absorb the applied color while yielding direct contact between body and surface. Seeking harmony between action and result, the artist synchronized his engagement in a rhythmic, repetitive pattern, ingraining movement into the work as the relationship between artist and instrument stemmed into a symbiotic interconnection, manifesting somewhere between the predetermined and the unconscious. Calling upon "the intelligence of the painting" through the generic simplicity of a single brushstroke, the original gesture that generated the artist's legacy, a series of horizontal lines of varying widths and color linger on; though terminate at fluctuating lengths in an effort to consider authorship within the construct of an active cessation. Initiating a process governed by reductive inclinations and a sophisticated ease, Griffa coexists with his paintings in reflection of origin and anonymity while simultaneously signaling the passing of time through a restrained interruption in a series of linear strokes.

Initially chosen instinctively, for the preliminary tone in each painting is selected at random, color is engaged to administer the following selection and so on. In effect, color assumes the role of the connector between gesture and outcome, creating a necessary formal logic that stabilizes the work in history. The resolution to eliminate connotative subject matter or content parallels the way in which color is employed, for as tones and hues seep into the canvas they become a blend of ingredients and in effect, the matter that forms imagery. Griffa bestows his work with "a capacity not inherent in it by nature, but made natural to it through man's efforts," allowing his own hand to continue on an equal plane with the authentic matter constituting each painting, through both physical and intellectual means.

As movement halts, after the paint dries and the immediacy created by the body is removed, the artist gently folds the fabric in equal parts. We are left with an archive, or record of the act of painting. In unfolding the canvas and pinning the painting to the wall, distinct lines remain, reminding us of time passed as the memory of painting becomes memorialized. In providing the viewer with the freedom of independent consideration through a limited degree of intervention and openness in composition, Griffa offers a universal language in his commemoration and celebration of painting.

Giorgio Griffa lives and works in Turin, Italy. The artist is currently the subject of a traveling retrospective touring institutions including Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, curated by Andrea Bellini, Genève, Switzerland (May 2015); Bergen Kunsthall, curated by Andrea Bellini and Martin Clark, Bergen, Norway (August 2015); and is due to travel to Fondazione Giuliani, curated by Andrea Bellini, Rome, Italy (February 2016); followed by Serralves Foundation, Porto, Portugal (May 2016). A monograph titled *GIORGIO GRIFFA: WORKS 1965 – 2015* was published by Mousse Publishing on occasion of the cycle of exhibitions dedicated to the artist's work. Griffa's work has been exhibited internationally, with solo exhibitions at venues such as Mies van der Rohe Haus, Berlin (2013) and MACRO, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2011). In 2015, the artist participated in exhibitions at Fondazione Carriero, Milan, Italy; Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini Collezione Burri, Perugia, Italy; and a group show curated by Ugo Rondinone at Secession, Vienna, Austria (2015). Griffa's work is housed in the permanent collections of Tate Modern, London, UK; Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy; Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli, Turin; GAM, Galleria di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italy; and Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. The artist is slated to present a solo exhibition at Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles, France in February of 2016.

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# THE NEW YORKER

## Galleries—Chelsea

### Giorgio Griffa

The Italian painter, who turns eighty this year, uses raw, unstretched canvas as the support for his frugal abstractions. The works here date from the seventies, when Griffa made repetitive marks (daubed stains, thin pinstripes, hazy bands) in violet, seafoam, and sunflower yellow. Often the painted lines or blotches begin in the top-left corner and proceed right and downward, giving the marks a linguistic frisson. But, in every case, spare, deliberate compositions merge with the unprimed canvas. You are always aware that the paintings are objects pinned to the wall-- not rather, makeshift curtains drawn across it.

Through February 6.  
Kaplan  
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# ARTNEWS

OPEN SESAME: ART EVENTS IN NEW YORK

## 9 ART EVENTS TO ATTEND IN NEW YORK CITY THIS WEEK

BY The Editors of ARTnews



Installation view of Giorgio Griffa's "Une Rétrospective 1968-2014" at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva, 2015.

PHOTO BY ANNIK WETTER/ COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENEVE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7

Opening: Giorgio Griffa at Casey Kaplan

Like many avant-garde Italian artists who came up during the 1960s and '70s, Giorgio Griffa is hardly a household name in America—he has had one solo show in the United States in the past 25 years. (Meanwhile, in Europe, Griffa has a traveling retrospective.) Now, Casey Kaplan Gallery makes another case for why Griffa should be better known to Americans. Focusing on work made during the '70s, this show looks at Griffa's work after he decided to paint onto raw canvas laid on the floor. Made up mostly of parallel lines, the resulting work recalls Minimalism, but with a decidedly human touch—Griffa's hand is always present.

Casey Kaplan, 121 West 27th Street, 6–8 p.m.

# GIORGIO GRIFFA

## *A Retrospective 1968-2014*

### 28.05 — 19.08.2015

The Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève is happy to present a retrospective of the Italian artist Giorgio Griffa from May 28 to August 23, 2015.

One of the most radical and articulate artists of the avant-garde working in Italy today, Giorgio Griffa became known in the late 60s for his paintings reduced to their essential components: canvas, colours and brushstrokes. The Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève presents an exhibition covering his oeuvre between 1968 and 2014.

The work of Griffa transcribes an idea of rhythm, sequence and the repetition of minimal gestures on non-stretched canvas, nailed to the walls and simply folded when not on display. The grid created through constantly folding them becomes part of the paintings' pattern, erasing the distinction between support and surface as well as abolishing the idea of painting as "open window".

Griffa is associated with Minimalism, due to his interest in repetition, seriality, and formal dispossession. He is, however, unique within the movement for his refusal of geometric rigor and the obliteration of the artist's hand. Giorgio Griffa produces works that combine avant-garde and tradition, simplicity and complexity.

Giorgio Griffa's exhibition at the Centre d'Art Contemporain will comprise approximately forty works, covering the different stages of his development, from the *horizontal lines*, which he is renowned for since 1968 to his *Alter Ego* pieces dedicated to different artists of the recent or distant past; from *Arabesco*, a sequence of numbered works from the 90s, to his more recent paintings.

This exhibition is part of a wide curatorial project initiated by the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, which will bring together, in addition to this retrospective, three other exhibitions in Europe:

*Giorgio Griffa, Painting in the fold*, Kunsthalle Bergen, (28.08-18.10.2015). Curated by Andrea Bellini and Martin Clark.

*Giorgio Griffa, Works on paper*, Fondazione Giuliani, Rome, (04.02-09.04.2016). Curated by Andrea Bellini.

*Giorgio Griffa, Quasi tutto*. Serralves Museum, Oporto, (Summer 2016). Curated by Andrea Bellini and Suzanne Cotter.

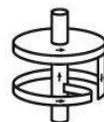
An artist's book with contributions from Andrea Bellini (Director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève), Hans Ulrich Obrist (Serpentine London), Chris Dercon (Tate Modern), Suzanne Cotter (Serralves), Laura Cherubini, Luca Cerizza, Marianna Vecellio and Martin Clark (Kunsthalle Bergen) will also be published by Mousse Publishing.

Giorgio Griffa was born in 1936 in Turin, where he still lives and works. Solo presentations of his work include MACRO, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2011), Neuer Kunstverein, Aschaffenburg (2005), Städtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf (1978) and Sonnabend Gallery, New York (1970), among others. His work was presented in the 38th and 40th Venice Biennale in 1978 and 1980, as well as in group exhibitions at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Museum Abteiberg, Kunstverein Münster, Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Kunstverein Hannover, Stadtische Museum,

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**Giorgio Griffa**  
**Painting into the Fold**

28. August 2015.: 20.00 – 18. October 2015

Opening

28. august, 20:00



One of the most radical and articulate artists of the neo-avant-garde working in Italy today, Giorgio Griffa came to prominence in the late 1960s for his intense and highly concentrated paintings which are reduced to their essential components: canvas, colours and brushstrokes.

Emerging at a time when many of his peers in the Italian art world were moving towards more sculptural, object-based practices – most notably those associated with the Arte Povera movement whom Griffa worked alongside in Turin – his commitment to painting as both an aesthetic endeavor and an exploration of the intelligent, active nature of materials and matter, has remained the focus of his own work for nearly five decades.

Griffa's painting transcribes an idea of rhythm, sequence and the repetition of minimal gestures onto unprimed and unstretched, folded canvases. Working horizontally on the studio floor, the various and often primitive marks, lines and motifs are applied with a brush or sponge in a manner that is more reminiscent of calligraphy or design. Rather than the paint being built up or held on the surface of the canvas, it instead soaks into the fibres of the raw fabric, staining it, saturating it and transforming it. It is a painterly language that has retained an extraordinary consistency for more than 40 years.

In 1993 Griffa began an ongoing series, *Canone Aureo*, in which he depicted the 'golden number'. Painted at various scales, and in various colours and patterns, it is treated much like the other more or less abstracted signs and symbols that Griffa employs. First defined by Euclid in the third century BC, it has captivated mathematicians, philosophers, artists and architects for thousands of years. Infinite in its decimal manifestation, no matter how many decimal points one adds the number never increases. Instead it spirals in on itself, collapsing into smaller and smaller spaces of reality – a fold or fissure opening into the unknown and the unknowable.

Griffa has likened it to the myth of Orpheus, writing: "Orpheus descended into Hades, he physically entered the unknown... And we are not talking about superstition here. I would say that we are dealing rather with knowledge arrived at indirectly, by metaphor, by analogy" Griffa's work, then, might be seen as an attempt to approach these universal and essential spaces of knowledge and knowing. As he writes: "Painting itself is provisional knowledge... Every mark of the brush is a real phenomenon, every piece of canvas is a piece of reality."

Giorgio Griffa (b. 1936) lives and works in Turin.

Curated by Andrea Bellini and Martin Clark.

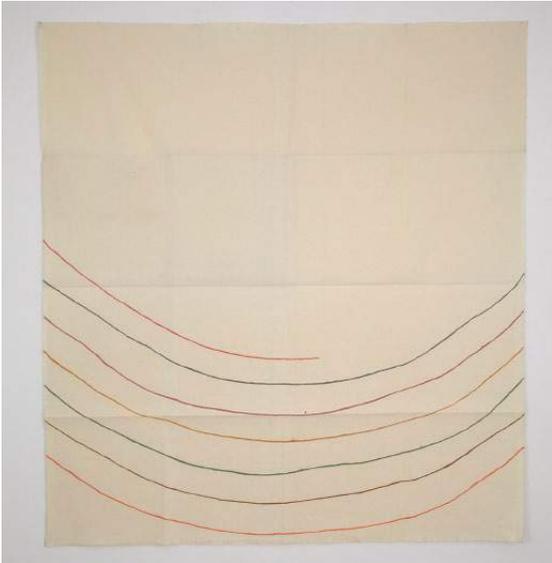
This exhibition is a collaboration with CAC - Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneve, Serralves Museum, Porto and Fondazione Giuliani, Rome. It is accompanied by a catalogue published by Mousse Publishing, including a complete chronology of the artist's work and life, and newly commissioned texts by Andrea Bellini, Laura Cherubini, Martin Clark, Luca Cerizza, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Chris Dercon and Suzanne Cotter.

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# ARTFORUM

## BEST OF 2015: DANIEL BIRNBAUM



Giorgio Griffa, *Dalla terra al cielo (From Earth to Sky)*, 1979  
acrylic on canvas, 93.5 x 88"

4

GIORGIO GRIFFA (CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENEVE; CURATED BY ANDREA BELLINI) Referring to his striking abstractions as his "little rags", Italian painter Griffa has long aspired to create a revolution from the home rather than from the barricades. Although his art takes the golden ratio, the Fibonacci sequence, and other eternally valid geometries as its starting point, these paintings are firmly rooted in our mundane world, as titles such as *From Earth to Heaven* attest. It's just that he was--and is--a bit ahead of most of us, as became astonishingly evident in this large retrospective. Griffa could almost be an emerging artist, a buddy of Sergej Jensen's. Take a painting such as *Dall'alto*, 1968, the oldest work in the exhibition, and put it in any current show with students of Michael Krebber--it would outshine most through its humble economy.

# ARTFORUM

## Giorgio Griffa

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENÈVE

**IT HAS BEEN** more than fifty years since Donald Judd famously declared “European art” over and done with. The American artist’s pronouncement, voiced in an oft-cited 1964 conversation with Bruce Glaser and Frank Stella and grounded in his perception that the work of the Continent’s painters was woefully mired in the past, marks a particular tipping point in transatlantic rivalries; until recently, a similar bias tended to color most accounts of art since Minimalism. Artists abroad, it was often suggested, simply missed the developments of the 1960s—not least by continuing to paint. Yet the past two decades have seen important shifts in thinking. Thanks to recent scholarship, as well as some remarkable exhibitions—I think especially of the seminal “As Painting: Division and Displacement,” held at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, in 2001, which helped call attention to a range of French practices in particular—we are seeing a veritable upsurge of interest in what one might call “Minimalism-adjacent” painting in Europe in the 1960s and ’70s. Recent gallery shows in New York of work by Simon Hantai, Supports/Surfaces, and Niele Toroni (who is also receiving institutional attention), among others, are to be seen in this light, and so, perhaps, is renewed interest in that city and elsewhere in roughly contemporaneous achievements by Italian painter Giorgio Griffa.

Now in his seventy-ninth year, Griffa was born in Turin and began showing there in 1968. His emergence coincided both with an explosion of extrapictorial practices and with the Italian Hot Autumn, a period that saw many younger artists—including those associated with Arte Povera—rethinking the premises and the social standing of their work. Griffa was no exception: In a recent interview with curator Marco Meneguzzo, he recalls his contemporary opposition to traditional modes of authorship, and his desire to ground his practice in notionally anonymous signs: “That my ‘little rags’ should get around was a revolutionary condition not lived as a ‘terrorist bomber’ but as a ‘housewife.’” (Typically for Griffa, the artist’s somewhat elliptical phrasing places him in a decidedly passive posture, grammatically as well as by virtue of the thematic contrast between incendiary partisan and notionally unassuming homemaker.) Nonetheless, as the reference to “little rags” suggests, he remained—and remains to this day—doggedly committed to painting, and to the “humbling” of gesture he believes is uniquely capable within that medium. His canvases with highly reduced signs did in fact circulate, appearing in some of Europe’s most prestigious galleries, as well as in the 1978 and 1980 Venice Biennales. Institutional recognition, however, long eluded him.

An important survey at the Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève therefore signals a sea change in the painter’s international reception. Curated by CAC director Andrea Bellini, and following in part on the critical success of the artist’s 2013 exhibition at Casey Kaplan in New York, it is the first of four exhibitions to be held between May 2015 and September 2016, preceding affiliated shows at Bergen Kunsthall in Norway, the Fondazione Giuliani in Rome, and the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves in Porto, Portugal. These forthcoming projects will, one hopes, highlight different facets of this expansive body of work. In the meantime, Bellini’s presentation offers an illuminating overview of the painter’s corpus, as represented by just thirty-five carefully chosen and perfectly installed paintings. More than half of the featured works,

significantly, date from the ’60s and ’70s, and these emerge as integrally involved in a broader, international transformation of painterly practice.

Developments in France, in particular, offer ready references for the work in the galleries. Griffa’s emphasis on repeated, seemingly neutral gestures recalls the positions staked out publicly as of 1967 by Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Toroni, though the Italian painter varies his mark from one work to the next. At the same time, his commitment to the subjective qualities of color (Griffa’s tones are always mixed, so as to signal the residue of authorial choice) and technique of staining unprimed cloth with acrylic pigment suggest affinities with Supports/Surfaces and especially the work of Claude Viallat; in fact, something like the latter’s own painterly device—the bean-shaped sign he adopted in 1966—appears in certain works by Griffa of the ’70s. The painter’s programmatic recourse to unstretched canvas and the traces of folds that result from the works’ storage, a defining feature of his practice since 1968, only reinforce the sense of proximity to Supports/Surfaces, placing his canvases on a par with other, decidedly physical, and, as it were, “modest” linens produced by artists in that group: Think of Noël Dolla’s marked and stained tea towels and floor cloths of the later ’60s and ’70s or Patrick Saytour’s use of tablecloths, curtains, and blankets, among other supports, throughout the same period.

Yet Griffa’s paintings appear open-ended, indeed deliberately suspended, in ways that set them apart. Unlike the majority of work produced by his French peers, the artist’s canvases are never allover, nor do his motifs produce the effects of optical expansion, of seeming endlessness or boundlessness, so often evoked by Viallat’s fields in particular. Rather, he interrupts his marking midstream, always leaving a significant expanse of blank canvas—a gesture his writings and interviews suggest is rooted in resistance to utopian attitudes and a concomitant desire to foreground the finitude of action, its inevitably situated and oriented nature, within the limited arena of the painting itself. The first canvas in the Geneva show, *Da sinistra*



From left: Giorgio Griffa, *Da sinistra (From the Left)*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 48 × 37 3/8". View of "Giorgio Griffa: A Retrospective 1968–2014," 2015. From left: *Sei colori (Six Colors)*, 1977; *Obliquo (Diagonal)*, 1976. Photo: Annik Wetter.



(From the Left), 1969, announces this quality of Griffa's work. Short strokes of rose-colored paint in irregular horizontal rows proceed, writing-like, from the canvas's left edge, barely penetrating the vertical, page-like expanse before breaking off and commencing anew—as if to underscore the seemingly straightforward but in fact exceedingly fragile task of putting one touch after another, of remaining sufficiently present to the work to construct it bit by bit. (Many works show him concluding not simply with the terminal line in a series of repeating signs, but by breaking the final trace midway.) Also relevant, one suspects, are the etymological associations of sinistrality with awkwardness—the idea of the “gauche” that Roland Barthes would soon make central to his account of Cy

### Griffa's painting is consistently keyed to a sense of physical traversal through time and space: line as ductus, not contour.

Twombly's work—on the one hand (those repeating, deliberately “artless” signs), and femininity on the other (the gendered connotation of their pinkish tone).

Griffa's interest in the limits of agency informs a broader characteristic of his practice through at least the later '70s: the centrality of line. His painting is essentially colored drawing, and it is consistently keyed to a sense of physical traversal through time and space: line as ductus, not contour. Although the signs sometimes break across a crease in the canvas—a phenomenon that, as Barry Schwabsky has noted, suggests that the fold preceded the trace—each gesture nonetheless appears to result from a single movement, a unique kinetic impetus. Yet in each instance, the use of staining suggests a trajectory integrally conditioned by its material circumstances. (Morris Louis is among Griffa's avowed references, and his stripe paintings in particular stand behind much of the work in Geneva.) The signs at the CAC vary: *Linee orizzontali*

(Horizontal Lines), 1974, stands in for the hundreds of paintings of strictly left-to-right lines Griffa completed in his early years, while others run a gamut from the erratic paths of *Linee policrome* (Polychrome Lines), 1973, to the controlled curves of *Dalla terra al cielo* (From Earth to Heaven), 1979. One clearly feels the authorial decision or governing “rule” behind each mark, yet the edges of the lines bleed irregularly into the support, just as one color seeps unpredictably into another where the traces cross. Elsewhere, the artist deploys thicker, variously oriented segments that function as post-Matissean colored shapes, as in *Obliquo* (Diagonal), 1976, or *Sei colori* (Six Colors), 1977. Here the uneven saturation of the pigment is even more pronounced, reminding us that while the painter chooses how to proceed, the results of that decision are not entirely up to him.

The folds that mark Griffa's support foreground the physical context for action and also effectively constitute another system of drawing. Folding, as this painter practices it, appears as a deductive process par excellence: His divisions proceed from the literal putting-in-contact of opposed corners and edges; they measure and map the support from which they derive. The results vary accordingly—from a simple vertical bisecting a small, markedly horizontal support (*IN[VISIBLE]*, 2007) to central axes (as in *Da sinistra* and other, midsize formats) to allover grids composed of variously taller or wider rectangular areas in the larger works (as evinced by *Obliquo policromo* [Polychrome Diagonal], 1972, or *Sei colori*). Whether unique pleats or edge-to-edge armatures, the creases provide a rigorously linear foil to the painter's comparatively variable, soaked-in signs. Indeed, these two orders of drawing—the one that he does *with* the canvas, and the one that he does *on* or more precisely *in* it—frequently make contact, as in *Dalla terra al cielo* or *Obliquo rosa* (Pink Diagonal), 1973, to take just two examples. But the former mode also underscores how much of the canvas remains untouched by the latter—like unmarked bars of a musical score. Importantly, as in the earlier *Da sinistra*,

Griffa's pastel tones encourage associations with femininity, as do the repetitive, “menial” actions of folding and marking the cloth supports. Here as elsewhere, the painter who would later claim to have lived the late-'60s moment as a “housewife” appears to identify with decidedly non-heroic—indeed, socially unrecognized—forms of embodied labor: practices explicitly grounded in repetitive, everyday routines (a housewife's work is never done). (Much more could be said about the limits of this identification, and of the larger, decidedly uneasy entanglement of art, gender, and labor in the notionally “impersonal” abstraction of this period, and not just Griffa's.)

That we nonetheless remain within the domain of art—and a decidedly masculine canon—is clear from the long-running series “Alter Ego,” 1979–2008. Throughout that suite, and closely aligned with the artist's interest in what he has called “the immense internal memory” of painting, Griffa's “writing” is overtly citational, indeed intertextual. Represented in Geneva by *Paolo e Piero*, 1982 (in reference to Paolo Uccello and Piero Dorazio); *Matisseria N.1*, 1982; and *DDB (DA DANIEL BUREN)*, 1997, the group also includes references to Yves Klein, Paul Klee, Joseph Beuys, and other figures the painter believes helped pave the way for him. This self-consciousness is not, to my eye, a good thing for Griffa's art: The results too often reveal a stylized, somewhat precious quality that also undermines the recent paintings from the “*Canone aureo*” (Golden Ratio) series, 1993–, canvases inscribed with necessarily truncated fragments of the titular proportion in number form. (There were four such works in Geneva, from between the years 2012 and 2014.) Yet the homage to Buren in particular—a work whose repeating vertical stripes immediately conjure its dedicatee—does have the virtue of making explicit one of the limits of “anonymity” in art: Even ostensibly impersonal signs remain bound to historical individuals, who are conditioned in turn by a larger tradition. Griffa, one gathers, has known this all along. □

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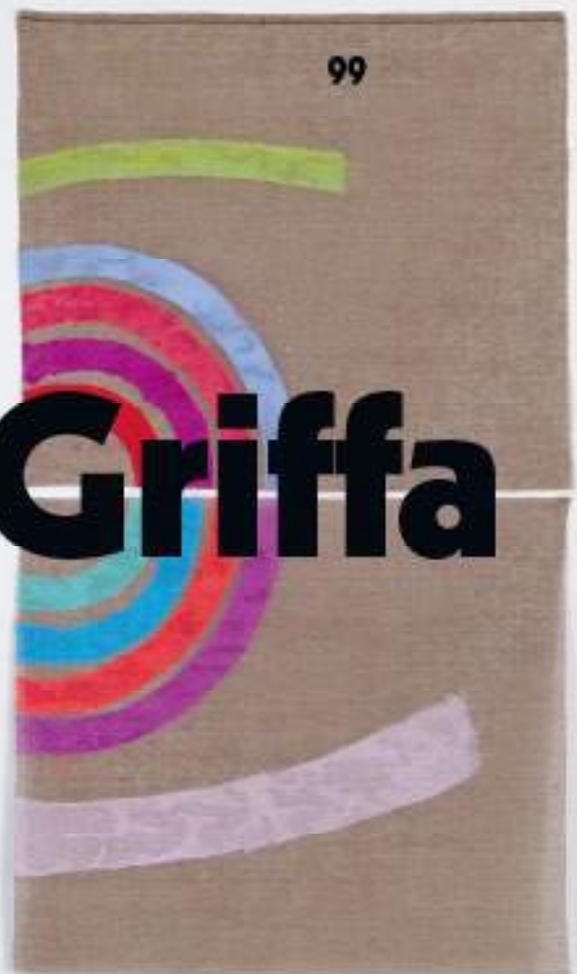
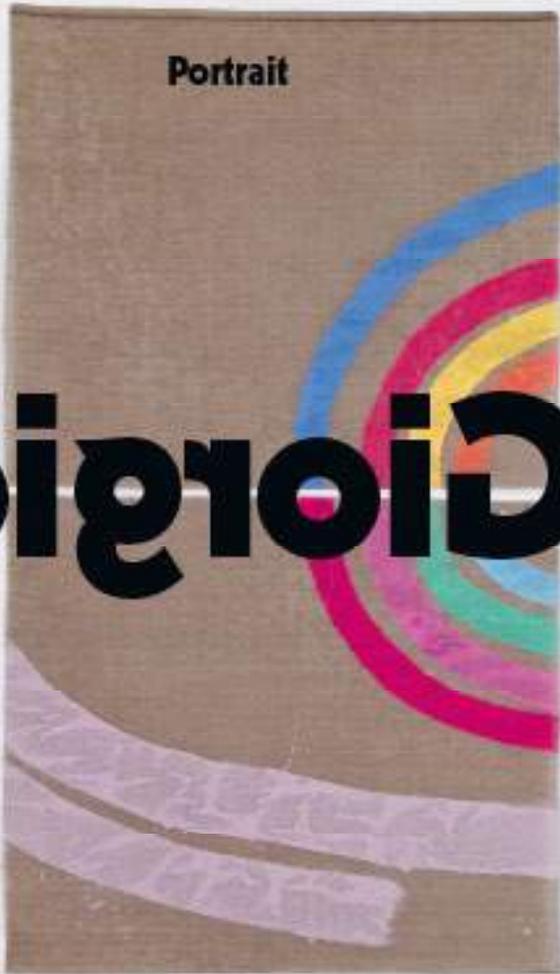
From left: Giorgio Griffa, *Matisseria N.1*, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 9' 10 1/2" x 11' 5 1/2". From the series “Alter Ego,” 1979–2008. View of “Giorgio Griffa: A Retrospective 1968–2014,” 2015. From left: *Spugne* (Sponges), 1969; *Obliquo giallo* (Diagonal Yellow), 1971. Photo: Annik Wetter. Giorgio Griffa, *Canone aureo 443* (Golden Ratio 443), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 63 x 39 1/2". From the series “*Canone aureo*,” 1993–.



