

MUSEO D'ARTE
CONTEMPORANEA
PRATO

EUROPE NOW

Contemporary Art in Western Europe

June 26 - October 20, 1988

An exhibition, like "Europe Now", which aspires to offer a selection of contemporary art in Western Europe, would not be complete without works by the German artist Joseph Beuys. Beuys, who died in 1986, through his artistic and social activity (i.e., his commitment to the movements in opposition to authoritarianism and in favour of environmental protection), gave many artists of later generations the utopian measure of an art that fully engages the contradictions of an endangered historical heritage, taking as its tools the esoteric wisdom of alchemy, the processes by which nature is transformed and regenerated, and the original myths and legends of Western culture. This capacity to revive and reactivate elements of a cultural totality on the verge of extinction is an important component of the work of many European artists of recent years.

The Italian artists who received international attention in the late sixties under the name, "Arte Povera", pursue an idea of art as transformation that uses common materials and everyday objects to exceed the limits of the painting. Gilberto Zorio, in his recent *Canoe*, captures metaphorical echoes -- echoes of travel and exploration -- that have chemical-energetic valencies. Mario Merz fabricates installations in which the organic and the inorganic, proprieties of representation and proprieties of materials, collide and transform one another in an eruptive proliferation that finds its emblematic measures in Fibonacci's mathematical progression. Jannis Kounellis, in his recent steel plates, recovers and articulates elements (coal, burlap sacks) of an artistic radicality reminiscent of the traces of a lost centrality. Michelangelo Pistoletto, in his *Moltiplicazione e divisione dello specchio*, focuses on art and his double, and on the participation of the world in the story of the work. Giulio Paolini, the silent and heretical travelling companion of the poveristi, shows with *Dynokrates* another

pre-eminent objects of research.

In Italy, as throughout Europe, the eighties witnessed the emergence of a new continent of painting defined as "Transavanguardia", "Arte Cifra", or "New Painting". For many years Enzo Cucchi has pursued, in his large paintings and installations, the traces of local legends with the cosmic implications in the alternation between minimal lightness and gestural magnificence which, in the case of Fontana, set in the garden of the museum, is inscribed in the body of the earth. Francesco Clemente has chosen to follow an artistic line along which the work alludes hermetically in the guise of an ideogram or emblem, to an undisclosed meaning. Mimmo Paladino uses drawing and fields of colour to allude to mythical-sacral presences combining Catholic and animistic elements. On a course that runs parallel to but cannot be confused with the work of these artists, Domenico Bianchi uses wax, oil paint, and ink to create rigorously autonomous paintings in which appearance and irradiation of light have overriding importance.

The German artist Gerhard Richter has succeeded in traversing the years in which painting was proscribed with the supreme greatness of the intelligence of his work. His abstract paintings show the illusionistic transparency of a process of continuous reinvention of painting and of its categories. His former pupil Thomas Schütte twists the terms of the work-context relationship to the point of calling that context into question, with installations whose playful dimension invariably points beyond the place of exhibition, towards the outside world. The playful elements in the works of young Albert Hien turns grotesque in installations and sculptures critical of the apparent progress of Western civilization. With the metamorphical ability of a chameleon Georg Dokuoupil produces paintings in which the evocative capacity of the image is treated with

films, whereas Georges Rousse uses photography to reproduce unique anamorphoses drawn on the walls of abandoned sites. As the most recent chapter in their reflection on the memory on antiquity, Anne and Patrick Poirier have conceived a large ruined column in stainless steel for the museum garden. Iron, treated with craftsmanly skill, is the preferred material of the Catalan sculptor Susana Solano, singular constructions where the relationships between positive and negative space, concave and convex form provide an opportunity for confronting the Modern tradition. The Austrian Willi Kopf uses composition-board panels to create parallelepipeds that reveal unexpected properties of the material itself, in a sculpture dense with reflection on the possibilities of the medium. Hubert Scheibl, also an Austrian, makes paintings in which minimal signs of representation and chromatic materiality kindle each other in turn. Danish painter and sculptor Per Kirkeby, in his quiet works, follows a Northern European line that has its closest forerunner in Jorn; Dutch painter Rob Scholte creates paintings in which the techniques of appropriation, *mise en abyme*, and visual paradox are occasion for comments on the status of painting today; and Swiss artist John Armleder combines motifs and materials drawn from the "sublime" history of modern art with common objects, showing his awareness of an indifference that belongs above all to the realm of consumerism.

The exhibition hosts two audio-visual installations exemplifying the possibilities of non-traditional artistic media. *Victoria*, by the Belgian artist Marie-Jo Lafontaine, grips the viewer in the antagonistic and ritual seduction of the visual and sonorous rhythm of the Argentine tango, reproduced on eighteen sculpture-monitors arranged in a spiral. *Roma II*, by Fabrizio Plessi, plays on the roaring illusion of a river flowing across the surface of thirty floor monitors.