Opera Gallery Monaco is proud to present the exhibition Monochromes Italiens, a selection of works of artists from around the world who have contributed to monochrome painting such as Lucio Fontana, Turi Simeti, Agostino Bonalumi, Marcello Lo Giudice and Alessandro Algardi.

Although monochromes have existed since ancient times in Asia and Africa, it was only as of 1915 that a concept was conceived by Kasimir Malevitch and illustrated in his famous painting Black Square on White Backdrop, considered “the ultimate point in painting, or its zero point”. Monochrome art has undergone in-depth research while experiencing success and failure throughout the 20th century. It is, however, unquestionably in Italy, after World War II, that it earned its stripes.

In 1947, Lucio Fontana published his Primo Manifesto dello Spazialismo, followed by Manifesto Spazialismo in 1948, where he exposed his theories on unity in art and architecture. These publications inspired young artists like Agostino Bonalumi and Turi Simeti. In 1951, the artist completed his first monochrome pieces, initially created as architectural ornaments before being considered as unique works of art.

Monochrome art is not a style nor a movement but rather the result of an attitude, a personal stand taken by the artist. Its main goal is to explore the relationship between context and content.

Monochromes Italiens, which will be exhibited from June 26th to July 10th, reflects the genre’s variety of approaches and techniques. This is how Lucio Fontana transformed the monochrome piece into architectural concepts symbolising all the questions related to the era of reconstruction in the 1950s. As for Marcello Lo Giudice, the artist used the genre as a support for his organic works using the elements of nature, the Earth and volcanos, as echoes to the various ecological issues of the early 21st Century. Monochromes inevitably evoke the perceptions of a given time and the artist’s interrogations of the era.
Born in 1899 in Rosario, Argentina, to an Italian father and sculptor, Fontana would spend the major part of his life in Milan. In the 1930s, he was one of the first Italian artists to try his brush at abstraction. After living in Argentina during the Second World War, the artist returned to Milan in 1947 and created the Spatial Art movement. In this movement, works are produced in relation to their surroundings and by dominating space. The artist is incarnated in his works, especially in his torn canvases, produced for the first time in 1949. These were the first Concetti Spaziali (spatial concepts), slashed canvas on which various materials and colours combined. Following a retrospective at the Venice Biennial in 1958, he started a series of perforated canvases, his Tagli, and thus became a reference for artists of the 1960s.

Concetto Spaziale (Teatrino), 1965
Signed and titled ‘L. Fontana Concetto Spaziale (Teatrino)’ (on the reverse)
Waterpaint on canvas and lacquered wood frame
110.5 x 110.5 cm • 43.5 x 43.5 in.

Provenance
Alexander Iolas Gallery, Paris
Acquired directly from the above by the present owner (1974)

Literature

Public notes
Concetto Spaziale (Teatrino) is the culmination of Fontana’s explorations into a highly visual and arresting series created in 1965 called Teatrini or little theatres. Employing the concept of a confined theatrical space, Fontana produced an exquisitely designed lacquered wooden frame to act as the stage. It sits in front of the monochromatic backdrop casting a delicate lonely shadow upon this scenery. Our attention is drawn to centre stage by the delicate, circular perforations made by the punctured bucci that metaphorically open up the pictorial area.

The artist usually pierced the holes with long nails after the stretcher and the canvas had been fastened in order to produce the delicate voids that are so integral to his explorations into pictorial space. Fontana explains: “the surface cannot be confined within the edges of the canvas, it extends into the surrounding space” (Bit, No.5, Milan 1967). The monochrome backdrop echoes a calm cloudy sky or poignantly the expanse of the cosmos, which Fontana would often turn to in order to capture a spirituality which resonates throughout his oeuvre. The intricate lacquered frame seems to want to expand, and creates a feeling of spatiality and a three-dimensionality.
Agostino Bonalumi was born in Vimercate, Milan, in 1935. He studied technical and mechanical drawing. He was a self-taught painter and in Milan he had the chance to meet Lucio Fontana, discover his work and eventually get inspired by his radical conception of space in his punctured canvases. Together, they elaborated practices that emphasized the physical presence and materiality of the work of art.

Bonalumi became famous for his estroflessioni works or painting objects from 1960 to the present. Those series were made especially from structures and frames causing the canvases to deform when they placed at the back of them. Bonalumi participated in several biennials. Due to his numerous exhibitions in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the USA, Agostino Bonalumi has remained in the public attention from the sixties up to the present days.

Blu, 1988
Shaped canvas and vinyl tempera
81 x 100 cm • 31.9 x 39.4 in.

Provenance
Private collection, Milan

Certificate
This work is registered at the Bonalumi Archives under the reference number 88-067
Turi Simeti was born in Alcamo, Sicily, Italy, in 1929. In 1958, he moved to Rome where he started to paint as a self-taught artist. In Rome, among other artists, he met Alberto Burri, one of the masters of Informal Art, who influenced his multi-media works in the early 1960s. 1965 proved to be a milestone year in Simeti’s career as an artist: he moved to Milan where he played an active role in the Zero Art movement along with artists like Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni and Agostino Bonalumi. Through his “sculptural paintings” Simeti explores the active experience of colour, shape, light and rhythm in a unique way by capturing the dynamism that exists between monochromatic and tactile canvas surfaces.