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# SPIKE

by. Eva Fabbris  
Summer 2015



**oigroid Griffa**

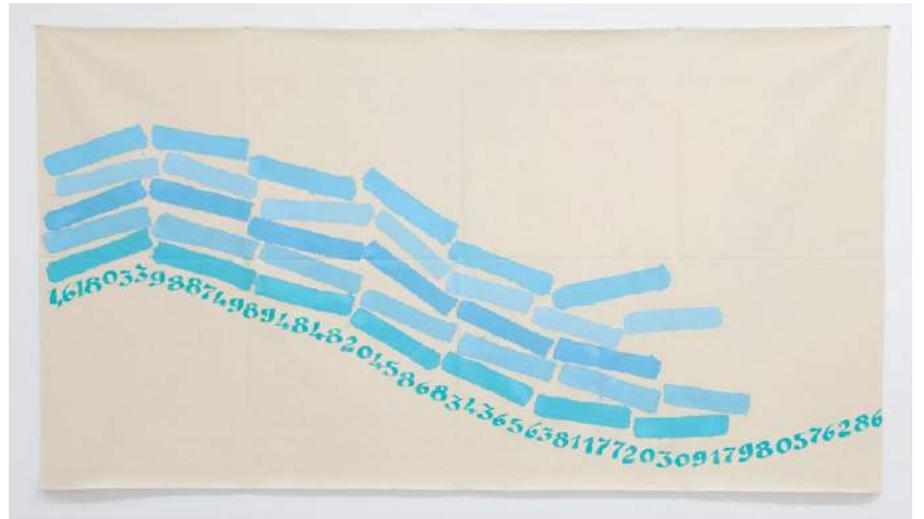
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Casey Kaplan  
Casey Kaplan and Eva Fabbris



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1 Installationsansicht / Installation view "The Dance of the Neurons", Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome 2015  
 Courtesy of Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome

2 CANONE AUREO 286, 2014  
 Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on linen, 160 x 300 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

3 CANONE AUREO 339, 2014  
 Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on linen, 160 x 100 cm  
 Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome

4 GIORGIO GRIFFA, 2014  
 Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome

5 CANONE AUREO 820, 2014  
 Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on linen, 158 x 97 cm  
 Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome

6 CANONE AUREO 443, 2012  
 Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 100 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

7 VIOLA SOTTO, 1989  
 Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 240 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

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CANONE AUREO 638, 2014  
Acrylic and Luminant / Acrylic on linen, 150 x 194 cm  
Courtesy Galleria Lorenz O'Neill, Rome

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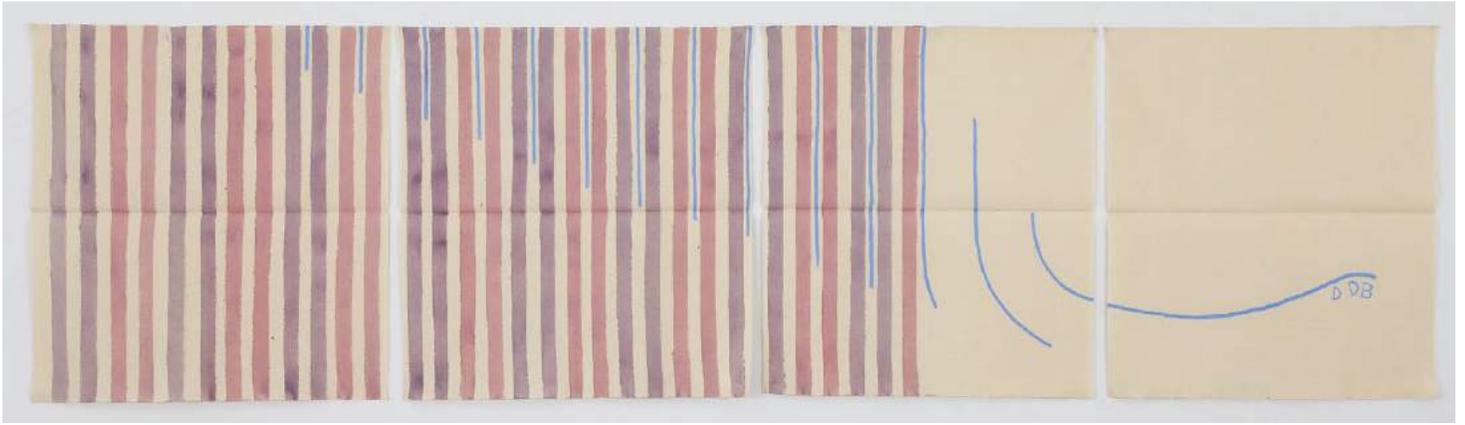


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1 ROSSO SOTTO, 2003  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 147 x 207 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

2 PENNELLATE POLICROME, 1969  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 71 x 220 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

3 CANONE AUREO 798, 2013  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 163 x 100 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

4 PAOLO E PIERO, 1982  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 540 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

5 DDB (DA DANIEL BUREN), 1997  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 118 x 459 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

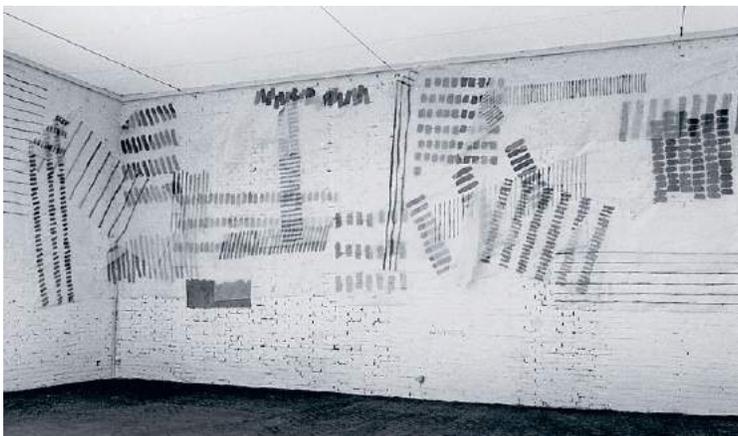
6 LINEE ORIZZONTALI IN VERTICALE, 1970  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on linen, 289 x 192 cm*  
*Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome*

7 SEZIONE AUREA - OBLIQUO - FINALE 628, 2010  
*Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 245 x 620 cm*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York*

8 DIONISO, 1980  
*Installationsansicht / Installation view La Biennale di Venezia, 1980*  
*Acryl auf 21 Leinwände / Acrylic on 21 canvases*  
*Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Lorcan O'Neill*

Photo: Cathy Carver (2); Jean Yong (3); Nanda Lanfranco (8)

8





ANONE, AUREO 798 (Detail), 2013  
Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 163 x 100 cm  
courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

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**Warum interessiert man sich gerade jetzt für das Werk Giorgio Griffas? Vielleicht weil er mit seriellen Gesten und ungrundiert an die Wand genagelten Leinwänden schon um 1970 viel von dem vorwegnahm, was die heutige Malerei umtreibt. Eva Fabbris erzählt die Entwicklung dieser Ausnahmeposition zwischen Konzeptkunst und Arte Povera.**

**Why are people now taking a renewed interest in Giorgio Griffa's work? Perhaps because around 1970 he had already anticipated many of the concerns of painting today, with his serial gestures and unprimed canvases nailed onto the wall. Eva Fabbris writes about how the artist developed a unique position between Conceptual art and arte povera.**

D Eine nicht aufgespannte, bemalte Leinwand zu falten ist eine einfache, elegante und recht banale Möglichkeit, sie wegzuräumen. Und es betont ihre „Materialität“. „Die Falten sind Teil der Komposition. Aber das ist nur eine formale Eigenschaft und nicht so wichtig. Sie kann sich verändern. Wichtig ist, dass der Stoff selbst ein Protagonist ist – und nicht neutraler Hintergrund. Wichtig ist mir auch, dass sich meine Arbeit über die Zeit verändern kann, wie ein lebender Organismus, und sich die Falten verändern oder verschwinden. Ich falte die Stoffe, weil das die herkömmliche Art ist, sie zu lagern“, erklärt der 1936 in Turin geborene Maler Giorgio Griffa. Wird eine seiner Leinwände für eine Ausstellung hervor geholt, ergänzen die durch die Lagerung entstandenen Falten die darauf gemalten farbigen Zeichen. Für die Hängung wird der Stoff nicht aufgespannt, sondern nur den oberen Rand entlang an die Wand genagelt.

E Folding an unmounted painted canvas is a simple, neat, and really quite ordinary way of putting it away. And it is a way of reaffirming its “material” quality. “The original creases are part of the composition. But this is only a formal quality, and not so important. It may change. It is important that the free fabric is a protagonist – that it is not neutral. And it is important that my work can change in time, like a living organism, and the creases may alter or disappear. I fold the fabrics because this is the normal way to store them,” explains Giorgio Griffa (born in Turin, 1936). When a painted canvas is taken out for an exhibition, the creases that have formed during storage will add to the coloured signs already traced on it. It will not be stretched, just nailed to the wall along

the upper edge. The inclusion of creases in the play of abstract compositions have by now become familiar features in the contemporary art world: from Tauba Auerbach's sophisticated compositions to the crisp, powerful lyricism of N Dash's surfaces. It is surprising to find an independent, radical anticipation of this sensitivity in Griffa's work from the 1960s. After studying law and attending the Accademia Albertina in Turin, he worked simultaneously as a painter and civil lawyer. He was a member of the concrete art movement and was in dialogue with many artists, particularly Aldo Mondino and the Arte Povera group. He exhibited with the latter in 1969 at Galleria Sperone in Turin, which had already put on a solo exhibition of his work. His first exhibition

Das Zusammenspiel von Falten und abstrakten Kompositionen ist in der zeitgenössischen Kunstwelt mittlerweile ein weit verbreitetes Stilmittel: von Tauba Auerbachs ausgefalteten Kompositionen bis zum spröden, ausdrucksstarken Lyrismus von N. Dashes Oberflächen. Es ist verblüffend, in den 1960er Jahren im Werk Griffas eine eigenständige, radikale Vorwegnahme dieser Sensibilität zu finden. Nach einem Jurastudium und dem Besuch der Turiner Accademia Albertina arbeitete er gleichzeitig als Maler und als Anwalt für Zivilrecht. Er gehörte der Bewegung Konkreter Kunst an und stand mit vielen Künstlern im Austausch, vor allem mit Aldo Mondino und den Protagonisten der Arte Povera. Mit letzteren stellte er 1969 in der Turiner Galleria Sperone aus, wo er zuvor eine Einzelausstellung gehabt hatte. Seine erste Ausstellung in den USA war 1970 in der Galerie Sonnabend. In letzter Zeit erfährt Griffas Werk vor allem seit seinen Einzelausstellungen

in America was at Sonnabend Gallery in 1970. There has been a renewal of interest in Griffa's work, particularly since his solo shows in 2012 and 2013 at Casey Kaplan in New York.

Griffa envisions a form of “painting that represents nothing other than itself.” To some extent, his art reflects the interests of a number of artists who began reconsidering painting in terms of its traditional elements in the late 60s. As the Italian critic Filiberto Menna pointed out at the time, the analytical approach of this genre was typical of conceptualism. Within conceptual art, the need to define artistic activity was being reaffirmed, bringing to light the structure of visual language. In a sort of methodological decanting, painting thus began to make use of the linguistic and poetic forms

D in der Casey Kaplan Galerie in New York 2012 und 2013 erneutes Interesse.

Griffa ist von der Suche nach einer Form der Malerei bestimmt, „die nichts anderes als sich selbst darstellt“. Er teilte dieses Interesse mit einer Reihe von Künstlern der späten 60er Jahre, die traditionellen Elemente der Malerei zu hinterfragen. Wie der italienische Kritiker Filiberto Menna damals erklärte, war der analytische Ansatz dieses Genres typisch für den Konzeptualismus. In der Konzeptkunst wurde die Notwendigkeit, zu definieren was künstlerische Tätigkeit bedeutet, neu aufgeworfen – mit dem Ergebnis, dass die Struktur der Bildsprache zum Thema wurde. Auch die Malerei begann die linguistischen und poetischen Formen zu integrieren, die für diesen Ansatz typisch waren. „Analytische Malerei“ erforschte die Bedeutungen, die jedem Element der Malerei zugrunde liegen: Leinwand, Farbe und Pinselstrich wurden untersucht und auf ihren Kern reduziert. Das führte oft zu serieller Wiederholung wie man sie aus dem Minimalismus kennt. Doch anders als im Minimalismus ist Griffas Herangehensweise an Malerei nicht programmatisch: „Zunächst einmal ist der Einsatz von traditionell malerischen Materialien keine theoretische Entscheidung für ‚Malerei‘ als Medium im Gegensatz zu anderen. Es ist eine praktische Entscheidung, bestimmt durch meine Möglichkeiten, mein Wissen, meine Fähigkeiten und persönlichen Grenzen. Ich habe immer gesagt, dass Malerei gegenüber anderen Medien weder als privilegiert noch als reduktiv gesehen werden darf.“

GIORGIO GRIFFA, geboren 1936 in Turin. Lebt in Turin. AUSSTELLUNGEN: *A Retrospective 1968 – 2014, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Genf (solo)*; *Artists and Poets, Secession, Wien (2015)*; *Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rom (solo)*; *The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (solo) (2014)*; *39greatjones, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich (2013)*; *Mies van der Robe Haus, Berlin (solo)*; *Fragments 1968 – 2012, Casey Kaplan, New York (solo) (2012)*; *MACRO, Rom (solo) (2011)*. VERTRETEN VON: *Casey Kaplan, New York*; *Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rom*

E that were typical of this approach. “Analytical painting” investigated the underlying meaning of the medium’s basic elements: canvas, colour, and brushstroke were examined and reduced to their essence. This operation often took the meticulous form of reiteration, in the manner of minimalism. Unlike minimalism, however, Griffa’s approach to painting is not programmatic: “First of all, the choice of the media forming part of the traditional ones of painting is not a theoretical choice for ‘painting’ in contrast with other media. It is a practical choice determined by my conditions, knowledge, capacities, and personal limits. For some time now, I have maintained that painting must not be considered either privileged or reductive with regard to other media.”

Griffa also established a methodological dialogue with the artists of

Arte Povera, and shared their interest in using a series of actions to create form. His painting process emphasizes action through the liquidity of the acrylic paint and the imprecision of the trace, and “physical” choices through the unprimed canvas, crease, and free hanging. His focus on gestures that are repeated – but unique, since they are handmade – is something he shares with his friend Alighiero Boetti. And then there is Mario Merz’s work, in which the worlds of physics and biology operate as both symbols and factual realities stuck onto similarly unstretched canvas. One example of this is Merz’s *La natura è l’equilibrio della spirale* (1976): a raw canvas featuring the first numbers of the Fibonacci series painted in a watery red, and actual snail shells applied as helical emblems of organic expansion. Though Griffa remained faithful

Griffa war methodisch auch mit den Künstlern der Arte Povera verwandt und teilte ihr Interesse daran, Formen aus einer Reihe von Handlungen zu erschaffen. Durch das Flüssige der Acryl-Farbe und die Ungenauigkeit der Spur betont sein Malprozess das Handlungsmoment, während die nicht grundierte Leinwand, die Falten und die lose Hängung „das Physische“ hervorkehren. Die Konzentration auf Gesten, wiederholt und zugleich einmalig, weil handgemacht, teilt er mit seinem Freund Alighiero Boetti. Und dann sind da die Arbeiten von Mario Merz, in dem die Welt der Physik und der Biologie sowohl Symbole wie faktische Realitäten sind, auch sie festgehalten auf Leinwänden ohne Keilrahmen. Zum Beispiel Merz’ „La natura è l’equilibrio della spirale“ (1976): eine rohe Leinwand mit den ersten Zahlen der Fibonacci-Folge, gemalt in wässrigem Rot und mit echten Schneckenhäusern, spiralförmig aufgeklebt als Embleme für organische Ausdehnung. Obwohl Griffa der Abstraktion treu blieb, hatte er eine ähnliche Idee von Kunst als Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit und des Kunstwerks als beinahe lebendigem Organismus, der für sich in Zeit und Raum existiert.

Griffa arbeitet in Serien, die alle ein Anfangsdatum haben, aber nicht unbedingt einen Abschluss. 1967 begann er mit „Segni primari“ [Primäre Zeichen], in der die originellsten und radikalsten Aspekte seines Werks zusammen finden: die Flächigkeit und die Serialität von Zeichen, die kontrolliert in ihrer Unvollkommenheit, aber klar handgemacht sind. Mitte der 60er entstand die Serie „Connessioni e Contamina-

to abstraction, he shared a similar idea that art is the construction of reality, and that the work is an almost living organism with its own existence in time and space.

Griffa’s work is organised in series, all of which have a starting date but not necessarily an end. In 1967 he began his *Segni primari*, which summarizes the most original and radical aspects of his work: the flatness and repetitiveness of signs that are controlled but clearly handmade in their imperfection. In the mid-60s, he started *Connessioni e Contaminazioni* [Connections and Contaminations], which introduced the possibility of varying the forms and sizes of the signs. And then came *Frammenti* [Fragments], with the canvas painted and cut into irregular pieces scattered around the exhibition space, and *Alter Ego*, which takes on his main sources of inspiration in the

D zioni“ [Zusammenhänge und Kontaminationen], mit der die Möglichkeit auftrat, Form und Größe der Zeichen zu variieren. Dann folgte schließlich „Frammenti“ [Fragmente], für die die Leinwand bemalt und in unregelmäßig geschnittenen Stücken über den Ausstellungsraum verteilt wurde; und „Alter Ego“, die sich Griffas Hauptinspirationsquellen aus der Malereigeschichte annimmt: „Matisse, Yves Klein, Klee, Tintoretto, Beuys, Paolo Uccello, Dorazio, Brice Marden, Merz, Anselmo, die Romanik, die internationale Gotik, der Laokoon und andere.“

Bislang existieren acht unabgeschlossene Serien nebeneinander. Die jüngste, „Golden Ratio“, Anfang der Nuller Jahre begonnen, widmet sich dem Goldenen Schnitt. Hier mischen sich Zahlen unter die gemalten Zeichen. Jedes Element, das Griffa in sein Malerei-System aufnimmt, tritt neben die schon vorhandenen. Seine künstlerische Vision ist frei von der Vorstellung eines definitiven Endpunkts. Vielmehr formulierte er sie in Jahrzehnte langen Hinzufügungen. Und diese konstante, minimale Hinzufügung unterstreicht einmal mehr die Bedeutung des Prozesses in Griffas Werk.

Was für die Serien gilt, trifft auch auf einzelne Arbeiten zu: Die farbigen Linien haben eine Richtung oder Neigung, aber kein Ziel. Man kann nicht sagen, dass sie abbrechen; eher lassen sie an einen lyrischen, ätherischen Stillstand denken. Flüssig vielleicht. Welle auf Welle. Wie jede Welle auch, ist jede Linie Griffas in ihrer Form und ihrer Stimmung einzigartig. Dennoch wiederholt sie sich: Steht man vor einer seiner

Arbeiten, pendelt man zwischen dem Verlangen sich auf jede einzelne Linie zu konzentrieren und ihr zu folgen und dem Vergnügen zu wissen, dass es noch eine weitere gibt – und dann noch eine. Die Serie, das Ensemble und die Wiederholung beruhigen und führen den Betrachter zu einer heiteren, bewussten Art von Konzentration.

Der Goldene Schnitt in Griffas Serie „Golden Ratio“ bezieht sich auf das mathematische Prinzip, das auch der Fibonacci-Reihe zugrunde liegt. Der Goldene Schnitt ist ein algebraisches Verhältnis, das sich in geometrischen Figuren wie der Spirale findet. Seit Jahrhunderten gilt es im Westen als Maß, das Proportionen vollkommener Schönheit hervorbringt. Die Spirale öffnet sich in die Unendlichkeit, und wir können uns nur ausmalen, wo sie einmal enden wird. Auch über ihren infinitesimalen Kern lässt sich nachdenken, so wie es Griffa macht, wenn er den Zahlenwert des Goldenen Schnittes in seine Malereien aufnimmt (1.6180339 ...). Nur dass dieser Wert nicht endgültig ist, da die Dezimalstellen nie aufhören: Sie sind unendlich, beschreiben also ihrerseits einen nie endenden Vortex. Diese Gleichung, die den vollendetsten Gebrauch von Raum in der Natur wie in der Kultur bestimmt, dehnt sich in ihrem Inneren immer weiter aus, in einem abstrakten Raum – der Kunst Giorgio Griffas. ✓

*Eva Fabbris ist Kuratorin und Autorin. Sie lebt in Mailand.*

*GIORGIO GRIFFA, born 1936 in Turin. Lives in Turin. EXHIBITIONS: A Retrospective 1968 – 2014, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (solo); Artists and Poets, Secession, Vienna (2015); Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome (solo); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (solo) (2014); 39great-jones, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich (2013); Mies van der Robe Hans, Berlin (solo); Fragments 1968 – 2012, Casey Kaplan, New York (solo) (2012); MACRO, Rome (solo) (2011). REPRESENTED BY: Casey Kaplan, New York; Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome*

E history of painting: “Matisse, Yves Klein, Klee, Tintoretto, Beuys, Paolo Uccello, Dorazio, Brice Marden, Merz, Anselmo, the Romanesque, the International Gothic, Laocoön, and others.”

