

Via Tamaro 3D

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(Translation Paolo Jacomelli)

In Olivier Mosset's artistic journey, one work is often cited by the critics as of crucial importance: the great 300 x 610 cm canvas painted for the X Paris Biennial in 1977. The same size as the wall on which it was exhibited and entirely in red, under which you can make out linear motifs drawn in pencil, only the most attentive visitors were able to "see" Mosset's painting. This work heralded another essential stage in the artist's relentless search in analysing the limits of paint: the move towards monochrome. There are many analogies between Mosset's exhibition at the Centro d'Arte Contemporanea Ticino and his Paris work. The Bellinzona exhibition is, in fact, another important moment in Mosset's career: for the first time, the wall itself becomes the support for the colour, the paint surface. Blue cobalt, Parma pink, emerald green and white are the colours chosen for CACT's walls. On the walls, six 200 x 100 cm monochrome canvases are displayed following rigorous logic: one is placed vertically, another horizontally, one in the same colour as the walls, another not. In this way, a vertical brown canvas is set against the blue monochrome of the first room, opposite an almost magenta wall an orange painting and in the green room, to the right of a canvas the same colour as the wall, there is a vertical one in an intense violet. All the monochromes have frames varnished in the same chromatic tonality chosen for the paintings, which are covered by glass. This formal rigour is only breached in the final room: this is in white whilst the seventh monochrome, which is in yellow, does not have a horizontal or vertical character being a perfect 1 metre-sided square. The sequence is broken, just when museum logic seems to have re-established itself, by turning the neutrality of the "white cube" into discontinuity and disorder as a result one simple yellow monochrome. We can't define the walls painted in Bellinzona as proper 'wall paintings' because the principle function of the walls is that of a support surface and so they do not achieve a formal autonomous status. It is not even possible to define the exhibition as a presentation of a series of monochromes on walls unusually painted in aggressive, non-neutral colours. We are faced with a much more complex entity despite its overall unity: a real constructed space. The spectator is therefore posed a number of interesting problems: one refers to the autonomy of the monochrome canvases with respect to the context in which they are exhibited whilst, at a more general level, another is about where the limits of museum space lie since it is usually conceived as being neutral area which is as ideal as possible for viewing. Its repetitive and serial nature reflects how logical and intentional Mosset's production is. Rather than simple formal interplay or an exercise in style it analyses and proceeds in a consistent fashion. The artist's decision to paint the walls is in fact a direct consequence of the initial exhibition co-ordinates: the spaces available at CACT in via Tamaro 3. These are not ideal surroundings as they are the result of a conversion of a living area into a gallery. The rooms of the museum are heterogeneous in nature and lack formal coherence: natural light is almost completely absent, the walls are always different in size, material and surface texture and room size not only varies in area but also in height. There is only one solution in adapting to this space: the creation of a *site specific* work, an arrangement which conforms to the space, which takes on transforms its fundamental features, camouflages itself and merges with it.

Olivier Mosset has achieved this with intelligence and elegance.

Whereas in the Paris work mentioned above the canvas and wall, the work and the support, by dint of their perfect harmony ended up by, if not suppressing each other, at least blending into one another, at the CACT, the mimetic approach adopted is more speculative and touches on the delicate area of the formal and conceptual identity of monochromes. Perceiving the limit between wall and monochrome of the same colour does not constitute a problem for the observer: there is no doubt about their relative borders. This is mainly due to their different dimensions but also to a feature which distinguishes the canvases from the wall background: the shining surfaces resulting from the varnish on the frames and, above all, from the glass covering the canvas, a shine which is in direct contrast with the opaqueness of the dispersion paint on the walls. The interaction proposed by the artist is subtle: the oscillation between autonomy of the canvas in relation to its architectonic support and its fading into the spatial and organisational context. This interplay based on chromatic mimicry certainly has a destabilising effect on the observer which, however, is immediately negated by the other monochrome exhibited in the same room, which distinguishes and identifies itself not only through tonality but also chromatically. Mimetic fiction is thus revealed twice over rendered evident through a dialectic tactic, a strategy that obviously remains at the basis of a painting style which attempts the hard task of questioning itself. In this sense, the frame surrounding the canvas takes on an important role, as it thematizes and embodies the physical and conceptual limit that defines the space of the pictorial figment. The channel between architectonic space and artistic figment thus becomes tangible redefining the relationship between context and work.

It is only in the white room that the debate becomes more complicated: here the missing monochrome could have reached the absolute limits of an osmotic relationship between canvas and wall by being, in effect, absorbed by the white wall, or conversely absorbing it, almost like a virtual canvas, which reacts to space, but can't be seen.

The arrangement in Bellinzona therefore provokes a reflection on the relationship that exists between monochromes and space, above all the possibility of a tridimensional space through monochromatic works. If we consider the painted walls of the CACT as a monochrome work in its own right, or as an evolution of the Paris canvas, we can even include the work in the broader context of Olivier Mosset's plastic compositions, a less well-known set of works, but not for this reason less interesting than the pictorial one. In this case, the development of the works in their spatial dimension would be imposed by the architectonic structure of the exhibition rooms and would therefore not be formal choice of the artist. Nevertheless, the visitor does not find himself totally immersed in an absolute tridimensional monochromatic environment, due to the presence in every room of a canvas of another colour, and because of the different colouring of the floor and ceiling. The arrangement chosen by the artist does, however, impose on us a comprehensive spatial perception, which could be defined as an environment which, by referring to itself, assigns its own theme. This tendency is reinforced by a secondary optical effect caused by the glass covering the canvas: the mirror effect. The whole museum environment finds itself automatically being reflected in the monochromatic canvases. Paradoxically, Mosset's monochrome paintings, where both figurative intent and spatial depth are totally absent, end up causing the illusion of space. In this sense, the horizontal or vertical layout and the bichrome of the canvases exhibited in each room end up corresponding to classical painting techniques used to create the illusion of depth: contrast between colours and the relationship between horizontal and vertical lines as elements which generate perspective.

Confronted with the paradox caused by a monochrome canvas that creates the illusion of a tridimensional space, one which is both fascinating and unsolvable, Olivier Mosset once again forces us to face up to what the essence of painting is by revealing to us the artifice of the figment which is its primary characteristic. But in Bellinzona, Mosset hasn't only managed to shift attention from the object to its essence. In an ideal or, better, in a virtual sense he has moved the Centro d'Arte from via Tamaro 3 to via Tamaro 3D.