

## CASEY KAPLAN

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## GIORGIO GRIFFA

### FRAGMENTS 1968 - 2012

EXHIBITION DATES: OCTOBER 25 – DECEMBER 22, 2012

OPENING: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 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 US 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, they are 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: Matisse, Merz, Klein, Tintoretto, 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 mathematic 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, Düsseldorf (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, Städtische 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).

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10:00AM – 6:00PM

HENNING BOHL, MATTHEW BRANNON, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, LIAM GILLYCK, GIORGIO GRIFFA, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, PIETRO ROCCASALVA, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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**GIORGIO GRIFFA**

**FRAGMENTS 1968 – 2012**

*To be men not destroyers.*  
(Ezra Pound, closing verse of *The Cantos*)

Richard P. Feynman, physicist:

"... a photon is absorbed by an electron, the electron continues on a bit, and a new photon comes out. This process is called the scattering of light. When we make the diagrams and calculations for scattering, we must include some peculiar possibilities. For example, the electron could emit a photon before absorbing one. Even more strange is the possibility that the electron emits a photon, then travels backwards in time to absorb a photon, and then proceeds forwards in time again." (from *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter*)

Until just yesterday, matter was matter and light was light; time was inevitably past, present, or future.

Einstein already turned our yardsticks for measuring the world, time and space, into events. At least we could count on the tangibility of matter and the evanescence of light. Today we learn instead that a particle of light, a photon, can enter an electron—one of the particles that make up matter, along with protons and neutrons—that in turn emits another photon. One might say that when a particle of light encounters a particle of matter, they copulate. The boundary between light and matter is broken, light becomes matter and matter in turn becomes light.

Arnold Gehlen, philosopher:

"... there is a resonance within us, and without concepts and without words, we grasp something of our own essence. What is interesting about this hypothesis is the notion of a basic self-understanding that starts from the outside, and hence a new possible understanding of symbol and metaphor." (paraphrased by Maria Teresa Pansera in *Antropologia Filosofica*)

Today, as in the past, we can still consider ourselves capable of grasping things without concepts and without words; following Orpheus into an unknown that never becomes known. This, among other things, is one of the realms of art.

Roberto Calasso, author:

"The essence, *rasa*, of the Satapatha Brahmana, an unmistakable essence, not classifiable as that of a metaphysical nor a liturgical treatise, lies first and foremost in the uninterrupted sensation of focusing thought on the action in the very moment that it is performed, never letting go of it or forgetting it, as if the spark of thought can flash to life only in the moment when an individual being moves its body in accordance with a meaningful design. It would be hard to find other cases in which physical life and mental life have co-existed in such intimacy, refusing to be separated even for an instant. (from *L'ardore*)

Rather than there being any conflict or hierarchy between the two, physical and mental life embrace each other. Like light and matter. The mind leads the brush and in turn, the brush leads the mind.

Giuseppe Ungaretti, poet:

MORNING

Immensity illumines me.

(postcard from Santa Maria la Longa, January 26, 1917)

The morning is not only that particular morning when the poet put this image on paper, but also all the innumerable mornings of humanity down through the millennia.

The morning that saw the dawn of the Copernican world was a stormy one indeed, which is understandable given that man found himself ousted from his palace at the center of the universe and packed off to humble lodgings on the outskirts of the solar system. Giordano Bruno's death at the stake and Galileo's trial bear witness to that drama.

And yet Bernini greets it with happiness and a sense of wry humor. Immensity illumines him.

That happiness lies in the discovery of motion. The straight line becomes curved, the golden rectangle turns into an oval, space opens up, solids empty out, sculpted garments weave a perpetual movement with the wind, and pursued by Apollo, Daphne turns back into a tree.

The wry humor laughs at hierarchies. The lion on the Fountain of the Four Rivers in Piazza Navona laps the water like a puppy, having laid aside its regal role, and the figure above it raises one hand to shield himself from the falling sky. In Saint Peter's the columns twist up through the air, and the square before it, which at the time was the center of the human world, is conceived with two centers.

The brush scoops up the paint and lays it on the canvas. The canvas absorbs it. The paint dries and while drying it changes and takes on its own configuration. The intelligence of matter is what sustains the operation; my hand is at its service.

And the event continues.

Innumerable photons penetrate those electrons and come out bearing color, image, memory, knowledge, emotion and seduction (this is not a scientific explanation, just an impression).

It is another morning in the endless representation of the world, where knowledge and seduction are stored.

Where do knowledge and seduction lie? In the neurons of our brain? In the photons that emerge from the painted canvas? Do the photons awaken them or carry them along?

In painting, as in music and poetry, there is an indescribable, unbounded native joy that intersects with our individual stories. Perhaps we know how it manifests itself, once it manifests itself. But we do not know where it lies, where it hides.

Thought, our principle reality, is still without an effigy.

A mere stroke of the brush.

Turin, March 28, 2012

Giorgio Griffa