Eight series coexist in Griffa's art, each with its own development, in some cases not yet complete. The most recent, started in the early 2000s, is devoted to the golden ratio, and includes numbers among the signs. Each element that Griffa decides to admit into his painting system is added to what is already there. His artistic vision does not contemplate the possibility of reaching a definitive endpoint. On the contrary, he has over the decades preferred to formulate it by means of addition. And this idea of constant though minimal addition further underscores the importance of process in Griffa's practice.

What is true for the series is also true for individual works: the coloured lines have a direction or an inclination, but no point of arrival. It can't be said that they are interrupted; rather one might think of a lyrical, aerial stasis. Liquid, possibly. Wave upon wave. All waves, like all of Griffa's lines, are unique in terms of form and mood. But they are repeated: when we look at one of his works, we negotiate between our desire to concentrate on each particular line, and the pleasure of knowing that there is another one – and another after that. The series, the ensemble, and the reiteration make us feel at ease and lead us to a form of light-hearted, conscious concentration.

The golden ratio in Griffa's series refers to the same mathematical principle underlying the Fibonacci series. The golden ratio (or section) is an al-

gebraic ratio at the heart of geometrical figures like the spiral. Over the centuries, it has been viewed in the West as the equilibrium underpinning proportions of perfect beauty. The spiral opens up towards infinity, and we can only imagine where it will end. Alternatively, we can reflect on its infinitesimal essence, as Griffa does when he highlights the value of the golden ratio (1.6180339 ...). But this is not the conclusive number, since the decimal places never end: they are infinite, so they, too, describe a never-ending vortex. This equation, which defines the most sublime use of space in both nature and culture, expands internally, in an abstract place that is Griffa's art. ✓

*Eva Fabbris is a curator and writer. She lives in Milan.*

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# ARTFORUM

PREVIEW - GENEVA

## “Giorgio Griffa: A Retrospective 1968-2014”

**CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENÈVE  
GENEVA**

**Through August 23**

**Curated by Andrea Bellini**

Featuring three dozen works, this exhibition forms a retrospective in nuce of an artist only belatedly receiving his institutional due. Born in Turin in 1936, Giorgio Griffa came of age when painting's increasingly embattled status often gave rise to extrapictorial experiments. If Griffa clung doggedly to painting, he refused to stretch it into framed propriety. Instead, he developed the technique he uses to this day: Applying acrylic directly to unprimed canvas, he folds and unfolds works unceremoniously, letting creases add to the effect of his pastel strokes, which are by turns geometric and whimsical, ordered and irregular. A catalogue with contributions from Martin Clark, Suzanne Cotter, Chris Dercon, Hans Ulrich Obrist, the curator, and others promises to flesh out the sparse critical literature on the artist. *Travels to Bergen Kunsthall, Norway, Aug. 28–Oct. 18; Fondazione Giuliani, Rome, Feb. 2–Apr. 4, 2016; Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal, summer 2016.*

— Ara H. Merjian

## In the studio with Giorgio Griffa

KAREN WRIGHT | Friday 2, January 2015



Giorgio Griffa was born in Turin in 1936. He moved to this current studio in a large block near the city centre ten years ago, having previously used a room in his flat that was “much bigger and brighter”. It would be hard for it not to be brighter, as the room we are in has no windows, its only illumination an obscured glass door to prevent people peering in. He admits he was so depressed after he moved in that, “I had to draw myself out of sadness”, pointing to a drawing about the addition of yellow. He also got himself some daylight bulbs to warm the light.

The Seventies block – a former storage facility for tyres – was converted to studio spaces when the tyre manufacturers left. The studios are now rented out, not only to artists, but to designers and architects. There is a commercial kitchen here as well, which supplies restaurants and caterers and now has also opened a small restaurant in the courtyard, where I had a delicious lunch.

Griffa comes to this modest room every day, working away at his semi-abstract works up on stretched canvas, all containing conceptual reasons and logical rationale. He is currently working on a series that is lying on the floor. He has been experimenting with a new canvas. It is not pure cotton, but it is mixed with a bit of synthetic material – he laughs, pointing out how the colour has leached from the lines. “That is up to the artistry of the materials, not of the artist.”

Griffa has been experimenting with the mathematical Golden Section for many years, as “it goes numerically far beyond what we can comprehend”. He includes it in his canvases in some way, along with a number of doodles and squiggles, each having some meaning. But ultimately, he points out that “every art of every time... physically enters the unknown.”

On another wooden easel are some beautiful small collages. “These are experiments. I have been working on the same paper that I get in large sheets for many years, and when I moved, one piece tore and so I ripped it off and made these small works. I would not sell them, but I have given one to a friend.” I point at his shoes, covered in paint; his jeans, also, have a tide mark of colour. There is something desirable about the vestiges of the painter. The bowls that contain his water and paint – he has been using only watercolour and Liquitex acrylics since 1967 – are thickly caked with colour.

Griffa is modest in his demeanor, but has recently been having a moment of rediscovery with a show at Macro in Rome and a gallery show in Rome. I ask him if he likes working in the complex with other artists and he responds: “It is a beautiful thing. I have always worked in isolation and here is a common house. It is a beautiful idea – a curious family with no father or mother.”

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**GIORGIO GRIFFA**

FRAGMENTS 1968 - 2012

EXHIBITION DATES: JANUARY 10 – MARCH 2, 2013

OPENING: THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 6-8PM

"I don't portray anything, I paint." Giorgio Griffa, 1973

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce FRAGMENTS 1968 – 2012, an exhibition of new and historical paintings by Giorgio Griffa (b. 1936, Torino, Italy). Spanning four decades of Griffa's career, this is the first solo exhibition of the artist's work in New York since 1970, as well as his first in the United States since 1973.

The exhibition presents a selection from over forty years of Griffa's paintings on un-stretched canvas and linen. Throughout the past four decades, Griffa has undertaken a practice that he describes as "constant and never finished", adhering to "the memory of material", and to the belief that the gesture of painting is an infinite one. Within the finite frame of his canvas, each artwork becomes a site of collaboration between painting and the painter as the hand works to reveal a constellation of signs and symbols. This relationship is further mediated by the materiality of the works: the absorption of the acrylic into the fabric from each stroke dictates the brush's next move. The completion of a canvas functions as a suspension of this relationship. After the acrylic has dried, each painting is carefully and neatly folded into uniform sections and filed as a register of their collective life as a whole.

The artworks from the late 1960s and 1970s display the use of an "anonymous" sign, the simple and repetitive movement of the artist's paintbrush to create uniform task-like marks that serve to record the process of painting. These early, minimal compositions began with ordered horizontal and vertical lines that eventually gave way to the use of sponges and fingerprints. While this period displays a shift from the anonymous to the personal, it is united through the consistency of deliberate end points or breaks in pattern and reveals the construction of the paintings as an action interrupted.

Griffa's paintings actively resist perspective and narrative, instead favoring a cyclical connection to the memory of painting as an action. Time is present through aesthetic shifts in the work that are most notable by decade. These mark making variations reveal an awareness of the artist's surroundings and provide evidence of the time within which he was working. For example, in the 1980s Griffa's practice evolved to include expressive forms and brighter tones, coexisting with discordant arrangements of unfinished planes of color. He began to utilize a more concrete set of references in the "Alter-Ego" series (1978 – 2008), in which Griffa aspired to come to terms with aspects of painting's memory within the works of other artists, such as: Henri Matisse, Mario Merz, Yves Klein, Tintoretto, Joseph Beuys as well as imagery of the Romanesque and International Gothic periods.

This shift, from ordered marks towards a broad range of gestures, eventually led to the inclusion of numerical systems into his artworks in the 1990s. Still characterizing his paintings today, the "Canone Aureo" series displays Griffa's interest in mathematical and scientific structures that underlie our natural world. These infinite sequences, such as the Fibonacci series and the Golden Ratio, act as a parallel to Griffa's practice, and additionally function as punctuations in the work's vocabulary. They also determine and organize the signs within a work. Despite these varied trajectories, it is the act of painting that always remains at the forefront. Griffa said in a recent interview with Luca Massimo Barbero: "If these works have the power to speak and to listen, I'll let them do it themselves."

Giorgio Griffa joined the gallery's program in 2011. Solo presentations of his work include MACRO, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2011), Neuer Kunstverein, Aschaffenburg (2005), Städtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf (1978) and Sonnabend Gallery, New York (1970), among others. His work was presented in the 38th and 40th Venice Biennale in 1978 and 1980, as well as in group exhibitions at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Museum Abteiberg, Kunstverein Münster, Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Kunstverein Hannover, Stadtische Museum, Monchengladbach, Kunstverein Frankfurt and Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

For further information about the artists or the exhibition, please contact Loring Randolph or Alice Conconi, [loring@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:loring@caseykaplangallery.com) and [alice@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:alice@caseykaplangallery.com).

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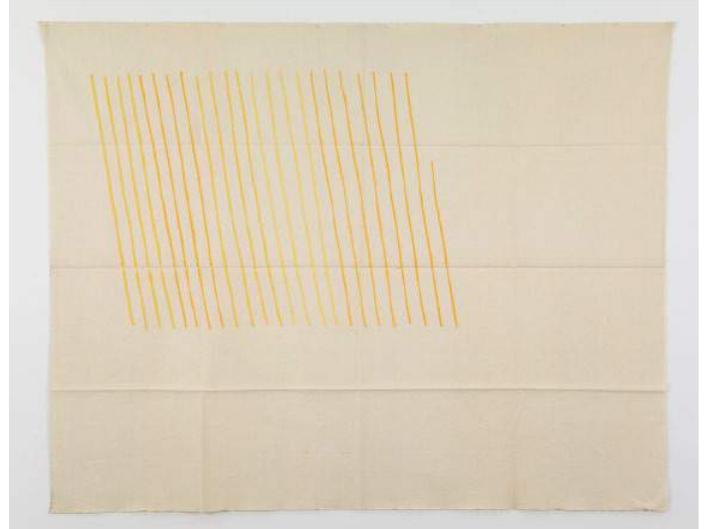
# ARTFORUM

**Giorgio Griffa**  
**CASEY KAPLAN**

"Fragments 1968- 2012" was the first solo exhibition of Giorgio Griffa's work in New York since 1970, and the first time since 1973 that the artist's paintings have been shown anywhere in the city at all. Sadly, it got off to a rocky start. Just four days after the show opened last October, a five-foot storm surge flooded West Twenty-First Street, destroying Casey Kaplan Gallery's walls and basement storage area and seriously damaging sixteen of the artist's works then on view. But all was not lost. The exhibition reopened in early January with two cleaned and restored canvases from the original hanging, as well as thirteen entirely new selections from the artist's studio, providing a welcome if belated introduction to the art of this underrecognized figure of European postwar painting.

Born in 1936, Griffa studied law in Turin and spent his formative years in the 1960s countercultural milieu of that city. By the end of the decade, he had abandoned figuration and opted instead for an approach that would characterize his work for the next forty-some years: "painting that represented nothing other than itself." The resultant compositions—if it is fair to call them that—are uniformly simple. Created in acrylic on unprimed, unstretched canvas, they typically display several iterations of a single motif—zigzags, dots, dashes, or vertical strokes. Importantly, in nearly every case, the sequence of figures appears to have been deliberately left unfinished: A line ends just before it should, or a row of dashes spans only half the support. *Linee orizzontali* (Horizontal Lines), 1973, for example, features eleven narrow stripes running across the very top of a large rectangular canvas, with the final line, colored purple, terminating quietly at the middle. Likewise, the last of the twenty-four strokes in *Obliquo giallo* (Diagonal Yellow), 1971—which look, strikingly, like hash marks ticking off days on a jail-cell wall—is only two thirds of the length of the others. Beginning in the '80s, Griffa expanded this repertoire to include a more diverse set of gestures, culminating, in the '90s, with the introduction of numerical sequences, seen here in the show's two most recent works, both made last year, which feature the early digits of the golden ratio handwritten in a loose script. The core ingredients, however, remain the same: acrylic, raw canvas, and serial motifs.

Artforum, March 2013, Vol. 51, No. 7, pp 276 -277



Giorgio Griffa, *Obliquo Giallo (Diagonal Yellow)*, 1971, Acrylic on Canvas

This seriality invites immediate comparisons to American Minimalism or to the work of Martin Barré, while the specter of BMPT hovers as well. Yet the effect of Griffa's work differs from any of these, owing to the enthusiastic embrace of the subtle imperfections that arise from the application of paint by the human hand. Take, for example, the splashes of pigment around the thick, linear brushstrokes in *Quasi dipinto* (Almost Painted), 1968, or the way in which the wavelike lines of *Festone* (Festoon), 1984—each colored differently, with paint that was applied rapidly, while still wet—bleed into one another to create tie-dye swirls of variegated color. Such divergence introduces a homespun, almost folksy vibe, and reveals Griffa's interest in exploring the range of formal possibilities within certain material constraints, a concern also evident in his use of raw canvas, with its uncontrolled absorption of paint. Notable, too, is Griffa's palette, which has been influenced by Matisse. Bright, unencumbered, and modishly cool, the colors span a range of soft pastels—lilacs, lime greens, mauves, and periwinkle blues—sometimes dropping into darker registers of red and purple.

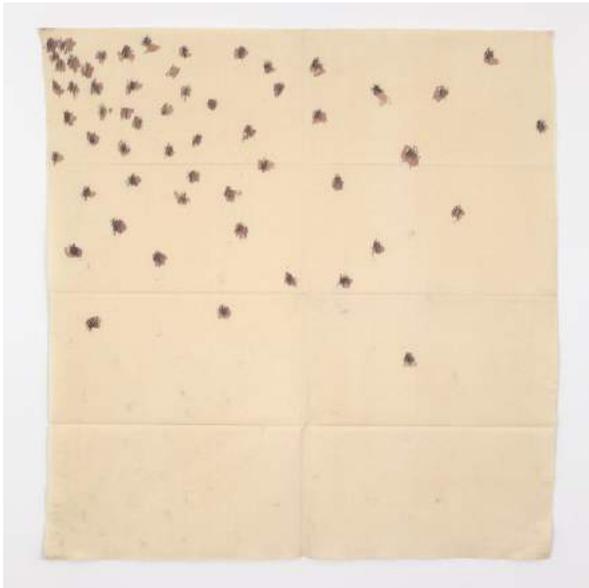
The real appeal of these works, however, rests in the surprisingly palpable effect of Griffa's anticompositional strategies. Rather than an illusionistic whole or structured totality, the accumulation of motifs suggests a process that is still under way. It is the line cut off midway or the prematurely ending series of marks that lets these works leap to life: The empty space becomes a field of unfulfilled potential, a void that begs to be filled. Early on, Griffa recognized the need "to stop just a moment before completion," to "avoid [ ... ] the final point of closure that suddenly puts the work into the past." The result is an invitation, and a reminder that the open work need not be revised to sustain its charge.

-Lloyd Wise

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# ARTFORUM



**Giorgio Griffa, Macchie (Stains), 1969, acrylic and pastel on canvas.**

consists of a tumbling constellation of acrylic daubs overlaid with scribbled pastel, was executed from top left to right.

The writerly disposition of this work dovetails seamlessly with a compulsion to foreground materiality and process, which is characteristic of the deconstructive era from which it initially issued. Indeed, the formal similarities it shares with the Supports/Surfaces movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in France are striking, but it seems blessedly unencumbered by the unwieldy Marxism that beleaguered and ultimately rent apart its French counterpart. Here a kind of pure painting thrives intact, evincing a discreet but tenacious fidelity to its most basic components: paint, canvas, and the human hand.

**Giorgio Griffa**  
**CASEY KAPLAN**  
525 West 21st Street  
January 10–March 2

“Fragments 1968–2012” traverses the past four decades of the Turin-based Italian artist Giorgio Griffa’s winsomely delicate production as a painter. And while changes in terms of content can be described throughout the fifteen paintings on view, fundamental constants remain. To wit: a commitment to mark making on unprimed and unstretched canvases, whose sheetlike folds are as much a part of their composition as the texture of their weave are a part of their fabric. Deploying a bright and airy Matissean palette, Griffa’s marks, which vary from vertical and horizontal stripes to zigzags to numbers, are manually applied in a systematic mode from left to right, and there is often a signature caesura in the middle of the canvas, as if the artist were stopping a thought midsentence: Even *Macchie (Stains)*, 1969, a personal favorite, which

*-Chris Sharp*

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# The New York Times

## ART IN REVIEW

Giorgio Griffa: 'Fragments, 1968-2012'

By ROBERTA SMITH

Published: February 7, 2013



Jean Vong, Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan

525 West 21st Street, Chelsea

The floods of Hurricane Sandy interrupted an exhibition at Casey Kaplan's gallery that was close to his heart: the Italian painter Giorgio Griffa's first New York gallery show since his debut in 1970. Like most of Chelsea, it's now up and running. It could hardly be timelier in bringing to light the work of an artist who reduces painting to its basics.

Like many younger artists, Mr. Griffa seems to test how little it takes for something to qualify as a painting. For decades he has used raw unstretched canvas of different textures and tones in a way that emphasizes portability. The paintings are simply folded up when not on view, which invariably makes the grid of fold lines part of the motif. To these surfaces he applies unruled lines and strokes that sometimes accumulate into shapes but often simply repeat for a while and then stop — as if in midsentence. The short fat strokes of "Segni orizzontali" (1975) march edge to edge across the top of the canvas in pinks and blues, for only four rows, halting halfway through the fifth row. Other paintings consist of thin wobbly lines of color also drawn edge to edge, like an Agnes Martin version of one of Kenneth Noland's stripe paintings. There are funny details: Of the three zigzag lines in the 1970 "Linea spezzata," the middle one seems to carefully jump the fold, belying the work's apparent nonchalance. In the 1969 "Macchie," a swarm of pink dots scribbled with black pastel have left ghosts on the lower, bare portion of the canvas because of folding.

Mr. Griffa's early efforts especially take advantage of the eye's reflexive tendency to read marks on flat surfaces as pictorial but repay the effort with a natural touch, a playfulness that has its own kind poetry and a determination that beauty and deconstruction are not strange bedfellows. His art deserves a place in the global history of abstraction.

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# THE NEW YORKER

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

### **GIORGIO GRIFFA**

Too little known, the subtle Italian painter has espoused minimalism-chastened abstraction of a sort related to the French Supports/Surfaces movement. Large unstretched canvases, gridded with creases, bear sparse marks-floating lines, hesitant stripes, odd curlicues-in pale, sweet colors. Insistently experimental, the works combine majestic scale with intimate touch. They impress, with charm. Call it Color-Field Povera.

Through March 2. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

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# Bloomberg

## Ending 40 - Year Hiatus, Artist Survives Sandy in NY Show.

Katya Kazakina - Jan 9, 2013



Giorgio Griffa. Festone, 1984, Acrylic on canvas

“Of course I was going to open with Giorgio’s show,” said Casey Kaplan. “I owed him that. The guy had waited for 42 years to have a show in New York.”

Griffa, 76, was born in Turin, Italy, where he still lives and works. He hasn’t been represented by a gallery since the 1970s, Kaplan said. Yet he has continued to paint every day, creating a large body of work. Much of it has never been exhibited or sold.

His last New York exhibition was with Ileana Sonnabend; eight years later, in 1978, his work was included in the international pavilion of the Venice Biennale.

He uses acrylic watercolor on unprimed canvas, applying a series of vertical and horizontal lines, garlands, zigzags, blotches and tiny dots that allude to writing and evoke works by Cy Twombly, Agnes Martin and Daniel Buren.

### Different Light

“The light is different in watercolor than in oil,” said Griffa in a telephone interview from his studio. “In my work, there’s memory of Italian painting. The canvas is nude on a wall. My idea of painting is that it’s never finished.”

When the painting is dry, Griffa folds the canvas as if it were a blanket or a garment, and stores it away on a shelf.

Giorgio Griffa’s first New York exhibition since 1970 opened just four days before Hurricane Sandy flooded Manhattan’s Chelsea art district last October.

A five-foot water surge hit the Casey Kaplan gallery, where Griffa’s show, “Fragments 1968-2012,” was on view. The deluge stained Kaplan’s ground-floor space on West 21st Street and Griffa’s canvases, whose prices range from \$17,000 to \$80,000.

Most of the paintings need to be restored, a lengthy and costly process that averages \$8,000 per work.

Now the gallery is preparing to reopen its doors tomorrow, with a new selection of Griffa’s paintings spanning four decades. The minimal, poetic canvases are pinned, unframed, directly to the walls with tiny, delicate nails.

Of course I was going to open with Giorgio’s show,” said Casey Kaplan. “I owed him that. The guy had waited for 42 years to have a show in New York.”



Giorgio Griffa. Quasi Dipinto, 1968, Acrylic on canvas

“There are pieces here that have never been unfolded,” said Kaplan, pointing at the vertical and horizontal creases that form as the work ages.

“His work had a tremendous impact in the 1970s, and he’s been carrying out his research into the relationship between painting, writing and mark-making ever since,” said Francesco Manacorda, artistic director of Tate Liverpool, in a phone interview. He went to school with Griffa’s son in Turin. “His investigation looks completely contemporary and fresh.”

### **Different Project**

A week after the flood, Kaplan flew to Turin to break the news to Griffa. While there, Kaplan also sold three paintings to the local museum, Castello di Rivoli, its first holdings by Griffa.

“Giorgio was generous and patient,” Kaplan said. “It was also part of the healing because we started planning a new show right away.”

The two selected a completely new group of paintings, spanning more than four decades through 2012.

“The first exhibition was nice but the second is even better,” Griffa said. “You see, the works need people. Without people, the work is asleep.”

“Fragments 1968-2012” is on view Jan. 10 through March 2 at 525 W. 21st St.; +1-212-645-7335; <http://caseykaplangallery.com/>.

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Press Release  
Berlin, November 2012

**GIORGIO GRIFFA  
GOLDEN RATIO**

Opening on Sunday 25th November 2012 at 11 am  
25.11.2012 through 24.2.2013



Giorgio Griffa, who was born in Turin in 1936, first made his name internationally in the 1960s as part of the Arte Povera movement. In 1970 he exhibited at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York and Paris. In 1969 and 1973 he took part in the avant-garde shows "Prospect" in Dusseldorf, where he also had a solo exhibition in the Kunsthalle. In 1978 and 1980 Griffa was represented at the Venice Biennale. His work is currently on show at the Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York "Fragments 1968-2012", 25.10.12 to 10.1.13).

Giorgio Griffa's work is marked by an asceticism and modesty, which nonetheless radiates with a playful Mediterranean lightness. In terms of the "art of the simple" Giorgio Griffa works on raw, unframed canvas. These are nailed to the wall and painted with luminous colours. Griffa makes relatively free but sparing use of colour in the form of painted lines, dots or numbers. The work may be read as fragments, dealing with time and space dots or numbers. The work may be read as fragments, dealing with time and space.

Giorgio Griffa has called his exhibition in the Mies van der Rohe House "Golden Ratio". The golden section, also called the divine ratio, is currently an important topic in architecture. All the work in the exhibition deals with the golden section in the form of the irrational number 1,618033988749894848204586 8343656381177203091798057628623154486227 05260462818..... For Giorgio Griffa it is a way of approaching the infinite through the modest presence of a simple number.

