

Trademark

Marco Meneguzzo (2016)

Fabbriche Chiaramontane, Agrigento

For however long an artist may have worked, and Pino Pinelli has some fifty years of mature activity under his belt, often his fame remains tied to the moment in which his work was in tune with "the spirit of the times"; that is, when his ideas, forms, and works best embodied a collective state of mind related to an equally collective vision of the world: in other words, when history attributes to him a "brick" for the metaphorical construction of the great building of universal culture. For this reason, while not wishing to speak only of Analytical Painting with regard to Pino, I must start from there.

There is frequently a lot of confusion about this, starting from the term itself: "Analytical Painting" has only caught on recently, replacing the other two names used in the 1970s, "Pittura Pittura" and "Nuova Pittura"; but the public, far more than those active in the field of art, considered "painting" to be the same as "a picture". This is understandable, both because for centuries a picture was the traditional support for painting, so much as to be virtually a synonym for it ("a painting" brings to mind, even for the most knowledgeable, a picture...), and because even in that 1970s climate of renewal, of revolt, of experimentation, in Italy respect for the painting tradition - even of those who had not yet decided to abandon it completely - was the same both for the surface and its support, and so the artists united under the banner of "Analytical Painting" did not abandon the "picture-form".

With just one exception: Pino Pinelli.

It is very strange that this extraordinary receptiveness to painting without a picture was not sufficiently noted at the time; while the French groups were insisting on it, in Italy only Giorgio Griffa had eliminated the work from the support of the stretcher... but since 1976 Pinelli had done far more: he had constructed blocks of painting without any possibility of referring back to the concept of a picture. To leave pictures behind, or at least to pose oneself the problem of that form, one that is both so perfect and so cogent, was a question that had been on the table for over a decade, with the followers of Fontana first of all - Enrico Castellani, Agostino Bonalumi, Paolo Scheggi - but also with Rodolfo Aricò's shaped canvases; and yet Pinelli managed masterfully to sever the final links with pictures and to re-forge those with painting. In fact, what are his marks, his disseminations if not "pure painting"? This intuition alone would be enough to reserve him a place in our history of art, if for nothing other than being the only Italian artist to paint without a picture;

and the explanation for this lack of recognition - or a lesser recognition than could be expected - seems almost paradoxical, after what I have just said: Pinelli's work appears so "natural" that its "exceptionality" has gone unremarked. This is not a contradiction in terms: the development of his work, from his first "Pitture" at the beginning of the 1960s, strained after nothing, and even what was a courageous "leap in the dark" - in other words, the passage from canvas to objects or, rather, from painted canvas to painting tout court - seems quite natural: so clear and evident in its ideal and formal limpidity that one asks oneself how come no one had thought of this or done it earlier. In this sense, Pinelli's work has the "naturalness" of all great ideas, of great intuitions, because it is simple and because it opens a boundless horizon for his work and that of others.

Pinelli has cultivated this simplicity - as did Matisse when he painted his "Odalisque" twenty times so that it would seem painted "in one go", "at a first attempt" - and has maintained his marks as elementary as possible, almost as though to respect in form the form of the idea. And so he created minimal "marks" with which to construct his universe of disseminations: small bars, dots, lunettes, angles, ovals, points, crosses and, the maximum of complexity, the combination of two points or the interweaving of two rings. They do not even make up an alphabet; they are "trademarks", something that immediately identifies a brand, to us a fashionable word, and this brand is called Pinelli and is still today unmistakable. Contrary to what might be thought, the retention for such a long time of a basic level of marks, without too many combinations and without further compositions or complications, is the confirmation of his original conceptual and formal intuition, because otherwise the multiplication and slicing up of the basic elements would simply have hidden - and thus weakened - the clarity of the first hypothesis.

Pinelli simplifies. He constructs models for representations that are a skeleton, the structure of a whole that can be infinitely more articulated; but the construction, the complexity, the superstructure he leaves to others: he lets it be intuited in embryo in his disseminations, but he is not interested in it any further. And this is enough. What is more, the reduction in this sense is insisted on and stated, because it also includes another component of the work: colour. Pinelli's range of colours is, in fact, singularly reduced - white, black, grey, red, blue, and yellow - and, apart from a very brief period in the 1980s, he has never shifted from it: these are the colours of Mondrian, just as they are the colours - and non-colours - basic to the construction of all the others, at least according to the most fashionable theory of colours, and now deposited in the pre-memory of Modernity. Pinelli almost never uses them in combination but, rather, red with red, blue with blue, white with white... once again, through reduction he arrives at that "zero point" of painting that seems to be for artists what for physicists is the temperature of absolute zero, when atoms stand still (physicists will, I hope, forgive me for the crudity of this

explanation...): in both cases we cannot arrive but only come near, like a search for the Grail where the journey is important, and not the arrival.

And yet we should not mistake this search for concision, this journey towards the zero point of painting, as being only schematism, because Pinelli is a painter, a refined painter. But then he could not have kept his "hold" on the scene for so long had he not been so, and had his "trademarks", even though so potent, not allowed a thousand openings, not reserved more than one surprise, once we have got past the first strong impact. In fact, elementary forms and colours correspond to a chromatic application that imposes on the eye a sudden change of scale and, on the mind, the elastic attitude of a connoisseur. And it is here that there is revealed Pinelli's nature as a painter. In the 1970s - at the height of the analytical and classifying climate - painting for the artist had become a problem of quantity. Five, ten, fifteen applications of the same colour on the same form determined an infinitesimal variation, though one visible to the trained eye, of the colour's tonality: they established the "difference" given, in this case, by the work and action of the painter who, in this way, measured his own presence in the work. From the 1980s until today, Pinelli's colour melds with the support and saturates it; the ripples on the surface - which appeared in the 1990s - seem to be pure pigment, like small telluric movements that create heights and depths all derived from a single source of colour: a world of pure colour, of a single pure colour, which is only the starting and finishing point of Pinelli's voyage.

In this way it is possible to understand how, thanks to the concision arrived at and maintained by the artist - in his work everything is about this: form, colour, painting - his works have gone beyond any temporal contingency, and any link with art history - in this case with the analytical period of the 1970s - only comes "after" the art. Having started in that climate and from those experiences, Pinelli found a trademark that went beyond them, even while obeying the spirit of the times. It is what Baudelaire was talking about in "The Painter of Modern Life": to be part of one's own times and to be nourished by them in order, though, to manage to lead one's own work away from those times; this is the essence of the modern artist, and this is why, in the case of Pinelli, it is necessary to start from Analytical Painting but even more necessary to forget it, in order that today, a third of century after those experiences, these works are not looked at as historical documents or some noble inheritance from a precise period, but still as the starting point for a new and long voyage, an outpost for new explorations.