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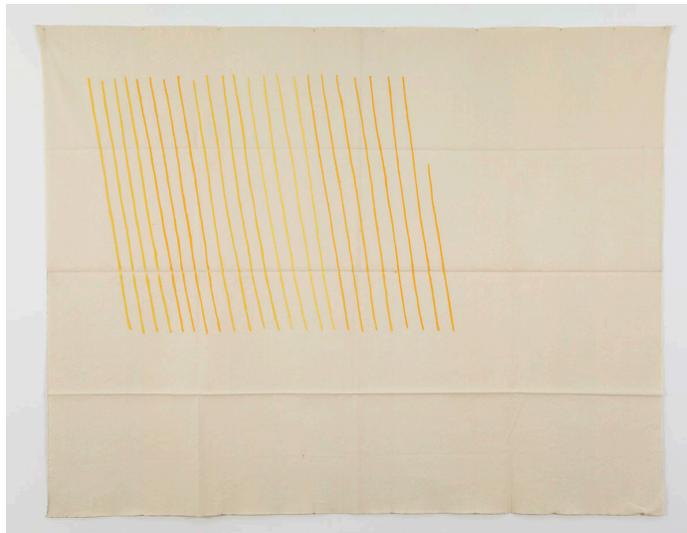
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ARTFORUM

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.



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