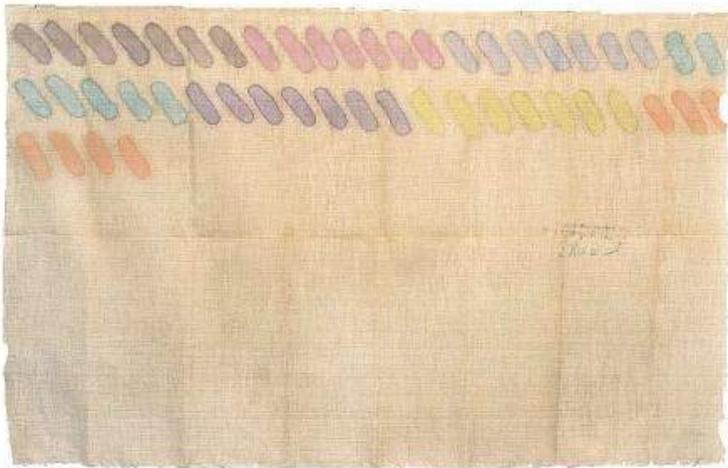
Dr. Wita Noack (Mies van der Rohe Haus)

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November 25, 2011. <http://www.galleristny.com/2011/11/italian-painter-giorgio-griffa-will-show-with-casey->

# GalleristNY

## *Italian Painter Giorgio Griffa Will Show With Casey Kaplan*



"Untitled," 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 118.5 x 90 cm. (Courtesy Lorenzelli Arte, Milan)

Announcing its plans for Art Basel Miami Beach 2011 via e-mail, Casey Kaplan gallery shared that it now represents Italian painter Giorgio Griffa. Born in 1936, Mr. Griffa has not had a one-person show at a New York gallery since 1970, when he showed with the late Ileana Sonnabend.

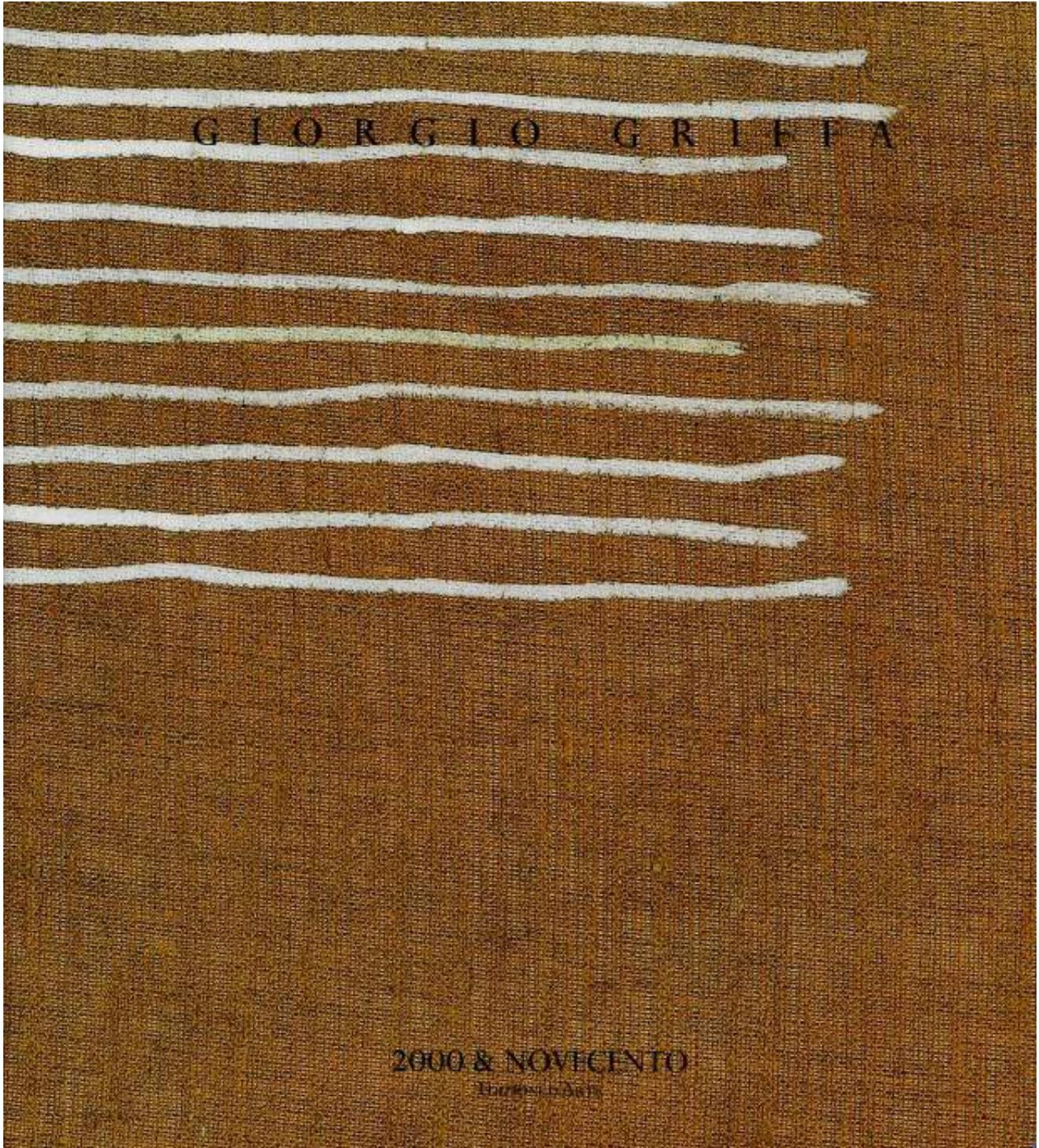
At Art Basel Miami Beach, Kaplan will show Mr. "Griffa's minimal, unstretched paintings that have demonstrated the artist's consistently vivacious exploration of his chosen material and medium and the idea of painting as an action with an infinite duration," the gallery said in its message. A one-per-

Though not well known in the United States, Mr. Griffa has shown regularly in Italy. This year he was the subject of a solo exhibition at Rome's MACRO museum (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma), and he has had recent shows at galleries in Turin, Milan, Seregno and Bergamo.

In an essay written in 1987, critic Silvana Sinisi wrote, "[w]hile Giorgio Griffa has been in the vanguard of Italian art almost 20 years, he continues to be something of a 'case apart,' someone difficult to categorize, somewhat 'out on a limb.'" Almost a quarter century after that was published, New Yorkers will have an opportunity to make sense of his work.

**-ANDREW RUSSETH**

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# From Marks to Music

Luigi Abbate

Using the word music to outline the poetics of Giorgio Griffa can lead to many interminglings du Coeur: in other words, to emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural short-circuits. This is certainly not due to its justifiable if nauseating usefulness (the trite idiom *Ut Pictura...*), but it is, above all, due to what we might call the sensory characteristics of the work, quite apart from Giorgio's genuine attraction to the art of sounds, to his recognition of music's privileged position in, as he says, 'following Orpheus's path of knowledge of the unknown and the inexpressible.' To deal at length with these short-circuits would be a useless repetition of the critique to which this essay is simply a prelude. I will, then, try to pinpoint just some of the possible places where my experience as a musician intersects the career of the painter Giorgio Griffa. These are personal notes, aesthetic-anthropological conjectures about a far vaster relationship between art and music.

Griffa's painting dwells in the world of marks and comes up against - and not just tangentially the wholly musical problem of deciphering those marks. Noble marks but, above all in his early painting, purposely humbled, and without that romantic aura that works of art use to define themselves. Raw-boned marks, stripped of any kind of mnemonic frills, and thus unlike, in music, a Bagatelle by Webern or - in recent aphoristic works by Kurtág - memory-filled "arias sung in one breath". They are more like certain radical experiments by Cage or Feldman or, if you will excuse my presumption, my own *Apax* for wind quintet dating from '84-'85, the Greek title of which, when followed by the suffix *legomenon*, means "never newly coined again, never repeated again". Composed in the '80s at a time when we were still unused to writing music with a computer, I notated it down almost maniacally by hand, perhaps also because the composition was the musical rereading of a strongly "marked" painting - almost a twist of fate. In this way the score could have its own graphic self-sufficiency. And so I discovered my fetish for a well-written page to be related to a more noble and precious fetish: the naked canvas on which the artist leaves his mark. A radical and extreme idea, just like the canvases by Giorgio some fifteen years earlier which, in the great self-reference of the vertical, horizontal, or diagonal marks, gave little or no satisfaction to perceptual succulence or the enjoyment of form and colour - just as I, at the beginning of my career as a composer, rejected repetition in music and thus the recognizability of the object (in musical terms: motif, theme, and harmony). Griffa was then to pass, as he himself has admitted, from his "Calvinist" period to a "Mediterranean" one. Just like me *CApax*, was never again to be repeated). And, I believe, like many others. As in my own case and that of others, this passage meant for him a gradual recuperation of memory. In the meantime, however, the rite of deciphering or not the mark has by now loaded Griffa's work with the esoteric value belonging to music: "The artist is entrusted with the knowledge of what cannot be known". And, almost as though to twist the knife in the wound, he continues by making his own the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, and Pound's poetic-existential dizziness. In his *Treatise on Harmony*, Pound explained with inspired clarity the problem of harmony's non-verticality: each chord can be perceived only if it persists in time, even if only for a moment. Music identifies itself and establishes its hierarchies in time: in the past we spoke about tonality (certain people still comfortably compose in this way), but today we talk about polarization, harmonic fields. .. Experience helps to mature the need for a deeper research into the meaning of art work, and the relationship between "filling" the canvas and the completion of the pictorial gesture by way of marks has yet another musical correlation in the relationship between the executive gesture (the best... possible) and the search for Schumann's *innere Stimme*, the interior voice that is written on the staff but may also not be executed. Griffa himself has spoken of his "... wish to pass from an imitation of nature using external lines to one using internal lines". Not by chance then! The alternative of playing something or not (otherwise, *ad libitum*, optional *ritornellos*..), and, in general, all the variables linked to the interpretation of a musical work, bring to my mind another particular aspect of Giorgio Griffa's poetics summarised once again in a recurrent observation in his writings, a statement of his passivity in the face of material: "To construct a work of art with the marks made by the hands of anybody". An extremely human, intimate way of considering Deleuze's deterritorialization which, I must admit, upsets my musical ego: a disturbing attraction to artistic anonymity, a subtle inclination towards the *cupio dissolvi*. I also share with Griffa the need to debunk the romantic idea that the artist/musician must necessarily feel himself the repository of truth (which is, when it comes down to it, nothing other than a specific form of sagacity) and that, instead, he should not claim to impose his truth on others: a decidedly secular attitude. Perhaps we can interpret in this sense too the lack of a need for a canvas support as a metaphor/metonym of such claims.

But suddenly, and by contrast, a new theme appears on the horizon, almost as though to revive the paternal right, the authority, over the work: it is the artist's work, his daily work, very like that of a composer or musical interpreter, something which is far more down-to-earth than non-experts like to believe. For example, by working with such materials as watercolours - "which bring me near to the Mediterranean tradition" - which permit the process of a marriage between them. And what is this marriage in music if not the so-called "impasto of colours" as it is defined in handbooks for scoring and orchestrating? Obviously this definition has been taken over virtually intact from the sphere of painting. And this marriage, in other words the absorption of one colour into another, comes about on the canvas on its own account. Griffa has said, "I watched, like a careful and involved spectator, an action that was not carried out by me". This is rather like a composer who, when not playing himself, entrusts himself to his interpreter: so the composer is the listener/spectator of his own work. Yet again, the artist mysteriously lays down his weapons and trusts in the autogenesis of the work. During a recent conversation, Giorgio spoke to me about the "intelligence of material": once again, an apt and true expression, applicable to many artists as well as being apt for composing music. I would also add: the generous capacity of material to accumulate information and vectorial potential. Generous because it is able to absorb and metabolise even dross - in other words tensions, suffering - and to translate re-creatively deconstructive/destructive urges.

# Giorgio Griffa's *Boundary Painting*

Marisa Vescovo

The work of Giorgio Griffa, to be seen in the 2000 & NOVECENCO gallery, is very difficult to write about, even after having read just one of his books, *"Cani sciolti antichisti"* (1980), in which he carefully sets out the outlines of his working process. But seeing that courage is the basic requirement of any activity, I will trust to my feelings and luck.

The beginning of Griffa's by now forty-years-long activity was a thoughtful return to analysis, to the specific tools for painting, with a renewed attention given to the picture's support (the canvas, at first hanging freely and un-stretched), to colour (liberated from its denotative aspect became more autonomous), and to gesture, which determined both the field and the function of the boundary.

These were Griffa's interests from the end of 1967, and they have been labelled variously "New Painting", "Painting/Painting", "Analytical Painting", and "Process Painting". It was, in fact, a question of reducing mental and physical emotionalism to a minimum in order to pinpoint the notion of space and space-time through the physical fact of untreated canvas or hessian. It was a question of visual art as action or the experience of the reality of the body; or, in other words, the arm as it traces out a mark with the same morphological characteristics, though always differing according to the energy of the hand. The hand passed over the surface with a full brush and traced out straight lines of different lengths and arranged horizontally, vertically, or else hatched.

This work is closely connected to that of Conceptual Art, as Menna has underlined, and is strongly influenced by the language and ideas of a specific and autonomous art practice, even in the field of painting. We thus notice Griffa's rejection of the necessity for an object-like form for the work, and a re-evaluation of "making", something which had been put to one side by both Pop artists and Minimalists.

All the above refers to the first series of works on show, the "Segni primari", in which the idea or concept, by eliminating arbitrariness, chance, chaos, emotions, and subjectivity, exalts control, clarity, and sobriety; in fact, the carefully flattened and insignificant marks tend to highlight the process itself.

If we examine *Linee orizzontali* (1969), *Verticale tricolore* (1976) and *Spugna* (1977), we become aware that the two-dimensional polychrome mark develops according to a conceptual structure which is the work's intransigent aim. And here we can clearly see Griffa's wish to undertake a systematic attempt to eliminate any kind of empirical component, one for which the choice of method and order becomes fundamental.

Towards the end of the 'seventies, Griffa felt the need to "open up the work to wider implications", as a result of which different marks began to intersect, but they were always linked both to his earlier practice as well as to his extraordinary memory for past painting which he considered a source of enlightenment and suggestion. In this second series, which was concerned with "Conessioni e contaminazioni"; the layout and combinations of the marks mix and take on varied "forms" and "dimensions", the presence of which, however, demonstrates Griffa's typical additive process, while the combinatory possibilities create rhythmic and multiplying presences on the surface which never become objects.

We find all this in *Quattro segni* (1979), *Per linee orizzontali* (1982), *1ncastro viola* (2008) and *Incrocio* (2009), as well as in other works where the amplification of the variations and their abundance of marks and colour, even though eliminating mental and subjective redundancy, underline visual richness, so much so that the lines are now free to break down the boundaries of classical geometry and to compose themselves freely and follow their musical instinct. Such other works as *Avanti e indietro dall'intervallo* (2001), *Angolare* (2002), and *Polittico* (2002), make us aware that painting, besides being a means for spiritual evolution, also demands a mental effort: a genuine creative contribution on the part of the viewer. In these works, in fact, the marks are part of a constructive and repetitive system which, on the one hand, is based on intense and evocative colour, and, on the other, transforms the wave-like movement of the lines into a vibrating continuum bringing to mind a movement towards the infinite. The linear or curvilinear "writing", guided by motor impulses, takes the place of what, in traditional painting, had mass, volume, and material.

There are inevitable transition areas between the visual and verbal arts, especially when one asks oneself about such things as the image's "aim".

It seems that Griffa, by starting from the remains of "mentally" fertilised painting, wants to show that expressive capacities are limitless, that every gesture can become a pretext for painting, and that it is almost always 'with this gesture that the man/artist describes and reveals himself. Painting can thus be established as the sequence of human gestures, full of manual and handcrafted naturalness, aimed at summoning up delicate and evocative memories of culture in the guise of both literature and of *joie de vivre*, as well as a musicality deriving from a succession of a-logical yet all-inclusive facts. The marks of colour following the action of the hand are not completely controlled, and they thus come about as events and testify to the vital association between artefact and artifice. This also means that the impact of the colour has a dynamic quality, a motory chromatic physiognomy, and that at times a colour, even before being perceived, can be heralded by the experience of a certain behaviour of the body.

Already in 1972 Giorgio Griffa had considered using as the title a show of his work in Rome the statement: "I don't represent anything; I paint"; some years earlier Rothko had said, "I don't express myself in painting. I express my not-self". Rothko's statement is to be related to his a-historic, a-temporal, and non-subjective spirit which was part of an originary-archaic dimension of life, the sign of the anonymity of visual perception. For Griffa, instead, the "millennial memory of painting has found, in the development of Minimalism, various Possibilities for allowing its immense patrimony (including that of representation) to continue to live without having to rely on obsolete structures). In Griffa's space-time dramaturgy, the capacity of his gesture imperiously asserts itself; in some cases it "dances" and gives rise to the "visible"; it is a gesture that embodies the revelation and indication of something else that stands beyond simple presence. So the effect is not coldly and rigorously anonymous, but extremely sensitive. Each painting is, therefore, a testimonial to a different knowledge of its execution.

At the end of the '70s he began his third series of "Frammenti". Griffa was to write about it, "The various canvases are cut up into tiny irregular fragments onto which the paint is applied. The fragments are then disseminated in the exhibition space. These selfsame canvases, no longer the neutral support for the painting but an integral part of it, become images and figures together with the paint that they contain ". It is enough to recall the installation Frammenti, 1979-80, to understand that these small canvases, covered with a just a few variously shaped marks and placed on the wall, do not offer any inherent certainty; they have no bases or points of support because their irregular outline shapes them two-dimensionally and frees them from any definite vectorial or directional positioning. Just like living bodies, they can adapt themselves to all conditions because they have no compositional problems. With these works Griffa shatters the systematic rigidity of his two-dimensional painting and opposes to it a multi-directionality and ubiquity that makes them become vital and free. By denying the canvases a single reality, Griffa affirms their self-generative existence. While being aware of all this, the artist is also aware that the generative act - even while only being able to derive from a network of allusions, debts, and quotations - needs, at the same time, a breach with, and a deviation from, the past. The question is not one of a rejection of the past: but if you love it too much then a really personal style of painting might slip from your grasp. Of course, if you want to paint you must see "everything" - even the past.



Griffa has said, '70s the '80s I introduced a more specific memory of painting into the work, the old problem of the cohabitation of marks which draw, and paint which colours: marks and field". This 4th series, "Segno e campo", leads us to the question of the primacy of mark or colour. In such paintings as Campo rosso (1984), Campo giallo campo verde (1986), Arabesco rosso (1997), Policromo (2003) and Ricurvo (2008), we can see an aura shining around a coloured mark on an "infinite" background. It seems to acquire a vibrant corporality and no longer shows itself just as a fragment of language but also, and contradictorily, as a fragment of a mysterious language that emanates flashes of mental energy. This colour-mark, oscillating between its own lightness and its attraction to speed, meets up with the "elsewhere". For Griffa the mind is a sacred space in which to activate, as in a theatre, thoughts made up of fragmented words and chromatic paths; a place where there is acted out the abstract-colour-mark play of a world where its poetics are brought into focus, because the act of looking is also an act of reading.

We might speak of “a score of ideograms as weightless as aquatic insects” (Italo Calvino). But the insects are also graphic marks, the writing on a piece of paper, or the notes of a flute playing in silence, and without which there would only be the void-fullness of a world which can only be dissolved by what is light, speedy, and slender. As in Oriental or Orientalist painting, there is no opposition between mark and colour in these works because they are successfully based on their superimposition. The perception of colour had a fundamental role in the manifestation of alchemical ideas which, in turn, have made colour a language of movement which was to emerge as the music of colour in the 20th century. Griffa's colour has an absolute solidity constructed from the most fluctuating material instability which seems to be obtained from the dust of some cosmicalchemical atomisation; a colour from space and, therefore, a stem cell importing the taste of an unknown colour. On Griffa's canvases we find the colours of the beginning and end of a day.

Colour is considered as a means for arriving “elsewhere” or for hinting at the climate within the canvas or at the sensitivity of the artist; it is organised by a syntactic chain of marks that resonate against their frame of reference. The colours selected are neither opaque nor brilliant; they retain their latent radiance and suggest weight, but they remain as tender as certain skies by Carpaccio or Lono. It is never a question of the chill industrial clarity of Minimalist tradition but, rather, a strength based on a control of details aimed at a silence linked to the history and intensity of ancient colours. If we look at the various canvases called *Tre linee con arabesco*, 1991, part of the 5th series, we become aware that the various sequences of marks adapt to the series of works by imposing on themselves a unifying rule: three lines accompanied by an arabesque. And the arabesque, as its name implies, is linked to Arabic-Islamic, and at times Chinese, art; it represents the surmounting of representation. In fact it is not a representation but a rhythm, even an acoustic one, that acts through the infinite repetition of a theme: a psalmody. Arabesques permit an escape from the conditioning of time by also becoming a support for contemplation because they have neither beginning nor end: in fact they tirelessly quest for limitlessness. So this type of ornamentation is essentially a kind of negation of geometric closed forms. Schlegel went even further when he suggested that arabesques were even an originary form of human fantasy. The manifestation of the chaos from which forms originate into what we might call creation from nothing.

“In the second half of the '90s I began the series with numbers which aims at imparting information about the way in which the development of the work was realised. The numbers indicate the order in which the various marks and colours were applied to the canvas.” (Giorgio Griffa). Such paintings as *Otto colori* (2002), *Sei colori* (2006) and *Cinque colori* (2008), do not simply indicate the artist's way of orchestrating colours and marks - I am now referring to the 6th series - but they remind us that a meaning has been given to the numbers, one that goes far beyond mathematical calculation. From the mystic numbers of antiquity to modern forms of superstition, each culture, from the highest to the lowest, Eastern and Western, has conferred a symbolic value on numbers: religious, philosophical, cosmological, and predictive.

The 7th series, “*Alter Ego*”, is extremely fascinating. Here the artist gives free rein to his historical memory, a memory that re-invests things with their full import and that can increase attention to differences, to hidden biographical data. His look at the past, and his stratified iconography becomes the just recipe for a search for themes, metaphors, and tales to be dipped into. As Baudrillard says, Art History becomes our “lost reference point”, in other words our myths, and, as such, it takes its place on the canvas. But, as long as the past and memory re-appropriate its meaning and accept its fragmentariness, then it is also necessary to distance ourselves from it and realise the difficulty of understanding it and its fragmentation which, at times, does not reconnect its pieces unless through interpretation and testing. Today, an artist like Griffa draws freely on the storehouse of museums and art history. The artist does not search in the labyrinths of memory in order to debunk values but, rather, for “a comparative model” to be verified, symbols that might represent the origins of existence and action. In our case it is sufficient to look at such works as *Paolo e Piero* (Paolo Uccello e Piero Dorazio - 1982), *Matisseria n. 1* (1982), *Tre linee con arabesco n. 319* (Matisse - 1992), *Luxe calme et volupte* (Matisse - 1999), *Fibonacci* (Mario Merz - 2006), and *Caro Piero* (Piero della Francesca - 2008) in order to understand that this extraction of ideas-icons is purely mental or existential and is the result of his love for, or recognition of, data; these can then be transformed and restored to us through marks of colour without any hint of “appropriation” or quotation. So the works are tinged with an iconographic “desire” resulting from an activity aimed at dominating what is irrational and intuitive, while severe self-criticism elevates such thoughts and choices to the plane of aesthetic taste. What is immediately evident is Griffa's passion for the magical colours of Matisse, someone who countered Cubism with an all-embracing idea of the whole and the greatest expressive complexity together with the greatest simplicity. It is a synthesis of the art - music and poetry come together, and the painting is a synthesis of representation and decoration, lines and colours: everything acts within the ultra-sensitive, though non-crystalline, dimension of rhythm and colour. The group of works comprising the 801 “*Sezione aurea*” series rounds off, without exhausting, this creative period, a period begun in 2000 and that is concerned with the mathematical aspect of the “golden section”. Once again there are numbers, those studied by the Pythagoreans, also known as the pentagram, and which were also considered a symbol of harmony and from which is obtained the golden number, the analogical proportional element between the human figure and the subject of nature. In art the concept of harmony and its numerical laws have ruled since archaic times, whether through the golden section or spiral growth processes; they are known as the Fibonacci series or, in other words, a series of numbers that is endless and thus projected towards infinity. In this way a different vision of the world is suggested, after man had, for centuries, been questioning the value of images in relation to their object referent. The development of modernism has led us to go beyond its limits, even though these limits are not external but an internal frontier, an idea of a boundary, because it comes about at the point in which the visible and the invisible touch and where place and non-place are tangential.

