

*Schifano's schematic forms became increasingly defined as the field; the rectangular canvases with rounded corners resembled a screen ready for reception, or a video just switched on and warming up; or, if you will, the viewfinder on a reflex camera which has to delineate a specific view. . .*  
(M. Calvesi, exh. catalogue, Galleria Odyssia, Rome 1963)

## Mario SCHIFANO

*Qualcos'altro*

Curated by Alberto Salvadori

Opening: Wednesday, January 22, 2020; 7pm-9pm

January 23 – March 20, 2020

From Tuesday to Saturday, 11am-7pm

Gió Marconi gallery is pleased to present the exhibition *Mario Schifano. Something else*, dedicated to a group of monochromes from between 1960 and 1962, curated by Alberto Salvadori and in collaboration with the Mario Schifano Archive.

Schifano began to make these industrial enamel paintings on canvas-backed paper in 1959, after earlier experiments in Informalism. He first presented them in 1960 at Galleria La Salita in Rome, in the group exhibition *5 pittori*, which he shared with Giuseppe Uncini, Tano Festa, Francesco Lo Savio and Franco Angeli, and later in a solo show at the Tartaruga gallery in 1961.

Ahead of other artists working in Rome at the time, Schifano not only intended his monochromes to empty the surface of the painting, partly as a reaction to Informalism, but also to attribute it with another point of view, to 'frame' it, to propose a new way of seeing and painting.

Maurizio Calvesi was the first to understand that the surface of the monochromes was simply a screen, as he commented in the Galleria Odyssia exhibition catalogue in 1963: *'They were highly original paintings with only one or two colours to cover the entire surface of the rectangle, or two rectangles juxtaposed... A number or several letters (but only at times) isolated or symmetrically placed; a lump in the paper, some drips, that was the total movement of the painting.'*

As the common denominator of an entire generation of artists, from Lucio Fontana and Enrico Castellani to Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein, the monochrome was no novelty between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the '60s, and Schifano was perfectly aware of this.

*'I thought painting meant starting from something absolutely primary'...*, said Schifano, *'The first all-yellow paintings with nothing in them, empty images, had nothing they wanted to say. They diverged from any cultural intention. They wanted to be themselves... Making a yellow painting was just making a yellow painting, that was all.'*

Zeroing the gesture and meaning was therefore a simple pretext for making a painting that started from scratch, opening the way for something different.

The grammar of Schifano's monochromes is very simple: industrial enamels with a glossy, covering effect; 'dripping' colour spread freely and unevenly on the rough surface of wrapping paper. The intention was to give the idea of a billboard painting.

The surface of the paintings with their bright colours and absence of tonalities, similar to a photographic plate, heralded the emergence of new images: it was a new space for investigation, a field of germination which was ready to produce something else.

The exhibition's emblematic title refers to a work from 1960, made by Schifano when he was just twenty-six, and also to a polyptych from 1962, which is among the works on show.

With the effective conciseness of an advertising message, *Qualcos'altro (Something Else)* was perhaps meant to indicate that what the artist intended to paint had to be different from what was already available, but it was also a mission statement expressed in two words: the monochrome, denoting a *tabula rasa*, was ready to be transformed into a projection zone, a photographic field for focusing on details, particulars and fractions of images.

*Something Else* has an almost prophetic flavour, considering that these 'screens' were soon to be filled with new signs of modern life.

It is in the light of all this that the exhibition focuses on monochromes, sixty years after their creation. They were a crucial step in Mario Schifano's creative journey and the genesis of his artistic invention.

The paintings will be accompanied by a group of works on paper from the same years, and to mark the occasion, a tabloid format newspaper of the exhibition will be published containing formerly unseen work by Schifano, together with contributions by Riccardo Venturi and Alberto Salvadori.

#### **Biographical notes**

Born in Homs, Libya, in 1934, Mario Schifano moved to Rome in the immediate post-war period. After abandoning his studies, he worked as an assistant to his father, an archaeologist and restorer at the Villa Giulia Etruscan Museum.

He initially painted Informalist-style works, which he exhibited in his first solo show at Galleria Appia Antica in Rome. He subsequently took part with Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Francesco Lo Savio and Giuseppe Uncini in a group show entitled *5 pittori - Roma '60*, curated by Pierre Restany, which led to critical interest in his work. Moving away from Informalism, he began to create monochrome works using industrial enamel paint on wrapping paper glued to canvas.

In 1961 he won the Lissone Prize for young contemporary painting and held a new solo exhibition at Galleria La Salita in Rome. After a trip to the United States, where he took part in the *New Realism* exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, he began to introduce fragments of urban iconography into his canvases.

His work took the form of thematic cycles, from *Paesaggi anemici* to series dedicated to art history (*Futurismo Rivisitato* 1966). In 1964 he was invited to the Venice Biennial, and the following year he took part in Studio Marconi's inauguration show, becoming one of the Studio's most representative artists. In addition to three new series *Ossigeno Ossigeno*, *Oasi* and *Compagni compagni*, he also made avant-garde films such as *Anna Carini vista in agosto dalle farfalle*, which he showed at Studio Marconi in 1967.

From 1970, after his political and social commitment during the protest years, he experimented with transferring television images onto emulsified canvas, adding details in industrial enamel paint.

He had numerous solo exhibitions and in 1972 exhibited at the 10th Rome Quadrennial. The following year he participated in the *Contemporanea* exhibition, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva in the Villa Borghese parking lot. In 1974 a vast retrospective was held at Parma University, comprising one hundred works tracing his artistic career.

During these years he returned to revisiting art history, creating works inspired by the masterpieces of the historical avant-gardes; he also embarked on new cycles, among them *Quadri equestri*, *Architettura*, *Naturale sconosciuto* and *Reperti*.

In addition to organising numerous solo exhibitions in Italy and abroad, he contributed to several editions of the Venice Biennial and was included in the major exhibitions of contemporary Italian art, including *Identité italienne* (1981), Centre Pompidou, Paris; *Italian Art of the XX Century* (1989), Royal Academy, London; and *The Italian Metamorphosis 1943–1968* (1994), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (which subsequently transferred to the Milan Triennale and the Wolfsburg Kunstmuseum).

The artist died in Rome in 1998.

The many exhibitions dedicated to him include extensive retrospectives held at the following venues: Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome (2001); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (2008–2009); Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan; Musée d'art moderne Saint-Etienne Métropole; Castello Pasquini, Livorno (2013); Luxembourg & Dayan gallery, London and New York (2014); Complesso Museale Palazzo Ducale, Mantua (2017); and Mayor Gallery, London (2018). In addition to these were two important exhibitions organised by Fondazione Marconi: *Schifano 1960–1964. Dal monocromo alla strada* (2005); *Schifano 1964–1970. Dal paesaggio alla TV* (2006); *Grande angolo per uomini, manifesti e paesaggi* (2013), accompanied by the release of the book of the same name edited by the Mario Schifano Archive, and the last, *Ommaggio a Mario Schifano. Al principio fu Vero amore* (2018).

Among the principal and most recent group shows that have included his work are *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Gallery, London (2016); *Arte ribelle*, Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan, curated by Marco Meneguzzo (2017); and *Nascita di una nazione*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, curated by Luca Massimo Barbero (2018).