Untitled (yellow), 2014
Signed and dated ‘Simeti 2014’ (on the reverse)
Acrylic on shaped canvas
100 x 100 cm • 39.4 x 39.4 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio

Public notes
The work of Italian artist Turi Simeti is best understood in the context of the Nouveau Réalisme movement that emerged in Europe after the war, and specifically the tradition of Spazialismo painting founded by his compatriot Lucio Fontana. The group sought to effect a new style of art that prioritised gesture, innovation and performance. Simeti’s contribution to that programme has been to interrogate the most fundamental strictures of painting, playing with texture and tone to create radically minimal, profoundly contemplative works. Three discreet oval shapes emerge from the canvas of Untitled, blurring the distinction between the traditionally two-dimensional illusionism of painting and the materiality of sculpture. The monochrome background serves us to focus our attention on these abstruse protuberances, serving like meditative focus points. The painting illustrates Simeti’s lifelong determination to expand the possibilities of the medium in which he worked.
Untitled (blue), 2013
Signed and dated ‘Simeti 2013’ (on the reverse)
Acrylic on shaped canvas
100 x 120 cm • 39.4 x 47.2 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio
Umberto MARIANI (1936-)

La forma celata, May 2011 (Red)
Signed, dated, titled and inscribed ‘U. Mariani, 5/2011, “la forma celata”, cm 42,5 x 33, 6-10’ (on the reverse)
Vinyl and sand on lead sheet
42,5 x 33 cm • 16.7 x 13 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio

Umberto Mariani was born in Milan, Italy, in 1936. His family home was used as a refuge for Jews persecuted during World War II. The war left lasting impressions on the artist, particularly in the last months of 1945, and his works have been in continual evolution ever since. Mariani’s first phase is marked by the presence of bright colours dominating the canvas. His recent works show a complex use of shadows using white and black drapery, his signature alphabet letters and embossed symbols, all signs of the dramatic, semantic ambiguity of a language that’s not always decipherable.
La forma celata, April 2014 (Grey)
Signed, dated, titled and inscribed 'U. Mariani, 4/2014, “La forma celata”, cm 80.5 x 60.5, 6-17' (on the reverse)
Vinyl and sand on lead sheet
80.5 x 60.5 cm • 31.7 x 23.8 in.
Provenance
Artist’s studio

La forma celata, Nov. 2010 (Ivory)
Signed, dated, titled and inscribed 'U. Mariani, 11/2010, “La forma celata”, cm 65.5 x 40, 6-08' (on the reverse)
Vinyl and sand on lead sheet
65.5 x 40 cm • 25.8 x 15.7 in.
Provenance
Artist’s studio
Senza Titolo, March 2014 (Black)
Signed, dated, titled and inscribed “U. Marian, 3/2014, Senza Titolo, cm 65,5 x 40,5, 6-09” (on the reverse)
Vinyl and sand on lead sheet
65,5 x 40,5 cm • 25.8 x 15.9 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio
Born in 1957 in Taormina, Sicily, Marcello Lo Giudice is an Italian contemporary artist. He graduated with a degree in Geology from Bologna University and attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, studying under three Italian Art protagonists of the second part of the 20th Century: Emilio Vedova, Giuseppe Santomaso and Virgilio Guidi. After experimenting in conceptual art during the 1970s, with wax, strawberries, smoke and burned paper, the artist began an original research project that led him to develop a painting style “where light’s energy blends with the metamorphism of material to create remote geological views”, as French art critic and co-creator of New Realism, Pierre Restany, has said about his work. Lo Giudice’s ‘sedimentary’ painting style is structured by several intervents on the canvases in which colours, oils and pigments are spread in thick coatings, one upon the other, buried and then reemerging on the surface in various phases. Matter gives shape to heavy, matte bodies that revive iridescent pigments. Quickly recognized as an artist with an international spirit and influence, he has exhibited his works worldwide in galleries, fairs and public and private collections over the world.
Signed, dated and titled 'Lo Giudice, Eden Blu, 2014' (on the reverse)
Pigment and oil on canvas
160 x 130 cm • 63 x 51.2 in.
Provenance
Artist's studio
Red - Rouge, 2014
Signed, dated and titled 'Lo Giudice, Red-Rouge, 2014' (on the reverse)
Pigments and oil on canvas
70 x 70 cm - 27.6 x 27.6 in.

Provenance
Artist's studio
Alessandro Algardi was born in Milan in 1945. His first personal exhibition took place in 1967 in his birth town. Influenced by the art of Piero Manzoni and Lucio Fontana, his work features poetic elements by creating a field of fluid flow between the materiality of writing and the materiality of the medium (canvas, paper). Algardi works on monochrome canvases, either white or black - his favourite colours - on which he carves several layers of scripture on a unique line until concealing all meaning. Algardi’s work invites one to decipher it at first sight. The use of calligraphy reinforces the conceptual game while the interlaced sentences remain secret and mysterious. Although he has participated in numerous exhibitions in Brussels, New York and London, the artist’s studio has remained based in Milan.

Poema celato, 2014
Signed, dated, titled and inscribed ‘Alessandro Algardi, 2014, olio, acrilico, “Poema celato”, 100 x 95’ (on the reverse)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
100 x 95 cm • 39.4 x 37.4 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio
Racconto da titolare, 2012
Signed, dated, inscribed and titled ‘Alessandro Algardi, 2012, Olio + acrilico, “Racconto da titolare”, 80 x 100’ (on the reverse)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
80 x 100 cm • 31.5 x 39.4 in.

Provenance
Artist’s studio