This work about the golden section reminds us that also that if music is the most free form of empirical and everyday experience, the one most unbound by any kind of direct relationship with what language "represents", then it can be affirmed that there exists an analogy between Griffa's work and music. Deep down his works are visual "scores" of two-dimensional marks, "unconscious and intuitive" exercises in calculation where the execution is nothing other than the translation into marks of conceptual processes. In this sense the work of Griffa are visual "scores" based on silent relationships between concepts and processes. Each time we try to lend our ears to these sounds they die away only to spark into life once again on another canvas.

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All the series by Griffa have a beginning but not an end: they are constantly developing poetic progressions. In this sense Griffa's "travel book", because it is a synthesis of varied yet coherent moments, posits itself as a complex regrouping of experience in which distant events are brought together and, as with the sinuous winding of a river, things interlace, disappear, come back again, and thus suggest the outlines of a temporal experience, but one which is different to the one enclosed within philosophical ideas about time, as time becomes meaningful because it draws the traits of temporal experience in a narrative manner.

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GIORGIO GRIFFA

60 SCHIZZI DA  
OPERE 1968/2000  
E UN TESTO

60 SKETCHES FROM  
WORKS 1968/2000  
AND A TEXT



FRANCO MASOERO

## DISEMBARKING IN GILANIA

(From the Giancarlo Salzano Gallery catalogue, Turin 1998)

*"I would like something that didn't need  
expression and form"*  
(Flaubert)

The archaeologist Riane Eisler gave the name Gilania to a Neolithic society that occupied a wide area of the eastern and southern parts of central Europe. It was based on an agricultural economy, accorded equal status to men and women, and did not know the use of weapons. For about a thousand years, between 4000 and 3000 BC, this society was enslaved by the herding and hunting peoples of the northern steppes, who controlled the horses and arms, bringing with them a model of domination that is still prevalent today. The word Gilania is a blend of the Greek words gyne (woman) and ane, (man). Carbon dating, which makes it possible to establish when objects were made, has begun to enable us to build up a picture of the Gilanians. Theirs seems to have been a developed society,

no longer matriarchal but not yet patriarchal, and organized in a non-hierarchical system. A society whose structure calls into question many aspects of our past. I am not interested in examining the scientific basis for this exciting discovery (or invention, if such it is).

Rather, disembarking in Gilania has helped me to make some unexpected connections. It has given me a glimpse of a general pattern which extends over the various human disciplines. I see in the twentieth century various phenomena which, within the model of domination, breaks the tools that are used to dominate the world.

Space and time, ruler and clock, were the keystones of scientific observation. They were stable, fixed elements on the basis of which the knowledge and domination of the physical world was organized. With Einstein that hierarchy collapses; space and time become relative elements: they stand in a relationship to one another, and are themselves a relationship. Later, with Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle, science absorbs the unknown into its processes: the unknown becomes part of the scientist's activity. Observation influences the observed phenomenon to such an extent that it makes one aspect of it uncertain. The observer's ability to consider himself as being outside the process now collapses; and this used to be a distinctive feature of domination.

Geometry loses its absolute value and becomes variable as a result of the intersection and accumulation of the forces of gravity. Perhaps it is even annihilated in the black holes of the universe where the force of gravity coagulates into concentrations of energy so compact that not even light can escape from them. Guattari and Deleuze tell us that reality is a rhizome, despite our efforts to simplify it into binary systems that can be dominated by reason. These are just hints.

They point to the hypothesis that humanity has begun to revise its principle of domination: the economic and military tools of domination have become too dangerous; they must be tempered with something else.

Two themes, dominating mankind and dominating the world, have been superimposed in my words, for they are aspects of the same system.

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When I work on a canvas and my hand follows what is happening and I am both tool and craftsman at the same time, I am not able to specify any particular style of mine which superimposes my recollection on the memory of the colour that flows and of the signs that pursue one another. Nor am I able to evaluate any impact on the spectator.

Of the three characters - the author, the work, and the spectator - my concentration is entirely focused, as far as I am aware of it, on the event that lies in the middle. There is nothing new in this; I think it is a constant feature of creation, the relationship to colour, to marble, to stone, to the memories of the materials. It takes on different aspects in different epochs and in different artists.

But the relationship between the work and the spectator is a fact that there is no getting away from.

At a certain point in history we constructed the perspective view, which, through the optical box, fixed an

objective view of the world, external to the spectator. It was a clear process of dominating vision.

With sublime results.

A system in which on the one hand we looked from outside, as if through an open window, and we read the story from outside; while on the other hand the inner involvement, the emotion of letting oneself be absorbed, crossing the threshold, entering the work, was hidden, entrusted to the wisdom of the materials and the spaces. Then the perspective view was no longer enough; the categories of thought that had supported it began to crumble, and the window started to change into a mirror and later simply into an opening.

For example, remember when landscape painting started to traverse perspective with the excrescences of nature, and waters and boats metaphorically invited the spectator to embark on the picture, or when Cezanne broke the volumes and opened space, and others painted the frame, invading the diaphragm of separation, or when Monet's water lilies doubly checkmated the system of domination because matter becomes superior to the hand and because his eye, which is going blind, produces an increasing quantity of light instead of reducing it, as would be logical according to the laws of domination.

If we accept this path, where the difference between figurative and non-figurative becomes unimportant, we may note that the invitation to the spectator to enter the work, to walk through it, is generally accompanied by the disappearance of the story; it is no longer a banquet of the gods or just any old story meant to be read from the outside: the figures, or the signs (which is almost the same thing), are there, in a state of suspense, waiting for the spectator to sit down to table. The perspective work made you look at it from outside. These do not.

I think that the scientist of our time is aware that his action interferes with the phenomenon that is under observation: that he knows he is not investigating that fragment of the world because of the way it is, but because of the way it reacts to provocation. And from it he elicits fragments of knowledge of becoming. So it is not only the craftsman who interferes with the phenomenon; it is the spectator too. We must not forget this aspect. Nor must we forget another aspect, which will prove useful.

Up to a certain limit the phenomenon is dominated; it can be looked at from the outside and reproduced by the will of man, who may turn on the gas or build the atomic bomb. But when the non-linear phenomenon is multiplied and shrunk to the point where other causal

aspects come into play which in the dominated measure, though present, were insignificant, then it escapes from domination and continues to develop according to the concurrent causes as if it were itself a thinking subject.

We may therefore say that beyond that limit the system of domination is put into checkmate.

The phenomenon tends to elude control. And instead of there being a decrease in knowledge as would seem logical, we witness an accelerated increase, so that a few decades have carried science light years ahead. In quantum physics a phenomenon exists in various simultaneous, different, contradictory aspects, and another tricky question arises. The aspect that we investigate with the cognitive procedures is only one of several possible aspects; the phenomenon cannot be dominated except at a very rough level. In the arts after the middle years of the twentieth century I see a rapid extension of procedures in which the craftsman gives up dominating the whole process from raw material to finished work, and exercises a limited dominion or rather puts himself in a different relationship to his materials. Instead of dominating the process from the outside, he enhances participation from the inside; he lets matter talk instead of making it the tool of an external narrative. And so I can tell you of Pollock's hand, which does nothing but arrange the dripping of colour on the canvas.

Of Morris Louis's hand, which just steers the flow of the colour across the canvas.

It is clear that the procedures take place under the artist's control - that goes without saying but in a sense the hand has put itself at the service of colour, overturning the system of domination. Dorazio uses a brush but his procedure is not dissimilar: the artist's intention seems to me palpably subordinated to the vibrations of light and emotion which the colour creates by flowing and interweaving; it is the hand that has become an extension of the brush.

In Ryman painting ends and is sublimated in the mere ancient gesture of putting brush to canvas; the artist withdraws his personal memory before the millennial memory of the act of painting. With Burri the attention shifts to the materials: both in his combustioni and in his cretti the hand only performs the initial gestures. The process develops of its own accord within the materials that burn or dry out.

With Anselmo the oldest material on which man has exercised the lofty qualities of dominion, namely stone, is manipulated rather than shaped, and displays its memories by virtue of simple significant actions. It is still the hand of man that extracts the memories of the

materials, but the procedure is reversed; it does not require a form to be moulded, and if there is form, it comes by other ways.

Richard Long, too, uses these same stones, but breaks them and organizes them. All he does is arrange them in large circles of barbaric weight, which hold us suspended between millennial ancestral memories, the power of great sculpture, and the precise sense of radical change.

The same change becomes in Gastini physically embodied in the canvas, which is both support and protagonist, tool and agent at the same time, as are the colour, the iron, the signs and the space in a reciprocal dynamic, and here the weight is sublimated into an exchange with the air.

Where it used to be presumed that there was a single direction from artist to work and from work to spectator - a sense, of course, enriched by the internal valencies of the work - I find a movement that goes in both directions. The artist, by moderating the relationship of domination over the materials, shows a readiness to receive from them and not just to give; and he places in his relationship with the spectator the determinate elements of an indeterminate story, the boundaries for a transition in which the spectator, in observing reality, can modify it by his observation.

In a discussion of my paintings of the 1980s, Paolo Fossati wrote of a narration and fabulation that disembarked on Cythera. It seems to me that Gilania provides a more precise motivation for what I have been saying for almost thirty years about my condition as a tool rather than a craftsman, an indeterminate narrative that lies within the signs.

I would say that the detachment from Perspective and Form is obvious and not worth dwelling on. Rather, I would like to stress the strong sense of continuity that is concealed beneath the harshly discontinuous appearance. When we consider the works of the past we are aware how each of them is inseparably linked to its own time - by whose ideas it is nourished - but we also feel the strong and irrepressible sense of presence in our own time. In the physical impact of a sonata by Bach, a sonnet by Petrarch, or a painting by Raphael, this feeling of a presence which transcends the centuries, and which persists in different ways according to the way in which we ourselves change, constitutes an experience just as general as the experience of changes over time, and far more moving.

Therefore the work belongs to the present both of its own age and of later ages.

And at the same time historically it always belongs to the past. I say always because as soon as it is completed it becomes past, just as this sentence I am writing becomes past when I add the final stop that ends it.

It is a duality that I see as a precise sense of continuity between the various epochs and civilizations and between the discontinuities of history. It enables one to see the work as subject rather than object, as an active entity which, in its relations with people - which vary for different individuals and epochs and civilizations - escapes from its own objectivity.

This aspect of continuity comes, in a sense, to participate in the action; it belongs to the relationships that manufacture the work and not simply to the qualities of the finished work. The space of the action extends to aspects that were not necessary in a relationship of dominion over matter.

The chemical reactions that often conclude the works of Zorio continue to be produced in the finished work, and in this way attribute an organic character to that sense of a present that persists in time.

My works are never finished; the signs stop before that can happen, as if they were trying to elude that moment of conclusion when the present ceases to be the present.

These are different ways in which the ambiguous relationship between past and present become part of the constitutive process of the work.

And here the spectator comes back into play. This area of work, which is far wider than the episodes that I have mentioned, comprises paintings which, though strongly characterized, leave the relationship with the spectator indeterminate, displaying rather the modes of their own creation.

They leave the spectator a space for active intervention, for comparing his own memories and those of the work, for emotion and alienation. This seems to enhance that aspect of the work as a subject which is capable of forming a relationship with other subjects, and which is quantally superimposed on its simultaneous existence as an object.

Under the domination of perspective the spectator found himself dispossessed of his own body; he had a soul, an intelligence, a heart, and the body was the container.

With the transition to materials, their memory and their physical impact, we find that we have a body that expands; the orient is no longer so very far away.

The artist is aware, even if he doesn't know it, of that immense chain of causality which in the physical world carries phenomena out of control. So he restricts himself to fixing the body of that painting or that sculpture, the constituent links, the corporeal sense of the work; and he lets the work tell its own story, lets it give and receive in the indeterminable relationship with the spectator, which cannot be dominated except within very rough limits.

I am sure that among the many who have read the Divine Comedy over the centuries - really read it and not just studied it at school- no two people have read it in exactly the same way. This is the body of the work. Which has always existed. This body becomes the sole actor, in the two-way relationship with the body of the artist, who does not merely sow but leaves to the work what the work itself in turn suggests in the process of its creation, and in the two-way relationship of giving and receiving with the countless bodies of its spectators. The other aspects - ritual, magic, religious, narrative, celebrative, etc. have become indeterminate. A striking analogy with scientific thought.

*Giorgio Griffa*

### **Postscript**

It is not a realism that subtracts from reality in order to make it representable. It is a realism which participates in reality, which introduces itself into reality's procedures and so constitutes it in another form.

I look at Cindy Sherman and Vanessa Beecroft, but I also think of Giotto's coretti in the Scrovegni Chapel. The fake peopleless architecture that is introduced into the fresco changes its form.

I read the fresco in its phenomenal aspect; first and foremost it is reality: all the rest it carries inside itself. That is how I understand painting.

*Giorgio Griffa, 7 may 2000*

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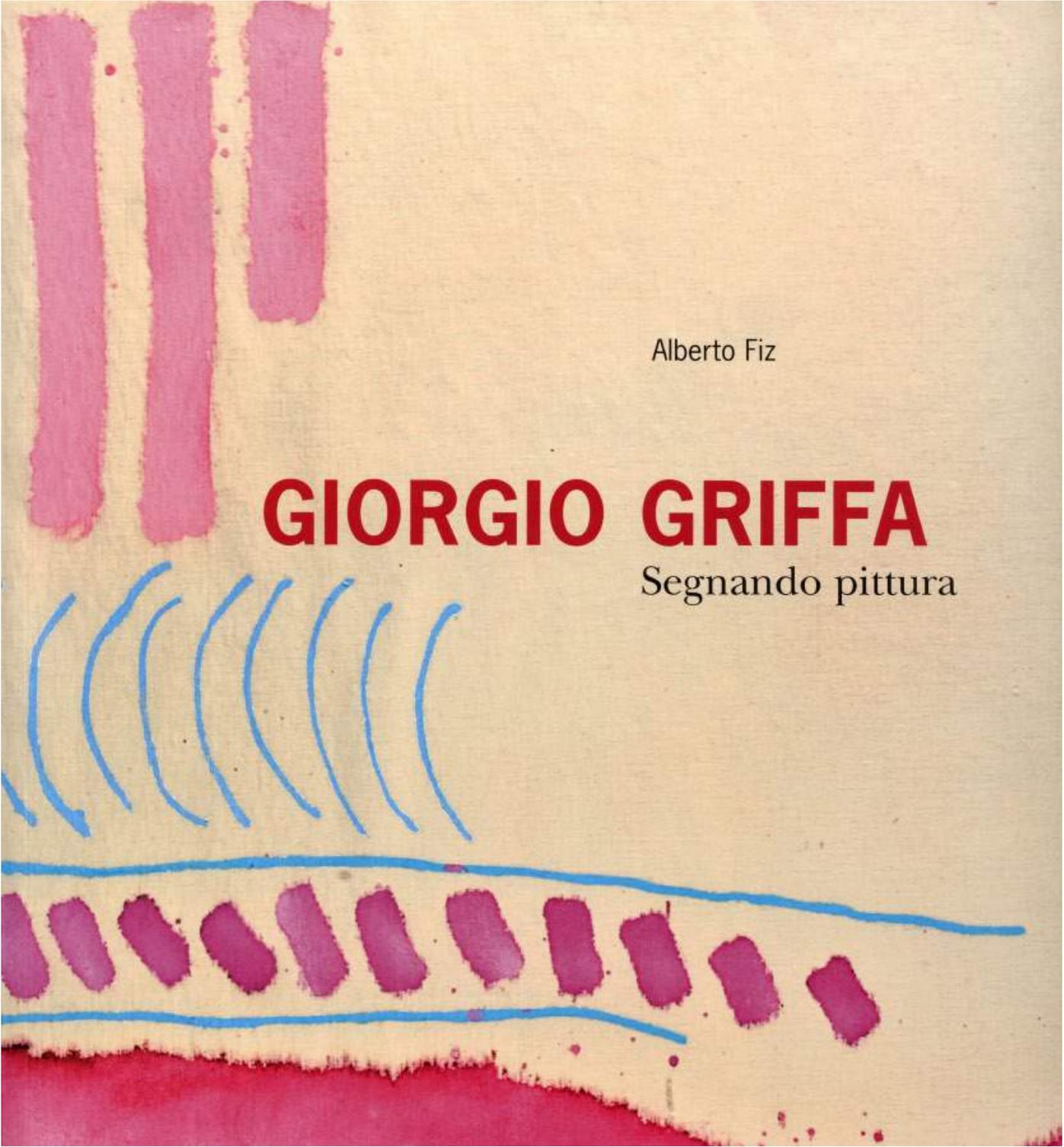
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Alberto Fiz

# GIORGIO GRIFFA

Segnando pittura

# Critical Anthology\*

Paolo Fossati

## *Griffa: Empiricism and Functionality*

One of Griffa's canvases is painted irregularly up to a certain point, while the rest of it is bare: neither the canvas nor the colour can explain anything. On the contrary, when they meet here they combine to reject all meaning: together they eliminate every semantic interpretation and, they restore the relationship of reciprocal attraction to the abstraction of its ideation. Faced with the compact wall of this abstracting functionality, Griffa starts by listing the "medium": the idea of painting and discretion are "composed of".

In his furious consumption of categories and motivations, Griffa starts again on each occasion with the primary listings and basic combinatorial structures: on each occasion, setting them out on the canvas hypothesizes the gesture again and gives the hand that traces all the previous gestures that determine the understanding of the future. Thus the idea expressed in physical terms invents the medium, while the medium methodically rearranges the combination of the formal elements.

Griffa's movement in the picture is a synthetic rather than an analytical one; it tends to generalize rather than specify. After its capacity to determine a coded reality has been restored to the gesture, we realize that the analysis of this initial movement is the result of a double action that is both reciprocal and necessary: the empiricism of the dynamic reaction when confronted by the urgency of the event and the repetition of a pictorial tradition identified with Constructivism and Concrete Art. The continuity may be noted in a precise choice: this statement of the work's grammar and syntax in order to propose the model of an alternative reality to the one that is accepted as it is because it exists, which puts the accent on the specific nature of the poetic medium, discretionary when faced with the logical continuity of other genres. Obligated to use itself in order to gauge its possibilities of being a model, the painting modifies the landscape that it produces with its presence in

accordance with a rational and empirical design. Sufficiently didactic to counteract the distraction caused by the vast number of signs surrounding us, it seeks to change credulity into an operation at the limit of its gratuitousness and hence into the evaluation of its responsible possibilities.

However, having reached this point, the continuity of the historical link becomes the divarication of action: after rejecting the consequential didactics and the historic utopia, Griffa's overriding concern is to make the highest empiricism coincide with the most precise functionality, so that one is the cognitive regulation of the other within a systematic analysis of the artistic language. And Griffa goes back to explore a zero point at which empiricism and functionality coincide: this zero point does not involve the elimination of every presence, but is rather the last space from which to check the means of differentiation and dissociation. While the art of painting means making an object that already exists without copying it, the action of painting means imitating in terms of great mobility the types of behaviour not so much as technique per se as technique that dissociates in the ideation the need for praxis as the sign of an active and possible presence.

It is, however, with regard to another point that Griffa measures his distance from a certain type of historicized hypothesis: faced with discontinuity and the way events do not recur, Concrete Art and Constructivism channel all their resources into the constancy of the medium, so that the mode of development does not need to start measuring its further possibilities from scratch on each occasion. On the contrary, every concatenation is broken in these works and certainty becomes doubt worthy of confirmation: the drippings left to an impression of gravity continue on their way, changing their appearance on the support, which is placed obliquely in the space. On each occasion it is necessary to find the zero point without any dramatic quality or sense of the absurd: the gratuitousness and artificiality of the morphological separation is not a method, but rather the carefully conscious cognition of one's own level of provisionality. This

This provisionality has its own modalities and rules: thus, resuming the discourse from the empirical fiction, a very distinctive functionality comes into being.

(Catalogue of the Galleria Martano, Turin, April 1968)

Albino Galvano  
(*Untitled*)

The presence of Giorgio Griffa in the experimental art of the most recent generations is characterized by an original line of development, a clear vision of the objectives and meaning of his work and the relationship linking him to the particular mode of being of the social milieu in which this work takes place, or at least - in accordance with ideological and political positions that are not those of the present writer, but that cannot be ignored if one wishes to understand the significance of large part of contemporary culture - of the relationship that with this milieu he intends, in a certain sense, to theorize. The development of Griffa's intellectual and technical maturity in this direction has been not only very consistent but also rapid. One of Filippo Scroppo's most successful pupils and certainly the most advanced with regard to his cultural responsibility, the artist acknowledges that the training he received had a propaedeutic value that was indispensable for his later development. In fact, he soon made good use of this stimulating lesson of freedom, seeking to develop an artistic practice that did not have as its ultimate aim reproduction or allusion, or the purely formalist hedonism of the "beautiful picture", even if abstract.

Certainly, such an objective, when it is not simply intellectualistic, cannot but exist in a dialectic relationship with what it seeks to refute: in effect, those who have been able to follow the development of Griffa's work, of which here only the most mature examples are on show, will remember pictures that are very "beautiful" in the current meaning of the word, for example variations on the theme of insects and flowers (and this choice of repertoire with what is almost an Art Nouveau flavour is significant). For that matter, it is possible to detect an echo, transposed- but not to the extent that it is unrecognizable into the interplay of "butterflies" a little astonished to find themselves detached from the serial iterations in which they were composed in ballets with roses and locusts in order to arrange themselves in a new and more serious, perhaps more cruel, operation. But this is the last opportunity for painting already in the ambit of the new operations that the large coloured and unpainted spaces and the articulations consisting purely of objects establish.

Having turned against itself, the expressive gesture of painting becomes an event and, as such, eschews any semanticity that is not its own existence and signifying the reason for its coming into being. In Griffa's case, this is a more complex reason than such an intentionally simple result might lead one to believe. One of the points of passage in which the crucial phase of Griffa's more recent work occurred was, in fact, constituted by the articulation of the real spaces of the canvas into complex arrangements that reduced and then progressively made superfluous the last figurative references, whether they were the outlines of a human face or hand, the traces of an elastic band flexed by the symbol of gravitational mass, or the outline of paint drippings. Now that these traces have been eliminated, the angles or intervals that relate one canvas to another are no longer a condition for the proposal of images, even images reduced to initials, but are the continuation of the space in which the canvases are located in the same topological situation that materializes within the canvas and is hardly distinguishable stressing the operative articulations - from differences of colour that have lost any hedonistic meaning. However, while this concept of painting eliminates any relationship between the artist and the public - in other words, between two subjective entities that is established in a different ambit from that of the everyday event or of existence regarded as different ways of exploiting a common object with the rejection of the aesthetic dimension in a distinguishing and restrictive sense, it does not eliminate an ethical value, but asserts it. Thus it is a commitment to restore an overall meaning to this relationship that directly influences our lives in a series of events that are those of everybody's existence. And it influences them with a series of myths that, rightly or wrongly, are regarded as purely comforting and thus evasive and falsified. It is not necessary to discuss here whether this way of presenting the work contributes to the demolition of myths or risks constituting new ones and whether the "hieroglyphics" of the present situation of art in relation to the anxiety and protests of today require decoding that is perhaps different from that offered by the new generation of artists and the critics interpreting them I believe instead that it is much more important to take note of the existence of the critical approach on both the implemental and the theoretical levels, and of the fact that our problems cannot be eliminated. In view of this reflection, I believe that Griffa's work, which has recently managed to resolve its problems directly and is sufficiently courageous to take this critical and practical work on itself, to be particularly timely and significant.

