

Enrico Castellani, One of Minimalism's Fathers

by Scott Indrisek, Modern Painters 07/10/14 9:34 AM EDT

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Enrico Castellani (c.1995)
(Courtesy of Holliger, Cityhaus)

The publicity-shy Italian artist [Enrico Castellani](#) rose to prominence in the 1960s with paintings that pushed the boundaries of form and space. An impressive spate of exhibitions this fall is sure to raise his canonical status, beginning with “Local History,” a pair of shows that situate him alongside Donald Judd and Frank Stella, at Dominique Lévy Gallery in [London](#) and [New York](#). There’s also “Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow” at the Guggenheim in New York, and “AZIMUT/H: Continuity and Newness,” dedicated to the gallery and magazine that Castellani launched in 1959 with Piero Manzoni, at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. In a recent interview, Scott Indrisek spoke with the artist about his work and new shows, all of which close in January 2015.

Donald Judd cited your work as one of the most important European precedents to Minimalism. What is your relationship to Judd and Minimalism? What relevance has that movement continued to have?

The term *Minimalism*, like all “isms,” is a media invention to simplify the analysis of cultural events. By the time I became familiar with this term, its meaning had already greatly widened and was applied to all human activities. I’ve never been interested in simplifying definitions. I got to know Donald Judd’s work independently of its defining label — brand — and I valued it, recognizing in his method the

same radical approach that animated my exploration, which was based on the need to lighten painting from being overburdened by false elements (literary, descriptive, ideological, etc.) to restore it to its ontological, essential quality: the surface. The cultural movement that goes by the name of Minimalism has created a platform of experience, essential and unavoidable to any process of advancement in the field of creativity (but one knows that revisionism and a denial of history are always lurking).



How do you characterize the actions you take on the canvas itself — are they violent or expressive gestures? Dispassionate, industrial-style interventions? Or something else entirely?

I approach the surface with minimal essential actions with the result of making it identifiable, to avoid the risk of making a redundant statement. In the gestures that I act out on the canvas, there is no violence but only the necessary energy useful for the completion of the work. The use of my dexterity is purely instrumental and does not involve the sphere of the psyche and the passion that relates to a time prior to the implementation of the work: that is, that of intuition and design.

Does your own work, or that of your peers, hang in your home?

I don't have the collector's spirit because I don't have the taste for possessing material objects. But, in contrast, I am under the illusion that I'm acquiring the spiritual essence of the work of others — the inward absorption of their significant existence. Nevertheless, at the moment I have a painting by Carlo Levi in my studio, "Melampus," a portrait of the dog that the writer and painter had during his stay in Basilicata, where he had been confined by Fascism; and a picture by Nanni Balestrini, writer, poet, and painter — very innovative in his technical implementation. These works were given to me as gifts.

Your paintings are generally monochrome, and often in all white. How do you decide when to work in color, and what does color offer you that white does not?

I title some of my paintings "white surface" to differentiate them from those that have surfaces of blue, or red, or silver. The color white does not exist in nature: Snow takes on the blue of the sky and the red of sunsets and the gray of London. White only exists in the jar, but as soon as it gets out, it takes on the color of the surrounding environment because white is not a color but an opportunistic entity that takes advantage of the reflection of colors diffused in the environment.

A version of this article appears in the October issue of Modern Painters magazine.

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