(Catalogue of the Galleria Martano, Turin, April 1968)

Maria Cristina Mundici  
*Quasi Living Organisms*

In Giorgio Griffa's Quasi dipinto (Quasi-Painting) we see canvases, brushstrokes and paint: the materials and tools of painting are preserved with their specificity and displayed as they are. These are works dating from 1968; however, it should be remembered that, in the period when he was learning the techniques of painting in Filippo Scroppo's studio, Griffa - on the suggestion of Aldo Mondino - came into contact with the output of Giulio Paolini, who from 1961 to 1964 worked on the separation of the different elements of the artistic object, each of which became a protagonist of the work: tins of paint and brushes, and stretchers and canvases constituted both the materials and the subject of many of Paolini's works in that period. And Griffa was deeply indebted to the artist: the way he laid bare the elements that go to

make up painting was clearly influenced by those works by Paolini in which the picture's only subject was its structural components, seen in their original form before they became part of a painting.

This is the point. Despite the reduction of his works to minimum terms, Griffa has never ceased to practice painting. He has distanced himself from figurative art, rejecting the idea that painting reflects a reality external to itself. He has experienced abstraction and its ideological backup. He has come close to overcoming the concept of the picture as a painted surface and tenaciously and rigorously pursued the possibility of painting. "I don't represent anything; I paint", he says.

However, in his Quasi dipinto the process of stripping of painting that characterized all his subsequent output was not yet complete. These works still display the influence of such American painters as Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman, and the trace left by the brush is very cultured, to the extent that the final fringes are often obtained with modelling, thus once again with a representative process rather than being constituted simply by the interruption of the brushstroke.

A year and a half later, the Galleria Sperone staged an exhibition of Griffa's work that was, in effect, a manifesto of his painting. The artist showed a series of canvases that were not mounted on stretchers, but were attached directly to the wall with nails: technically very simple, they offered us coloured traces left by the movement of the brush over the canvas. The canvases weren't primed and, with the material clearly visible, were themselves the supports for the painting. From one picture to another the weave and texture changed, as did the colour and the way it was arranged on the wall once it was hung. They remained canvases, with all the qualities and characteristics of the fabric, including the fact that they preserved, also when arranged vertically, the folds

caused by the method used for storing the pictures, which were folded up like any other pieces of cloth.

Griffa's pictures were, as I said, hung on the wall, so the canvas was supported on its upper edge by a row of nails placed equidistantly from each other, without, however, hiding the imperfections deriving from this procedure: there was a natural deformation of the shape of the canvas where the nail was inserted, causing greater tension on the upper edge, which, as a result, was stretched, making it wider than the lower edge, and this difference increased in proportion to the length of the canvas. These details were noted by the vigilant eye of the painter and had his approval.

The colour was placed on the canvas, as in the pictorial tradition. Rarely pure, the colours were often the result of mixtures and were combined with white. Rarely applied thickly so that they coagulated on the canvas, they were more frequently used in a liquid form - they were mainly acrylics - and, because of this, the density and colours varied.

The paint was spread with brushes of various sizes or transferred to the canvas with sponges having different degrees of absorption: when painting, the artist laid the canvas on the floor, with sheets of paper under it to absorb the excess paint and liquid. What remained was the mark of the tool - the sponge - or the more elementary trace the brush and the artist left on the canvas: that is, the line.

Thus the painted form was the line: not a calligraphic symbol in the manner of Giuseppe Capogrossi, but the transcription of the physical nature of painting. The line corresponded to the artist's primary gesture, which was so simple as to belong to the hand of everybody. From picture to picture, the breadth only varied according to the width of the brush or sponge used, changing from a thin mark to a field of colour: with a single gesture, the artist reabsorbed the conflict between the line and colour.

On the surface of the picture, the artist's hand repeated the same movement a number of times, with continuous "writing" going from left to right: there was a sequence of horizontal, vertical or oblique lines, sometimes preceded by a void, often followed by the silence of the unpainted canvas. This made it clear that it is a fragment, a portion of reality - of painting - that was now present and had settled here, but that, after a pause, would continue elsewhere, on another canvas with another resonance: a quasi-living organism, it was the unfinished gesture of his previous Quasi dipinto. The single picture was part of a more complex event that took place over a long or infinite period. Furthermore, each picture was closely linked to the time of its execution, to the extent that if an external event interrupted this process, the picture was rejected by the artist because it could no longer be

regarded as the recording of an event happening at a precise moment. Time - that is, the extended time of all the possible works and the limited time required for the execution of a single canvas - became the constitutive element of the work. Deriving from this were parallels with music and poetry, with the times and modes of execution and listening, and with the rhythms of reading. This is what was displayed on the walls of the Galleria Sperone in November 1969. Griffa's exhibition at this gallery demonstrated that his objectives and approach were similar to those of the other artists who could be described, more or less, as exponents of Arte Povera - associated with it in that period. Griffa recalls the encounters and exchanges with these artists, in particular Giovanni Anselmo, Gilberto Zorio and Giuseppe Penone. They also shared the belief that art is a form of knowledge and therefore a construction of reality, that the work leaves the spectator with room for active intervention, that the materials used with all their authenticity promote the actions and reactions on the part of both artist and spectator, and that the work is a quasi-living organism that exists in time and real space. The month before his solo exhibition at the Sperone, the artist took part in a group show at the same gallery together with Anselmo, Boetti, Calzolari, Maini, Merz, Penone, Prini and Zorio: on the floor next to his canvases hanging on the walls, he painted a series of lines that seemed to continue the pictures themselves, thus showing very clearly that he belonged to an area of thought similar to that of the other artists present.

(G. G., UNO E DUE, Edizioni GAM, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Torino 2002)

Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco  
*Propositions for Silence*

Can one remain silent when explaining on what principles this choice is based? Is it possible to discredit the art as an object while remaining within the boundaries of aesthetics? Or rather, can one paint with the painter's tragic tools (canvas, paint, brushes), thus creating problems for His Majesty the Painting? Can one paint the course of a thought? Dada gave a reply and today Griffa does

not give another type of reply, but asks the same questions.

Griffa takes a canvas and paint, concentrates and then he outlines the situation. Everything remains in a primary state. The canvas is the material that absorbs the colour and, above all, an action. In the end he doesn't exhibit the picture on a stretcher, but the bare canvas with a

few signs of the rainbow. He dispenses with images of utopia, reality or fantasy: he dispenses with images. Griffa rejects the world of representation (similar to Robert Rauschenberg's method): after all, for Mondrian and even for Pollock, the artist is delegated to represent images. Even the self-important theoreticians of behaviourism aspire to the fetishism of the image.

Griffa uses economy of means for minimal results. He doesn't seek to construct the beautiful sentence but, if anything, he's interested in the punctuation (in order to point out the future of the actions). A white canvas speaks, as does a meadow covered with snow: it's just that the footprints have been imprisoned, while the actions are filtered. Before an artist who has decided that the artistic concept is never immaculate, finally the critic is silent. What's the point of X-raying an X-ray?

(Catalogue of the Galleria Godei, Rome, November 1972)

Tommaso Trini  
*Biography of a Picture*

The only identity of Griffa's paintings is the process to which they are subject, a process that doesn't only speak of painting, a cognitive process that, totally focused on the execution and with an absolute pertinence of actions or structures essential to the pictorial activity, is at the same time apprenticeship, creation and communication. Already in his first exhibition - at the Galleria Martano, Turin, in April 1968 - Griffa's painting had this way of presenting its own biography: it was the recording of the application of paint with a brush on the bare canvas, which was, however, still attached to a stretcher. Since 1967, during the period in which he refused to exhibit his works, the surfaces have tended to become full and compact. Involving the use of either a painting knife or a brush, often with the choice of monochrome surfaces, or achromatic due to the white, the action of painting invariably begins at top left and is interrupted before covering the whole surface of the canvas: the visible interruption of the brushstroke indicates the artist's desire not to produce a finished work, but rather a continuous and open-ended process. It was in this period that Griffa's paintings were dialectically closer to the work of Giulio Paolini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giovanni Anselmo and Gilberto Zorio - in other words, to the extrapictorial

and critical operations of his contemporaries (not only those in Turin), rather than to the output of Morris Louis, Robert Rauschenberg or Barnett Newman, or even Kasimir Malevich, as one might think. The fact that the canvas is

bare, without a ground, is a reminder of Paolini's reflections (in 1960 and 1961) on the operations that he carried out on the back of the picture and Pistoletto's mirror paintings. Nothing may be superimposed on the bare presence of the painting and nothing may violate the canvas. The marks made by the application with a painting knife of white pigment and synthetic glue on a very thick unprimed canvas were followed in 1968 by coloured stripes, sometimes starting from the bottom. The type and size of the canvas varied considerably, and were often determined by the dimensions of the gallery where the work was to be displayed. On the contrary, the artist gave great importance to the preparation of the paint, no longer using pure colours, which would require an a priori condition, putting a rigid constraint on the painting. The liquidity of the two or three basic colours mixed in bowls and the choice of panels in relation to the type of canvas used were equally important to the subjective psychological relationship that guided the choice of the colour values. Thus painting required the colour to penetrate the canvas and follow its weave, its capacity for absorption, its folds and the attention - and the psychophysical tension - of the brushstroke. The course, breadth and undulation of the line of colour were nothing more than the passive recording of these basic choices: rather than a projection of the artist's autobiography, one found, at most, the halo caused by the absorption of the paint. Hence it was an electroencephalogram, the active recording of the impulses of the brain in a state of passivity and relaxation - the only possible analogy for this painter.

Griffa's decision in 1969 to eliminate the stretcher was the result of the fact that he accidentally started to paint a canvas before it was mounted on its stretcher. From then onwards all his canvases were free, but it did not matter to him if others later mounted his canvases on stretchers. It was a practical choice, not an ideological one: "[I want to] show my pictures in a way that is as close as possible to the state in which I painted them." It was, therefore, a practical need that did not bear on the substance of the work, but allowed the spectator to be fully aware that "only the traces of my work are revealed to the spectator".

### *Constructing reality*

Although he does not like to theorize - and even less does he like to make ideological statements - in recent times Griffa has often been obliged to clarify the meaning of his work. One of his favourite expressions is: "I don't represent anything: I paint." Elsewhere he explains: "If there isn't a definite ideological alternative, it's not possible to represent anything. Representational painting is always that of a finite ideal world. On the contrary, mine

is the painting of a world that comes into being as I do it." Instead of putting the accent on a noun, "painting", a category that exists thanks to external projections, Griffa draws our attention to a verb, "to paint", where the action serves as the backdrop to a condition. It is not, however, characterized by a tendency towards extreme positions, as in the case of Abstract Expressionism. There is no utopian desire to balance an act of transgression, as the fathers of abstraction often sought to. One could say that, after the first generation of Modernists (Mondrian, Malevich, etc.) and after the second generation of extremists (after the Second World War), what I would call the "third generation of painting", according to the evolutionary classification of the cataloguer, is projected, just as it is here, to reverse the direction of the message, which, instead of going from the interior towards the exterior, goes from the exterior towards the interior, from the codes of information to the processes of training and memorization. An attempt is now being made to improve the flow of information and it is here that Griffa's characteristic feature may be found: the art of pertinence. This is not only concerned with what is linked to the activity of painting and nothing else, nor does it only say what relates to the specificity of the means employed and nothing else. Pertinence as Griffa practices it by painting and discussing involves knowing what one is conveying, learning from painting what the lessons of painting are. Rather than the zero degree of painting, his path leads beyond the picture, where the idea of creating as intensely as possible - that is, the idea of the possible - prevails. This is where a result is still lacking and the lines of colour are destined to be nothing more than simple traces of the process, "The spectator will have nothing but the traces of my work." Griffa works with open-mindedness and passivity, without any violence. He explains: "After the initial choice, my work is simply executed. There is no investigation while I work. The work is only executed by the brush, canvas, my effort and so on: these are the elements that execute it and I am a tool just like the others. My active intervention stops before this, at the moment when the choice is made." At the extreme limit, Griffa imposes a rule: "[One should] carry out a process with the most suitable means in the simplest possible way, putting the accent on the minimal moments of this work, on all the components - both physical and spiritual that derive from it and are closely linked to this kind of process." Recently he summed up this rule as follows: "At this moment my work is not making pictures, nor is it drawing lines on the canvas, but it is rather taking the brush and bringing this colour to this canvas, following with the greatest attention what actually happens." These are some of the explanations that pepper his discourse - and this is why I quote them so frequently - but they do not make it arid: on the contrary, "constructing

reality” is Griffa’s true leitmotiv. He opposes it to the utopia of the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements, their models and their hypotheses, which he treats as if they belonged to the Enlightenment. “From the moment when the utopian hypothesis ceases to be valid, our task is to construct reality.” By reality, Griffa seems to mean the reality of the world and not the specific reality of painting. Moreover, it also appears that Griffa puts the construction of reality wholly in the world of the “reality of the canvas, which is not just the reality of colour, but also regards that of illusion, myth, dreams and so on, a physiological reality in which it is possible to act in the present, without utopia.”

(“Art Press”, no. 15, Paris, December 1974-January 1975)

Hermann Kern

*Nothing More than Unfinished Painting... A comment on Giorgio Griffa's works.*

Griffa does not regard the space of painting as a supreme good or as something definitive, but rather as a more or less arbitrary section of a continuous basic infinity, which for purely technical reasons must finish somewhere. This space of painting - in reality, a section - serves as support for making a section from a fundamentally infinite process, from a visible trace without time limits; on it are arranged the traces (lines and signs) that are also given as a possibility outside painting.

If one wished to give each type of painting that character of completeness, of being finished - for example, with the lines continued correctly right up to the lower right corner - this would mean the falsification of information, aviolation of the tempora’ character of painting and would also mean establishing the fluid course of time, presenting a definitive and irreversible result, and creating a timeless object. The fact that Griffa is incapable of continuing to work on a painting he has interrupted is part of this consideration. This is because after the end, after the interruption, he is really older and no longer the same as he was before, it would be inappropriate to continue the work. The temporal and progressive character of painting - as well as its musical nature - is to be found in all these various relationships with time (the horizontal line is a metaphor for it, tool. The following are significant parallels with music:

Rejection of completeness and a static character in favour of a process; painting as annotation with the nature of drawing; an invitation to observers to imagine what the continuation of the line would be like. In other words, during the time needed to observe the work, they are asked to relate time as a pictorial theme to their own

temporal situation and their own notion of time in order to “execute” the work in a sort of dialogue, just as is required when listening to a piece of music.

Musicalization, an approach to music as an extremely abstract art form - which had already been used by Kandinsky as a means of emancipation - and besides, through abstraction to the highest level, through the rejection not only of its function as an illustration and a separate form, but also as a structure, through the subjectification of a rhythmic process - that is, a fluid of energy in which the worktime can also be observed.

Griffa’s impartiality, which can be directed together with the material and the observer, may be attributed in part to the influence of John Cage. In particular, Griffa refers to a memorable piece for the piano of 1952: 4’33”. This work in three movements lasts exactly four minutes and thirtythree seconds, as its title states. Although not one clef is envisaged, it is composed for the piano: the pianist sits for the whole time at the piano, lifting his or her hands three times to the instrument and lets them drop to indicate the three movement of the work, while the rest of the time there is complete silence. The composition consists of the audible reactions of the audience, the noise from outside the concert hall and so on. Cage decided to create this composition after observing that no room is free of sound and that, in any case, one can always hear certain noises everywhere and, in a traditional concert hall, they are simply drowned out by the sounds produced intentionally. And it was stimulating for him to use this material for a composition, given that it was created without a specific purpose. It is probable that for Griffa the break with the past represented by this piece was interesting, as was the clarity with which it fixes the fortuitous nature of its borders and, therefore, the process that was in motion before and continues afterwards. Also of interest is how the artist works with the given material, the relaxed manner in which its genesis and the way it structures itself is observed and his refusal to interfere, and, at the same time, his inclusion of the public and his working directly with time: the analogies could continue.

### *Possible Meanings*

First of all, I believe it is important that, in Griffa’s case, the pictorial media represent themselves and can develop independently, that they are not be distorted by the instrumental nature and informative functions, and that exist without a specific purpose, joyfully, primitive, with infantile irresponsibility and are capable of developing the whole spectrum of possible meanings: not the use of the pictorial media for a preconceived scheme, but the rather allowing them to come to maturity and act. This means that it is not sufficient for the artist to be out of the picture and work on hypotheses that are only

intellectual; the painting must be executed - that is, it must come into being - in order to be, on the one hand, useful as a comparison or disobjectification, as a mirror, and also in order to allow the unknown to appear; the only act that is productive is that where the unknown can emerge as a reaction and separation from the given concepts.

Griffa is not consciously aware of either the origin or the result of each act: its possible poetry, the unknown and doubt. Innovation was not and is not his problem because he regards novelty as an intrinsic property of the development of painting. He states firmly that he has always done everything after the other painters and thinks that innovation is only a problem for the painters who are unable to follow the situation that develops around the painting with sufficient concentration.

This freedom regards not only the material but also the spectator: I believe the participation and inclusion of the spectator is important. The paintings are not complete works; with their partial character they aim at the process, leading the spectator from the first stages to the following ones. They are not separate from everyday life and invite the spectator to take part in the process. From this point of view, it is important that a large part of many works remains empty, that the empty space is emphasized by the scattered traces, and that the spectator should be offered a large space for his or her participation. This is comparable to the tantric projection of the mandala, or completely empty paintings that are meant to serve the believer as a flat projection in order to produce the image of the deity in his or her mind. In this regard, the character of painting as a process is once again indeterminate and its infinitely variable possible solutions make it evident to us that Griffa's activity will be very fruitful in the future.

(Catalogue of the Kunstraum, Munich, June 1975)

Arturo Carlo Quintavalle

### *Untitled*

The canvas and the patches of colour, suspended fabrics, abolition of the frame, abolition of the limit between the object that becomes a window onto reality and the picture, which is this reality. Burri had already framed a rag or a fragment, but Griffa relies on this ambiguity between the object, the object that becomes art and reality: behind him is Duchamp, as well as other artists.

Griffa was born in the context of the civilization of writing in a period of critical elaboration that aimed to recover different types of writing for painting on the borderline between calligrams and the different tradition of the image in the West. Griffa does not believe in mimesis -

Then another aspect of Griffa's work emerges: space. There is a difference in the sequence of strokes and patches of colour, and the spatial dimension is to be found in this different repetition. But this dimension is also subtly hidden in Griffa's refined choice of tones, consisting of very delicate relationships, such as gouache on paper, and instead the support is still canvas: once again Griffa speaks of painting, but treats painting as if it were writing and pays attention to the materiality of writing. Thus he is a painter of the phenomenon, not of the idea.

("Panorama", 16 February 1981)

Flaminio Gualdoni

### *Matisseria and Other Works*

In the work that Giorgio Griffa has been producing for about fifteen years, the problematic terms constituting its internal factor of stimulus and continuity are clearly perceptible. In the first place, there is the idea of painting as the terrain of cognitive possibilities that are produced from the experience of its identity, from its store of history, which motivates the artist's oft-repeated claim to be a "traditional painter". Secondly, there is the assiduous exercise of the investigative implications of practice, in which the rigorous scrutiny of the mental projection is not extraneous. This is not, however, a programmatic assumption, or even less a dogmatic one, and it presents itself as a severe and continuous warning of the dilemmas of choice and of the critical problems - in the most complete meaning of the term - of praxis. Moreover, his operative horizon is concentrated in the limit point where the pictorial image reveals itself in its primary genesis, in the significant interstice "in which relations are not yet representation". And again, the extreme paring down of the constituent of execution, of the possibility of gesture ("placing the colour in the canvas"), governed by neutrality that becomes a general rule, by a radiant secularization (and, on reflection, this is not without coquetry, otherwise it would be impossible to explain the elegance that is innate in Griffa's style) of the rituality of the painting so that the research for value lies, above all, in the clear and complete quality - at the same time empirical and mental - of the process.

These are all features that Griffa has always displayed unambiguously in their convergence towards the tension of a sign or colour that burdens itself - to the greatest degree of distillation and power - with the "historic sediment of painting": this is a sign that thinks of memory, its own memory, not as a locus of evocation, but rather of relationships, made all the more significant by the elaborating trends of pictorial practice.

This has nothing to do, therefore, with the immaculate workshop of the surgeons of the brush who pontificated years ago; due to an excess of ideology among the critics, an attempt was made to include Griffa in this too. If this were the case, how could we explain his repertoire of colours based on complementary colours and halftones, deriving from a period extending from the Renaissance to the Settecento and from the Sezession to Matisse and that, above all, does not repudiate an ancient landscape thread? And this masterly stimulation of deviations, vibrations, expansions and pockets of sense where a mechanical repetition of gestures would be in order?

In fact, the artist's recent output has fully accounted for this different constitution and its prominent internal reason. His tutelary god is now indisputably Matisse, whose fascination has for some time been present in Griffa's work: there are even explicit tributes to the artist, as in *Riflessione* (Reflection), exhibited in 1980. Thus Matisse conceived the pictorial space, with its precise level of theory, as a sphere of significant relationships and he regarded the image as the balanced tension of qualitative links between signs and colours. He also revived the sheer pleasure of colour, with its functional and decorative possibilities and the fact that it is, after all, the very essence of vision.

In many ways, *Matisseria* may be regarded as a work typifying the maturity reached by Griffa in his recent output, and it was preceded by a series of stimulating exercises - including a triptych, already nearing completion, displayed in the spring at the exhibition *Registrazione di frequenze* in Bologna - in which the artist summed up the possibilities of creating a more fluent rhythm in the sign and greater and more spontaneous brightness in the colour. Matisse's composition with planes of colour, divided up by sensuous linear rhythms, appears on Griffa's canvas as a network of relationships between signs and warm colours - all on the surface, which, as usual, is projected virtually - which have even acquired depths of agitated evocative power, arranged according to organic horizontal trends: orange with curved segments and green with flat layers, while the blues and violets are patches on a red ground, then blue again and a curvilinear motif.

In *Veneziana* (Venetian) it is the rapid, cursive spiral of a green recalling Veronese that gives a meaning to the space and characterizes the fluctuation of orange, violet and ochre, all colours associated with Venetian painting. In *Lavagna-Beuys* (Blackboard-Beuys) there is an open, live recording that becomes colour and, once again, there is the flavour of painting. *Paolo e Piero* (Paul and Peter), which is all oriented towards delicate lightness - of blues, pink and yellows and sturdy interweaving of diagonals, originates from the interference between the

intellectual; the painting must be executed - that is, it lances of the early Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello and the grid of the contemporary Piero Dorazio in which is to be found, without sharp contrasts, the value of intimate continuity guaranteeing the true sense of the pictorial experience.

Thus it is this profound coagulation of meaning that safeguards the *raison d'être* of painting and its historical body. Being attuned to its tension - and to the exterior modes of the style, as too many are inclined to preach - is, for Griffa, one of the few paths that we are allowed to take today: or at least that permits us to decently prop up our ruins.

(Catalogue of the Galleria Marzano, Turin, October 1982)

Francesco Poli

### *Painting without a Subject*

The now constant and increasingly articulated presence of professedly decorative elements in Giorgio Griffa's painting seems, in the last few years, to have signalled a notable change of course with regard to the distinctive aspects of his previous period, beginning in 1967-68, which the critics included in a fairly definite manner in the area of the so-called new painting.

What still remains today of the purist severity in the Minimal style, of the zeroing of every representative value that is not strictly self-referential, of the attention paid, above all, to the material process of painting, of the radical reduction of painting to its constituent elements (surface, colour and sign)?

What continuous relationship can be established between the former structural tension of the surface and the present apparent superstructural "superficiality", which is a characteristic that is usually attributed to everything that is, in some way, linked to decoration? If we remain strictly within the normal perspective of interpretation, the relationship becomes fairly relative, in the sense that the latest developments of Griffa's work could be construed as a form of pictorialist liberation from the clutches of cold analytical reason or simply as the accentuation of the lyrical and colour values and the taste for composition, even if this is only just emerging: in other words, it is the loss of methodological consistency, although this favours renewed aesthetic efficacy. However, through a different and more carefully considered concept of the language of decoration it is possible to see things from another point of view, giving space to considerations that, in some respects, once again cast doubt on the exhaustiveness of the previous interpretations. This is not so much a defence of the more or less

abstract value of consistency maybe in contrast with the recent extolling of the systematic eclectic inconsistency of artistic practice - as a desire for clarity and understanding that does justice to the complexity of a line of investigation capable of producing results that, in my opinion, still have to be adequately assessed. These results are particularly interesting for the problems they raise, revealing all their qualitative importance also because they are linked in a non-fortuitous manner with the working premises that have always informed Griffa's creative practice. The artist - who clearly rejects the most typical features of the avant-garde approach, although he accepts the effect of innovation as an inevitable consequence insofar as it is the condition necessary for every true work of art - made the following statement in 1979 and it is still valid today: "In my work there is no evolution, there is no progress... the lack of evolution does not, however, mean lack of innovation ... innovation is inevitable also when, as in my work, there is nothing that has not been

after the others - that is, there is nothing that the others have not already done." In this sense, the experience of painting is a passive one, distant from any tendency towards subjective expressiveness: it involves working with the traces of the anonymous and collective memory of the signs; it is the plotting out of these traces or fragments, causing them to emerge from the fabric of the ground, or - and it is the same thing - immersing them in it.

In my opinion, Griffa is to be credited with having managed to show much of this through images. In other words, he is "creating by images", developing with exemplary determination and clarity a type of painting with intense and carefully considered sensibility that is subtly cerebral, but without aprioristic rationalistic rigidity, where the analytical dimension, although present in some ways, only appears, if necessary, in an implicit manner as one of the aspects linked to the original ideational moment.

This is a type of painting that, in order to rediscover the truth about itself, has radically challenged the well-established logic of the composition and the presence of the subject in the work through a practice that, in parallel with the quest for a Minimalist character, can, in the first stage, be described as one of zeroing, but that, from the outset, has never gone in the direction of a sterile conceptual reduction, since the intention is the exact opposite - that is, positive rather than negative tension on the opening up of new fields of aesthetic signification.

In order to manage to present the painting directly not as a means or medium or material used for representation - it was necessary that the iconic element, even if this is a simple primary sign, should not be something detached from the ground or support, or something attached to this and, vice versa, that the support should not appear to be the ground for the image. In other words, it was

necessary to eliminate the difference between the figure and the ground, removing every element arranged hierarchically as far as attention was concerned, insofar as it was the main subject of the composition. This also meant denying that the figurative space was a clearly defined whole and any possibility of existence of foregrounds and backgrounds - overcoming, among other things, the ambiguity of the interplay between the figure and the ground typical of Concrete Art, which still presupposed the idea of a virtual space.

Thus, it is the sign, the physical trace of colour, the anonymous fragment of figurative memory that lays down the conditions of its meaning, opening up to the process of signifying at the moment when it comes into contact with the support, with the sphere of semantic possibilities and with the field of painting, imbuing it with its substance. But, as I have said, this painting is without a subject and thus there is no trace of a subject of the action - with the consequent possible metaphorical references - just as, on the other hand, there does not appear to be an object to which this action is subjected. The linear sequences, aggregations, accumulations and superimpositions of the brushstrokes and the layers of paint interweave, so to speak, their textures with those of the canvas, settling on this like the sand on a beach or the soil in a field, so as to assume its identity by right, although remaining clearly separate. From this point of view, it is possible to find an analogy with the underlying idea of Land Art works by such artists as Michael Heizer or Walter De Maria. But equally relevant is the reference made by Griffa himself to frescoes in order to underline in his work not only the consubstantiality of the paint and ground but also the timeless fascination of the antique, which oozes from the intonaco and, at the same time, the painting.

For Griffa, the fact that he does not address the problem of the composition means he avoids isolating his work in a closed schema that is seen exclusively as a system of internal relationships. Rather it means regarding the work as one open to every possible coming into being that is never completed because in some ways it can always allude to a non-relative, absolute dimension of painting, even though there is a clear awareness that the latter will inevitably suffer a setback because it will never be able to completely conquer the terrain of its ambitions.

(Catalogue of the Galleria Martano, Turin, October 1986)

Silvana Sinisi  
*Delicate Replication*

Having been working as an artist for about twenty years

Giorgio Griffa continues to be an anomalous case who is difficult to define in the context of the Italian art scene. Decidedly against the tide was the outset of his career in 1967 and 1968, a period when painting, which had been dethroned by less traditional media with a more spectacular impact, was considered to be out-of-date and even regarded with suspicion. This was the moment of glory of Arte Povera, when the utopian movement aiming to renew and reinvent the world, driven by the enthusiasm of creative vitality, was beginning to wane.

Griffa, by contrast, opted for quiet concentration, preferring to work in a sort of secluded soliloquy with the traditional tools and materials of painting: paints, brushes, the neutral space of the canvas which he used from the outset for a nonrepresentational purpose. While it was only from 1969 that he decided to eliminate the stretcher "in order to show my pictures to the world closer to the conditions in which I painted them", right from the start Griffa sought to shift the focus of attention from the final result to the process, with an overall reassessment of the preliminary stage of the choices - dimensions of the canvas, paints, brushes experienced as the most important moment of a work in which the visible results are only the traces of a complex working procedure. Thus, with a more careful interpretation, the artist's apparently unfashionable choice of painting shows itself to be deeply rooted in the historico-cultural context of the late 1960s, revealing a background of critical and cognitive aspirations that were matched by the contemporary art movements where painting no longer played an important role: for instance, Arte Povera, Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. Griffa, however, tends not to impose choices of meanings and to eliminate every subjective connotation from his work in order to make himself available simply as an executor, putting himself "on the same level as the other physical features contributing to applying of colour to the canvas." The only margin of arbitrariness - that is, of "active intervention" - that Griffa allows us to have is the preliminary choice of the materials and tools to be used in the process of painting, where the adoption of a certain type of fabric with particular characteristics of thickness and weave, as well as the choice of colours and brushes, appear on occasion to have been determined by momentary subjective tendencies, which, however, may be traced back to the objectivity of an overall design. Also the choice of the signs, defined at the outset with precise characteristics of width, length and thickness, as well as their arrangement on the canvas, express an underlying idea that is then developed during the process of execution. By reversing the customary schemes of things, the artist places himself, with regard to the action of painting, in a state of "passivity" - that is, a sort of mental vacuum that does not allow distraction, while he identifies with the line made by the

brush guided by his hand, his attention focused on the degrees to which the paint is absorbed, according to the permeability of the surface.

The abandonment of any facile expressive immediacy - curbed by the strong design component - as well as the reduction of painting to its basic features, have led to Griffa's painting being associated with the movement known as Pittura-pittura or Pittura analitica, which became of major importance in the first half of the 1970s. This was, however, a label with which the artist did not entirely identify, as was evident in numerous interviews where he discussed various problems relating to his work. In a text published in 1973 he stated: "I do not carry out any investigation of painting: I do not investigate the objective connotations of colour or the other elements used in painting. I do not, in other words, carry out any active operation, even if this is cooled down and objectified. After the initial choice, my work is simply executed: by the brush, my hand, the paint, the canvas, time, my physical fatigue and so on these are the elements that execute it and I am a means to this end like the others. My active intervention has ceased to play a role earlier, at the moment of choice. Having said all that, I must, at this point, recognize that the only definition I accept for my works is that of painting and that I regard myself as a painter and nothing else."

Between the picture and painting, and between virtual or metaphorical depth and the surface, Griffa opts for the language of painting, but with a fundamental difference from other painters of analytical origin: what counts for him is not the verification of a system that is entrusted to a finished product that is complete in itself, but rather the highlighting of the flow of the dynamic and expanding creative process, which may also be interrupted for external reasons, but is never produces a result that is complete and irreversible. Once again this is a non-authoritarian choice, intended to free painting from an excessively rigid and prescriptive concept, and to reassess not only the creative process but also the role of the spectator, who no longer passively receives the message contained in the work, but is now directly involved in the process of reinterpreting and reworking its meanings. The distribution of the signs and colours on the canvas takes place from a starting point and in a fixed direction, but is not intended to fill all the available surface area. The work develops following a progression that is both temporal, as in music, at times based on the continuum of the line and, at other times, on the rhythmic division between one sign and another. Although the areas of colour appear to follow each other equally, there are small differences and imperceptible changes that reduce the precision of the serial repetition. Each sign comes into being unique and unrepeatable, like every act of life in the irreversible flow of time, and Griffa is

is profoundly aware of this continuous and unstoppable Heraclitean flow.

The result of an important period in the artist's career may be seen in a series of works, executed from 1978 to 1980, consisting of a combination of fragments that are, however, independent and were placed next to each other without any interruption. I recall, in particular, *Dyonisos*, a splendid installation at the 1980 Venice Biennale, where a whole room was lined with a large number of works that were different in terms of size, material and type of sign. The dilation of the work, which was unusual for Griffa, did not produce any sense of excess: on the contrary, it created a result of poetic lightness thanks to the fragile transparency of the materials and the joyful freshness of the colours and the textures. Having become part of a more complex whole, each fragment establishes a relationship with the other elements, forming a link between different experiences, as if it were reconstituting a cognitive path entrusted to the cohesive power of memory. *Dyonisos* seems, therefore, to symbolically conclude a period of Griffa's painting and, at the same time, to inform us of a new direction in his work that was indeed to produce a greater articulation in the pictorial fabric.

(Catalogue of the Galleria dei Banchi Nuovi, Rome 1987)

Paolo Fossati  
*Griffa 1968-90*

At the great banquet of painting and, subsequently, of Conceptual Art in the 1960s and early 1970s when the return to painting, then the colours and gestures of this, right up to such developments as Nomadism or the Transavanguardia, or, elsewhere, various anachronisms, were served up - Griffa kept to a restrained and elementary diet. For around ten years, starting with his first exhibition, which was held in 1968, all his works seemed to be inspired by drastic reductions: dots, lines and surfaces left as they were at the beginning of the process. And these were processes with traces and the distribution of dots without a hors d'oeuvre or dessert.

There was music full of rhythm and structural tones on the edge of the silence that his canvases were intended to retain as if this was, in its turn, painting. But, in a city like Turin where artists were paying a great deal of attention to these features, he must have been aware of the way the paint was applied and the tension of the colours. For him, too, it was important to make the colour "sing" in certain spaces of the canvas, ready to be surprised by a final result that turned out to be richer - and more viscous than the original idea. These are all things that he

reflected on - and the apprenticeship, before and during the exhibition in 1968 was not brief - and took his time over, gradually carving out a different territory for himself, not for merely sampling, but for analysis. Originally the canvas was prepared, then it was bare: just a few strokes of the brush in compartments, the regularity of which was not calculated precisely, but entrusted to times of repetition; spots of colour, almost always delicate or in light tones, while accumulations of paint are also to be found. These early paintings by Griffa are inscribed in their rectangular surfaces, with their colours, tones and brushstrokes, perhaps with the result that they appear to be cold or indifferent. And the artist soon realized this, he who was not cold, but was indeed indifferent to labels and programmes because he was not willing to accept the formulae that were then - and subsequently - in fashion. In reality - and this needs to be said at once for an artist who is as intense as he is endowed with pictorial qualities of patience - the fact that Griffa did not play the game was a shrewd way of observing and controlling the games of the critics and also, or above all, of the artists, weighing up, sifting and examining them, so that his were felicitous indications of mechanisms and rituals. For the critics and commentators he was too conceptual to give himself up to painting, too concentrated on painting to become an exponent of Conceptual Art. Griffa has produced a large number of excellent pictures in which an extremely interesting fact gradually became manifest: the more he added other elements - space, more signs, more whites, more thicknesses of lines and so on - the more this procedure, instead of forming drawings and figures was arranged with an order that was as superb (in my opinion, the reasons for the fascination of these works included, and continue to include, a magnificent yet disturbing infallibility) as it was equivocal (no evident reason justified then, or justifies now, the width of the bands shown or those left bare, and the same may be said for the reasons for the interruptions, with lines that suddenly stop, when the hand has not continued the action). Thus there was a happy calculation of the differences in a structure reduced to a minimum.

On the occasion of an exhibition in the mid-1970s the painter in question - the one of Griffa's canvases - decided to let the world know something about himself: he said he did not represent or paint, adding that his work only consisted of "placing the colour in the canvas". He said "in" the canvas because he now used not only an unprepared canvas but also, so to speak, one in a raw state in which the weave was clearly visible, so that the layers of colour, the "placing" Griffa referred to, impregnated the threads of the support and the signs settled on them. This occurred to the extent that it was not possible to work out whether someone - from outside - had painted over the canvas or if that spot or sign came

came from within and whether it was sought after and made or found and accepted. Reduction of the artist's intervention and sediment of painting: the formula of Griffa's early work is essentially this hendiadys. It is a minimal practice that approaches distant things and comes from points that are far from each other.

Compared with the output of his contemporaries or those involved in the same area of artistic investigation - Griffa's work was distinguished by the refinement with which, on each occasion, each canvas upset the balance of the pictorial effect. Like his contemporaries - in terms of age or interest - he sought to revive a dynamic form of painting that was also vital and full with feeling, aiming, like the other artists, to recharge the energy rather than the weight of the work's breath. The context was that of Arte Povera, which was povera (that is, poor) as regards the use of materials and pictorial symbolisms, but very rich in artistic practice, analogies and perspicacity. And here, in one of Griffa's numerous texts, is a phrase that was particularly significant in that climate: "Man is a midwife rather than a creator."

In a situation like that of Arte Povera, rather than weaving the heat of emotion with the thread of his poetic practice, Griffa preferred the cooler solution of the catalogue and the ritual: that is, the maximum distance at which signs and impulses can be kept for them to feed each other. And Griffa also stated: "I am not interested in how the message is conveyed as I am wholly intent on the procedure for constructing the work rather than the ways in which it can be enjoyed."

In the course of time this painter-cum-decorator has sought, at the edges of the traces left by the paint between his canvases, true repertoires of memory, in agreement with his reversal of the gaze. Thus Griffa does not create his own painting, but he looks at it and discovers it, quoting Paul Valery, and we then know that every beginning and every act exists between memory and oblivion, and involves forgetting what we know, if we know it. And he felicitously quotes the poet Eugenio Montale: "Thus history / neglects knowledge for haemorrhoids."

It is worthwhile, therefore, to refer one of Montale's later works, and quote, as if it were a memorandum, a particularly symbolic poem at this point of my commentary on Griffa's output - and this is a commentary by a witness, given that I have followed his painting from the outset with great relief in view of what the times and his contemporaries offer us, in a way that, obviously, receives greater recognition than Griffa has been allowed.

The title of Montale's poem is *L'arte povera*, but it does not refer to the art movement of the 1960s in any case the poem dates from 1971 - but to the poet himself as a painter. It is a tribute, which wasn't intended to be ironical, to the intelligence of his own painting:

easel painting

requires sacrifices

by those who do it and it is always something extra for those who buy it and do not know where to hang it.

For some years I only painted bird nets with trapped birds,

on blue sugar paper or grosgrain for packing.

Wine and coffee, traces of toothpaste

if there was a sea to be decked out in the background,

these were the colours.

I also composed with ashes and cappuccino grounds in Sainte-Adresse, where

Jongkind found his chilly light

and the package was protected with cellophane and camphor

(with limited success).

And the part of myself that manages to survive

the nothing that was in me and the everything that you were,

is unaware.

One does not need to have a lot of critical or historical imagination to realize where Griffa's painting - that is, the painting I am trying to define - belonged. The "picture object", in the sense of a work that, as far as possible, avoids absorbing the passion, private intensity, projections and personal affairs of the artist and is very much on the side of pictorial possibilities, has its putative fathers (Matisse rather than Malevich and followers (from Giulio Paolini onwards, with the same intentional disregard for communication). Non-representation also has these adherents and we are all capable of listing them. The most interesting aspect of such constellations or lineages seems to be the fact that, for Griffa, they have nothing to do with Minimalism, a movement then in fashion that brought about a depressing result - that is, the reproducibility or multiplicability of the modules established by the geometric minimum and transferable from one case to another with continuity. On the contrary, the series of works by Griffa seems to be based on nonhomogenous syntax, so closed is the composition on each occasion to the pure given data; it is, however, a deconstructing composition and hence without any pretence of contiguity, style or taste that are, in their own way, unrepeatable.

I believe that the constellation or lineage within which a possible future historian of today's art could discuss Griffa's work must go back to Dada. Not that such a discreet painter, with his aplomb, propriety and silences, would want to let off firecrackers or provoke others: in other words, Griffa isn't a bomber. However, he knows that blowing up certain consistencies and certain methods means a lot: for example, by dissociating the act of

painting from the artist's personality, so that the picture isn't a mirror, sediment or physiology of the artist (it is no coincidence that Griffa talks about himself as a decorator); or else, by deciding not to tell a story or, to put it more pompously, history - panel after panel, but, on each occasion, withering the onlooker with a still (the film has been lost thanks to some god), work after work, a series of unfinished paintings is another shock given to the conventions of the usual enjoyment of an artwork. In my opinion, the act of painting carried out with a taste for separation and breakage is of this type - that is, Dada - in Griffa's work. Once again, I quote from the artist's writings: "If there is not a defined ideological alternative, one cannot represent anything."

Up to this point I have been recounting - with all the customary chronological inaccuracies - the story of Griffa's early period. Not that things have changed fundamentally in the artist's later - and, all things considered, present - period. However, in the 1980s Griffa's work did take a new turn in the sense that each of the elements of reduction and analysis with which he had worked from the outset proclaimed their right to memory more explicitly; insofar as they were traces, they mapped out, so to speak, their own path. The fact that the gestures of the hand and the intermittence of the colour remained as they were, or varied only slightly, now meant that, on each occasion, they contaminated their own figurative mode. I shall try, once again, to express myself with a formula: from the 1980s onwards, Griffa has produced fairy tales, minimal stories and elementary amalgamations of profiles, shapes and signals, the references to which acquire, as it were, redundancy and referents. Neither mechanical nor automatically established, they are secret relationships. Where the main character of these short stories really lives is their secret theme, in a musical sense - that is, the hidden noise of the various figures put together. From the signs and rites of what he discovers, Griffa retrieves a trace of intention, a concealed text. Thus, just as Duchamp brought forth an object incongruous because it wasn't foreseen in the artistic script - turning it into art, Griffa goes back from the outside to the inside, leaving the thing discovered incongruous in its own way. And it's a precise referent: once again Dada, or something of the sort. My impression is that, in his splendid pictures of the last few years, Griffa has invented for all of us not only storytelling, but also - as Matisse, an artist much loved by Griffa, suggested - an invitation to undertake a journey, with a landing on Cythera. Amidst many immobile and decorated markings and minimal intrusions of the canvas - that is, within his repertoire - a map is being drawn, a place towards which sweetness and wealth of colour enchant and accompany us. Obviously this is a colour that isn't at all expansive and rhetorically expressive: being decorative,

it celebrates its supreme immobility and ascent by means of a gesture in that place. But, precisely because it is decorative, it is able to contain an order and an expansive internal emotivity. And, for this reason, it is an active colour, a conductor with clear and lasting dynamism: psychological maybe. In my opinion, it is no coincidence that certain curved lines - sometimes with a gentle curve and the use of a golden colour to increase its serenity as a bearer of the gaze proliferate and fan out. It's as if the contamination they propose were connected to a movement, a link slowly sewn in the space. And it is not even a mental space where we who interpret Griffa's pictures take the other end of ribbons, frets, broken lines or convolvuli and tie up strands, using both memory and suspension. This is the journey I'm talking about: finding oneself at the edge of the picture and continuing with it, but going beyond.

(Giorgio Griffa, Edizioni Essegi, Ravenna 1990),

Mario Bertoni  
*Unfinished*

"I even try to let the hours of the day enter my canvases."  
Matisse

I am quite sure that Griffa would unhesitatingly agree with a sentence like "I even try to let my canvases enter between one hour of the day and the next", meaning by this a space like an interstice requiring the idea of intermediate time - that is, the time a brush takes to cross the canvas: the hand stops, hesitates for some moments on the last square centimetre of the canvas, just as it has done just before, when beginning... , then he removes the brush still wet with paint, breaking off the line, which is unfinished at the lower corner, "at a certain point", a point that is no different from the others, but is certain to be the last (or the first). Surprised by the inevitability of the end and the beginning, the canvas enters time - for the duration of a point.

Griffa has quoted Matisse in various texts and has dedicated a work - *Matisseria* - to him, as if out of gratitude ... Well, Matisse maintained that "we are never clear-sighted enough to realize that the artists we admire would have produced very different works if they had lived in another century", which is already a fine way of discouraging the others from using his work as a model. While in Matisse's case the term "purity" has a central role, in Griffa's case this role is played by the idea of contamination - of the colour as well as of the canvas - in order to reflect on the physicality or thingness of painting. The sign also participates in this physiological character

"I believe that a general methodology of the creative spirit is in progress that, rather than considering the working tools as just material that the artist moulds, regards them as no longer virgin, but uses them with all the weight of their history and culture, as well as naturally their physical qualities, and entrusts them with the birth of poetry.... And since there is nothing in the world in which there is not an element of human culture, everything - absolutely everything - can be brought into this creative process. Everything, so also painting. The artist who transforms reality has been replaced by the one participating in a procedure for getting to know the world." It is Griffa himself, therefore, who states that the quest for any virginity (or purity) is unfeasible, in the belief that, in any case, every sign is unrepeatable - that is, exemplary "even when nothings exists that the others have not already done before". This is a sceptical position, far from the impetus of the art of first half of the century. It is, in fact, a position that caused Griffa to declare: "In my work there is no evolution and there is no progress" - thus laying claim to an attitude of passivity that allows the artist to become a tool among other tools and, in the end, to accept the situation where the act of painting is constantly marked by the hands of a clock. So what is the affinity between Matisse and Griffa? If we disregard the intentions and objectives, I believe that it depends, above all, on the fact that they both learnt about and experimented with what Matisse called "the writing of lines" - that is, "the harmony between drawing and colours", or "the precision of thought", a sort of synthesis of the artist's intentions, a meaning and a material. But, immediately after this Griffa distances himself from it, in order to venture into an area that Matisse rejected because he was anchored to feeling, spirit and instinct, while, for Griffa, this was an area in which there was no interiority to which he could lay claim, but simply a receptiveness to knowledge that could be aroused. Thus, while according to Matisse, "Purely intellectual painting cannot exist. .. it actually never starts", Griffa maintained that it could exist and that it neither begins nor ends, "the metaphor of a space (and a time) forever unfinished": it is, in other words, an area around the void, blocked out by thickened colour, which has nothing to do with either order or purity.

(Giorgio Griffa, Edizioni Essegi, Ravenna 1990)

Emilio Tadini

### *Figurative Alphabet*

1. Griffa's painting must be seen - in a way, we might say "expects to be seen" - from two points of view that might even seem to be in contrast.

It's as if we felt it even before we had a clear and distinct awareness of it. I mean, what we feel is that this painting allows us to enter and involves us in dimensions that are very different from each other. We feel that it is from these different dimensions that this painting calls us. And with different voices. But they aren't at all difficult for us to understand.

2. First of all, Griffa's painting makes itself available as a work about what we might call the primordial meaning of painting itself. It's like the repetition of a *mise en scene* on a stage where people, before saying to themselves, "Let's see what we can do with this painting," must have asked themselves, "Lefs see what this painting is." By trying it out. And naturally, by trying themselves out in that act. Irs significant that those two fundamental elements the support and the colour - display themselves in Griffa's work in a very simple way that is, at the same time, revealing.

In the first place, the support and colour show themselves here. But this indisputably practical act ends up by evoking quite naturally a large amount of theory. (I shall mention just some of the possible themes. How does the support enter the dimension of the image created by the colour and the sign? How do the colour and sign enter the dimension defined by the support - and how do they react to its plastic consistency and its colour? What symbolic value can be given to the fact that it is by blocking, in some way, the free path of the brush through the air - in that kind of stop or fall thafs both definitive and indispensable - that the opposition of the support makes the birth of the sign possible and thus that of the meaning? A sort of material dialectic ... etc.).

In the sign, Griffa's painting constructs by trying out, so to speak, its own body. In a very simple manner, it elaborates the materials constituted by the support and the colour.

It's a sort of figurative alphabet....

3. But Griffa's painting, as I said at the beginning, can be seen from another point of view - that is, from a point of view that may appear to be quite the opposite.

No longer is it an evocation of the primordial gesture of painting. On the contrary, it's a work on painting as the result of an infinite elaboration that makes itself available for us today. It's a work on painting that has done everything...

It's as if, in the clamour of all the history of painting, one were to strive to recognize once again the basic notes and rhythms.

4. Griffa's painting may be thought of, on the one hand, as the setting up of a system that, paradoxically, is prior to the history of painting, and, on the other, as the setting up of a system that is consequent on that history. Perhaps the most important thing is that these two

thoughts should be thought of at the same time, because we can feel simultaneously a sense of restored primordially and a sense of great intellectual sophistication that has been created in the absolute simplicity of an artistic practice.

5. (Naturally one shouldn't deliberately set any store on a note like this. If one does find a reason for so doing, may it take effect somewhere very far away on some backdrop. This text is nothing but a small incident in the world that rises up beyond the Indefinable, elastic limits of Griffa's canvases.

Naturally, within those indefinable, elastic limits, the support, colour and signs say everything that there is to say.)

(Catalogue of Giampiero Biasutti Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, 2001)

Rolando Bellini

### *Figurative Alphabet*

What happens on the unprimed canvases piled up in his studio? What happens now on the most recent supports, with their freshly executed signs consisting of colours, signs made of writing and signs formed by numbers? And what happens of an innovative or surprising nature on the latest works produced with intentional sobriety and newfound freedom by Giorgio Griffa? Something that, in my opinion, by moving first and foremost pencil, paper, canvas and paints - in other words, active elements in Griffa's artistic practice - brings together different kinds of event. As the ancient Greeks would have put it: there is an act (pragmal, a chance (tukhi), a purpose (te/os), a surprise (apodeston!), a tautology (tautologos) and, finally, an action (drama).

Furthermore (more particularly), what happens is what happened on the scattered leaves from which the oracles took their auspices and cryptically and symbolically ordained the future destiny of those who questioned them: that is, the constitution of signs consisting of forms, signs formed by numbers and signs made of pictorial writing that always require the active assistance of the spectator moved by the mystery and solicited by the inexpressible that asserts itself through a certain amount of chance. For the latter it is a question of the inspiration of the artist, of the forceful assertion (albeit subtly) of his creative powers, which are, in effect, the felicity of chance. Moreover, there is the combination between writing and painting, numbers and words, signs and calculation, and geometry and the absence of any measurement: thus we observe the dialectic confrontation between void and measurement of space according to classical reasoning - that is, Cartesian, Galilean, Einsteinian, and so on.

The signs disappear and there is, therefore, also dispersion and a great void and a great solid on each of his canvases, whether they be large or small. Whether bare or covered with signs and writing, each of his works, especially the latest ones, display fluctuating spatiality and ironical indifference - hence hidden emotional and intellectual participation - to the deeds and misdeeds of the day. There is also a quality of symbolic representation, recalling the theories of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer's association that would also have greatly pleased Erwin Panofsky, I suppose.

Adopting a strategy that was favoured by American Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, he made special, artistic use of everything that had hitherto been despised in the art world and he finally produced works characterized by elasticity and synonymous with freedom since they were created with the fewest possible limits or restraints. With a large number of acts that were wholly intentional and disarmingly simple, he trimmed down, so to speak, the overabundant sense in order to focus on their profound personal or expressive value and meaning. Indeed, this is a process that has been intensified in the latest series: it is a process according to which, although without abandoning any symbolic requirement, the symbolic self-referential superstructure is removed. Until very recently, however, this was present and active in the sense of a tautological crescendo, and also of a superstructural expansion that ended up by obscuring form and sign, as well as the artistic act and expression. Thus it is correct to say that lately Griffa's work has been growing in intensity, with a paring down process that, paradoxically, allows him to express more and in a riskier manner than he has been able to do in recent years. Without relinquishing the symbolic overtones - at most of meaning and its contrary, the nonsense implied in every artistic action - and without eliminating the fortuity of the action, its mixture of the explicit and the implicit, the artist performs a new, direct action intended to produce particularly expressive power and manifest subjectivity. In the final analysis, this is his reply to the eternal question, "so what is painting and what is this painting?" Griffa's reply may be found in his artistic practice: the simplicity of his signs, the direct and fragile beauty of his symbols in the form of numbers, the patina of certain layers of paint, the uneven pencil lines, the flavour of the materials, from the pigments to the paper, and the impact between the sign and the bare canvas. All these things - especially in his most recent works - help to define the artist's intentions. What Griffa does is to produce something similar to the spoken language freed from every betrayal of meaning, comparable to the full pronunciation of a word - that is, the correct pronunciation, semantically accurate or valid of that word. Thus he asserts - especially in his most recent series of works -

that it is necessary to pronounce and not articulate each individual sign. This is because, whatever he may do, the painter's art is nothing other than the assertion that is both pure (without residues) and that is also voluntary (that is, conscious) of a certain quality of language.

In the light of what has been said so far, Griffa wants to overcome the false barrier of the metalanguages in order to undertake his own very personal discourse centred on value and efficacy of act of communication intended to show and convey the implicit meaning, not by articulating it but simply by alluding to it. And, by alluding to it - at this point it is now clear - in the delicate and ironical interplay of voids and solids, bareness and cladness, sign and non-sign, number and symbol, and sound and colour.

In conclusion, for the first direct contact with Griffa's works, I would suggest that spectators linger in contemplations, allowing them to savour the flavour of beauty emanating from each individual work and let themselves be captured by the fascination of each "cryptosign" and by the disarming ambiguity and beauty of their forms that say a lot, also about themselves, although without explicitly expressing it. Thus the value of the artist's output may be found in a dual polarity: on the one hand, in the aesthetic flavour exuded by each work, on the other in the fact that each canvas of his, like all his painting, is nothing more than an excellent metaphor that is first and foremost an aesthetic one.

(Catalogue Giampiero Biasutli Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin 2001).

Maria Mimita Lamberti  
*Passages and Fluctuations*

Griffa's painting, simple in its forms, but with refined elegance, seems to offer itself to the most disparate exegetical operations: his characteristic style has lasted over the years, and may be interpreted in the light of Minimalism, semiotics, anthropology, Oriental traditions or Western philosophy, and behaviourism or hermetism, with the interplay of references reflecting the periods and the artistic debate in progress.

These are cultural modes to which his canvases together with the artist - lend themselves with courtesy, accepting the metaphorical capacities of writing and making use of analogies and suggestions from the different fields of human knowledge and exact sciences. And, with the same graciousness, they avoid them.

Attentive and inquisitive, Griffa has developed an interest in all these hypotheses and is willing to make progress in his artistic inquiry without losing his way and, at bottom, without changing. Thus he is ready to absorb the new

stimuli in a personal story that, on each occasion, proudly returns to entrench itself in his painting, which is painting and nothing else.

This is why there is a sort of supreme outmodedness in the output of an artist who has continued to work obstinately without taking advantage of a number of opportunities, when similarities and parallelisms would have offered him prestigious labels if he had only allowed his work to be classified under them.

(Giorgio Griffa. UNO EDUE, Edizioni GAM, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Torino 2002)

Mario Rasetti  
*A Painter Who Talks to Scientists*

Why has a theoretical physicist like myself, who seeks the laws of matter and asks himself how this can be at the origin of life, has agreed to write this piece, venturing into a field that is very much outside his own specialization? I believe that it is primarily because Giorgio Griffa is an artist who talks to scientists. In the clear geometry of his signs, there is a message that they are able to understand and endorse. There is, in fact, an irresistible tension towards knowledge that unites them in a cultural mission where they have much in common: in particular, they have an identical sensibility to the complex articulations of those spaces - whether these be abstract or real - that they, like him, seek to perceive and represent.

This refined painter and the men of science are like travellers that great eagerness drives to cross the borders of a country that is inconceivable for others in order to reveal its mysterious laws. Defining the key to Griffa's work, and also the vision that science has of nature, is rather like explaining to those unfamiliar with Oriental culture the profound meaning of the haiku: paraphrasing Roland Barthes, one might describe it as 'an immense practice devoted to suspending language' - not, that is, stopping it in a charged or profound silence that is, in a way, mystical, but enunciating something that does not have to develop either in the discourse or in the absence of this. In Griffa's canvases, the language in which the meaning is lacking is the combination of all those critical structures (or rather superstructures) - accumulated over centuries of memory - that see the artist's work as an objective, the final, insuperable point of an unrepeatable experience. As in the case of science, they are paradigms that cause matter and calculation, physical laws and mathematical inventions, and knowledge and conscience to be distant and extraneous in scientific

culture. Griffa's works are instead, like scientific thought, the expression of a continuous, unstoppable dynamic flow that - like the self-similar structure of a fractal - is found in each individual work, but also in the works as a whole, especially in the way in which they are articulated and correlated temporally.

In the first place, perhaps due to an analogical mechanism that is inevitable in my way of thinking as a practising scientist, they call to mind - or rather, they induce it through analogical representation - the elusive entity that mathematicians call omega: a number that defies the laws of mathematics (and this is only apparently a contradiction). Omega isn't an abstract theorem or an impenetrable equation: it's simply a number, as real as pi, infinitely long and literally incalculable. Like Griffa's sequences, omega is a process that reminds us of the limits to what we can know; like Griffa's canvases it contains all the beauty but also the intangibility - that is, the fundamental elusiveness - of every representation.

Thus the quest for omega is to be found in Griffa's canvases: refined algorithms written in an apparently simple alphabet of lines and colours, they codify an enigmatic, elusive multiplicity of possible choices that arouse - in those observing them and seeking to interpret them by deciphering the cryptogram - the perception of an unlimited plurality of options. In these works there is the same enigma of the number with infinite algorithmic relationships, opening up an unlimited combinatorial multiplicity of parallel interpretative worlds, which are as arcane as the innumerably complex - despite the apparent, almost elementary simplicity of the signs - codes in codes concealing mystery (which can be unravelled) and infinity (which is perhaps knowable). Thus every trace, every choice of colour - as if it were a word - has a profound reason in a different knowledge that is difficult to obtain and contains one of the mysteries of the many mysteries of intelligence that cannot be exhausted by a finite number of interpretations.

There are, however, other aspects of Griffa's work that intrigue a scientific observer. Like a true complex system, his painting is the sum of its parts, the overall properties of which don't correspond to precise properties of the individual components: thus it generates a real structure. In this, the messages are constructed through repeated procedures of reflecting abstraction; these are active processes because they are dynamic - that is, articulated systems of transformations that reproduce themselves by generating each other in genealogies that are all the more authentic because they are of an operative nature. Here the very concept of transformation recalls the much more subtle one of formation or self-regulation and consequently of self-construction. The structure is, in fact, combinatorial: its invention - whether this be free or contingent, and effectively seeking an equilibrium that

is both variable and stable - aims at the same time at a final necessity (like a theorem) and an intemporal state that is reversible, yet rooted in possibility rather than in reality (as in an artwork). Why is it that the number of brushstrokes, lines and symbols in Griffa's pictures are nearly always a prime number? And what rhythms that have yet to be deciphered do the frequencies of his brushstrokes conceal?

There is also time, both in each individual canvas and in the sum total of Griffa's work, but it's circular time. We know from anthropological studies that there are cultures that perceive time as cyclical, for example the Hopi Indians in America and Aboriginal Australians - and apparently also Stone Age cultures - but they imply that these peoples are trapped in a curious mental time warp with an essentially mystical significance. But there is instead a much more precise sense of rational purity in the circularity of Griffa's representation: it is the infinity of the circle compared with that of the straight line and the perpetual return of thought to itself, which inexorably sends it back towards its point of departure in an unchanging flow that is, in a way, always different. It is an eternal round in which at each return there is, however, an imperceptible variation - there is more knowledge and more awareness of the world, but also of oneself - in the Steinian rule of explanation by repetition. It is the question the ancients asked about how space, time and matter are constituted and, after a fashion, it finds a reply here: each theory that represents universal knowledge is both an end and a beginning; and the necessary ingredients are incredibly simple in their infinite complexity. On the one hand, there is the symmetry of the observed world, on the other, a new paradigm capable of containing the definition, in terms of geometry, numbers or pure perception, of the body - which I would like to call arithmetic - inherent in the same world.

(Giorgio Griffa. UNO E DUE, Edizioni GAM, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Torino 2002)

Marco Meneguzzo

### *Uninterrupted paths*

Essentially, the components that come into play in Giorgio Griffa's activity as a painter are time, language, the "inside itself" and originality. Evidently, these elements were tangential to the "political" dimension, in the broad sense of the term, the one with which Griffa's painting was generally interpreted at that time, and the political dimension entered into and that flanked them, but without ousting them or being able to take their place. In other words, a personal attitude remained where, to be sure, "personal was political", but where the "place" of

the investigation was actually the political nature of individual action.

Time, then. With an apparent paradox that has illustrious examples in modern science. Griffa's time starts from space. Starts from, but does not end in. In interview and essays, he has long insisted about his "unfinished" and this principle of not finishing is even more visible in his works (more so in the ones he did in the seventies, to a more elementary extent in the later ones), which never close and never will. Obviously, this is not a Western-style "unfinished", and an unresolved tension between reciprocally contrasting and conflicting elements - materials. Gravity/Levitation- but an Oriental-style "unfinished", lightweight and Zen: it is pointless and even harmful to finish a landscape if you are capable of suggesting to the eye of the beholder how it can be completed, thus adding the imagination of the spectator, who thus becomes an actor to the artist's work... But there's more: leaving a work physically unfinished means bringing it back to the attention of the eye that finished it ideally every time that it rests on the canvas. All of Griffa's works are in a sort of suspended animation. In this way, time is always new, open and (nearly) circular: in other words, it is not without a beginning and without an end, as in the eternal return of the Orient or of Nietzsche, but enjoying endless beginnings it is always being renewed, thus achieving the paradoxical form of time which flows in a direction - and thus complying with the Western conception of it - but which, as it can star all over again on an endless number of occasions, is impenetrable in the direction it will take. All this happens because Griffa does not close his works: at a certain moment, the sign is interrupted and the work is "suspended", awaiting other eyes, other gazes, other moments. Completeness is no longer a virtue, because when everything has been completed - in the sense of both space/form and time - also the time of the action is completed: on the contrary, Griffa keeps this space-time crack open, using the only linguistic artifice possible for a painter, i.e. that highly personal unfinished of his.

In this way, the time factor became part of the language of painting: in fact, it returned to being part of painting, after painting had been expropriated by artistic media more overtly directed it (all process art and conceptual art, for example, starting with the great early XX century statements of intent). In this sense, the critical way in which the artist's action has been analysed since the very beginning had identified the problem, but had barely evaluated only its more properly ideological aspects. His mental and operational path is not ideological, but if anything psychological, as Lacan's analysis of language could also be psychological. Painting exists before the artist, its language obeys internal rules something that I accept happens for every language - although they are

not just structural and mathematical, but also psychological. Thus the artist's meeting with painting is not the application of the character and psychology of the former to the substantially available and neutral language of the latter, but if anything the meeting between two psychologies, that of the being and that of the language. The image of the artist as the "conduit is not new. Plato already spoke about the artist as one possessed by the god (or the daemon) and Paul Klee spoke more or less about himself when he said he was the tree-trunk that transformed the invisibility of its roots into the visibility of the crown of leaves, but after the Dadaist and Surrealist reflections, this mystical vision took on a more earthy aspect, in which psychology in the broad sense of the term - so also including this sort of "psychology of language", as something proper to language itself ... - appeared to be crucial. Griffa is on this wavelength, actually accentuating the linguistic side of psychology, if that is possible, on the other hand trying to erase the psychological presence of the human being, of the artist.

This means that the artist is the product of painting and not the other way around: he is its creature and not its creator, but it is because he finds himself in this condition that he tries to understand everything about his motives. If space and time are evident in Griffa's painting, when we go into greater detail we discern the ways in which the creature's dependence on the creator becomes manifest, in our case that means the painter's dependence on painting. One key word could be "internal", which I defined more generally above when I mentioned "inside itself". With this term, which Griffa uses passim in his writings, but which does not appear to be immediately crucial to his research - unlike "time" - the artist tries to

define the feeling he experiences every time that his hand passes from the colour to the canvas.

The inside, the "inside itself" of painting comprises more than just the "classical" semantic structure of the language of painting - and what I mean by classical here is the combinatory, geometric, logical aspects of the various elements that constitute the syntax of painting - as it also includes something more fleeting, more impulsive. This is not a question of finding the Ego of painting, but its Id. In this search, which is more like a psychological excavation - but in the body of painting, note, not in that of the artist!... - Griffa finds many analogies with the ponderous existential question posited by the great painting of the Fifties or the work of such artists as Robert Ryman, who are apparently so different in Griffa, the artist's shout and his anxiety are transformed into the best and most durable results when not so much the individual depth as the depth of painting emerges: in an equal and opposite manner, the action of Ryman - I mention this American artist because he crops up from time to time in Griffa's own words, but it might also be worth rememb-

ering other artists in Colour Field Painting goes to the opposite extreme of arrogating to itself the anonymity of the gesture, the possibility that the hand behind those signs could be random. The result is actually similar; what emerges is the nucleus of painting, its inside self that normally remains most concealed, most unspeakable, maybe even most scandalously intimate, because it was not veiled by any narrative support and was barely sustained - in the beginning back in the Seventies - by a partial ideological support. Once the veil of ideological justification had been stripped away, painting appeared in its paradoxical, "unbearable" essence, just as some find Matisse's painting to be unbearable. Ultimately, the urgency of discovering, of unveiling, the inner nature of painting is comparable to that quest for the original that has been identified as another underlying element in Griffa's action. Coherent with his vision of painting as a psychologically original language, Griffa sees crossfertilisation, mixture and once again the indistinct element as the raw material of language, whence he extracts and abstracts signs that nevertheless convey the memory of that indistinct dimension and that mixture. The signs of the alphabet are themselves the result of images, which in turn were symbols and which derived from things... And talking about the alphabet, for Griffa, is so natural as to be almost self-evident.

(Giorgio Griffa, *Silvana Editoriale/ Galleria Fumagalli, Milano 2005*)

Klaus Wolbert  
*The Intimacy of Painting*

Giorgio Griffa has taken the essential components that remains when the painterly conglomerate of figurative and also abstract art are disentangled and reduced them to the elements that remain crucial for painting, then used them to layout a sign system, a vocabulary, an alphabet and a store of minimalistically achieved structural elements that are variably at his disposal when he is creating his works and which he places in clear evidence, on next to the other and unmixed, in his painting. He treats each individual element in his pictures separately and actually additively as in each case an independent signature in the system of imagery, as an exemplary presentation of its own self. This begins by converting the image support into a theme: the support is thus an unstretched, unframed and unprimed canvas, with all the characteristic of cracking and folding, pinned to the wall with a handful of nails along the top edge, a theme that continues in the stripes, lines, tracks, logos and commas painted with precision yet also with nuance, in which both the form and the function of the brush chosen in

each case remain retraceably visible. He avoids leaving traces of hesitation, correction or emotional calligraphy in favour of as intersubjective as possible a demonstration of pure painting. As this impression of painterliness could not be achieved using a constructivist imagery based on strict precision, Giorgio Griffa always "paints" directly freehand and takes care that, in the colouristic and formal presence of the brushstrokes on the textile cloth of the canvas, the freshness of the painterly approach and the handmade of his presentation remain with all the characteristics of the fabric of the colour. Although he has not pursued the stark purism and minimalist reduction of his early works any further in his later paintings, which are often in several parts, but has actually developed a straightforwardly ornamental, illuminatingly, colourful, sensitively enticing and moving image structure, the conceptual premises of his painting have remained unchanged in the process.

With his personal contribution to "rescuing painting" from the spirit of painterliness itself, Giorgio Griffa is one of the most frequently profiled representatives of the Analytical Painting that first put in an appearance as a tendency and a term at the beginning of the Seventies. As early as 1972, the critic Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco was already describing these radical painterly positions as *pittura/pittura* (painting/painting) in the catalogue of Griffa's exhibition *Iononrappresentonullaiodipingo* (I don't represent anything I paint). At the time, the force of his tendency was making its mark in Italy, conveyed there by the German painter Winfried Gaul, especially in the exchange with the art scene in Germany, where Klaus Honnef argued a strong pro-active case for the proximity of fundamental painting with the exhibitions *Geplante Malerei* (Planned Painting) in Munster in 1974 and *Bilder ohne Bilder* (Pictures without Pictures) in Bonn in 1977. Klaus Honnef was also the one who coined the term "Analytical Painting". In Italy, attention was then drawn to the phenomenon of "absolute" or "essential painting", as this position was also called, in the exhibition *La riflessione sulla Pittura* (Reflection on Painting), held in Acireale in 1973, for which a trailblazing catalogue by Filiberto Menna was published, and then in the shows *Arte come Arte* (Art as Art), in Milan in 1973, and *Pittura analitica* (Analytical Painting) in the Galleria del Milone in Milan in 1974.

In the phalanx of those monomaniac artists who have numbered past and present among the personalities showing in the area of Analytical Painting, Giorgio Griffa is the one who has developed his painting's imagery with particularly logical coherence and with an exceptionally intellectual approach, adopting influences both from conceptualism and from minimalism and combining them with the aesthetic demands of "absolute painting" to generate an unmistakable synthesis of his own. Yet

in however rational, axiomatic and streamlined a manner he applies formal and colouristic material, he always succeeds in maintaining a playfully lightweight, lighthearted and poetic component. Giorgio Griffa's paintings are on the one hand an example of very disciplined, precise, artistic thinking with an aesthetic manifestation of an accurately calculated formal planning, while on the other hand they also always show in their very result a considerable, subtle painterly quality that can be traced back to a sensitively refined, artificial nuancing of the medium in the process of painting. Giorgio Griffa's art is distinguished by its concentration on original painterliness, on contemplative delving into the intimate structures and properties of painting and that is also the reason why he has every right to say he "feels [he is] a traditional painter".

(Giorgio Griffa, Silvana Editoriale Galleria Fumagalli, Milano 2005)