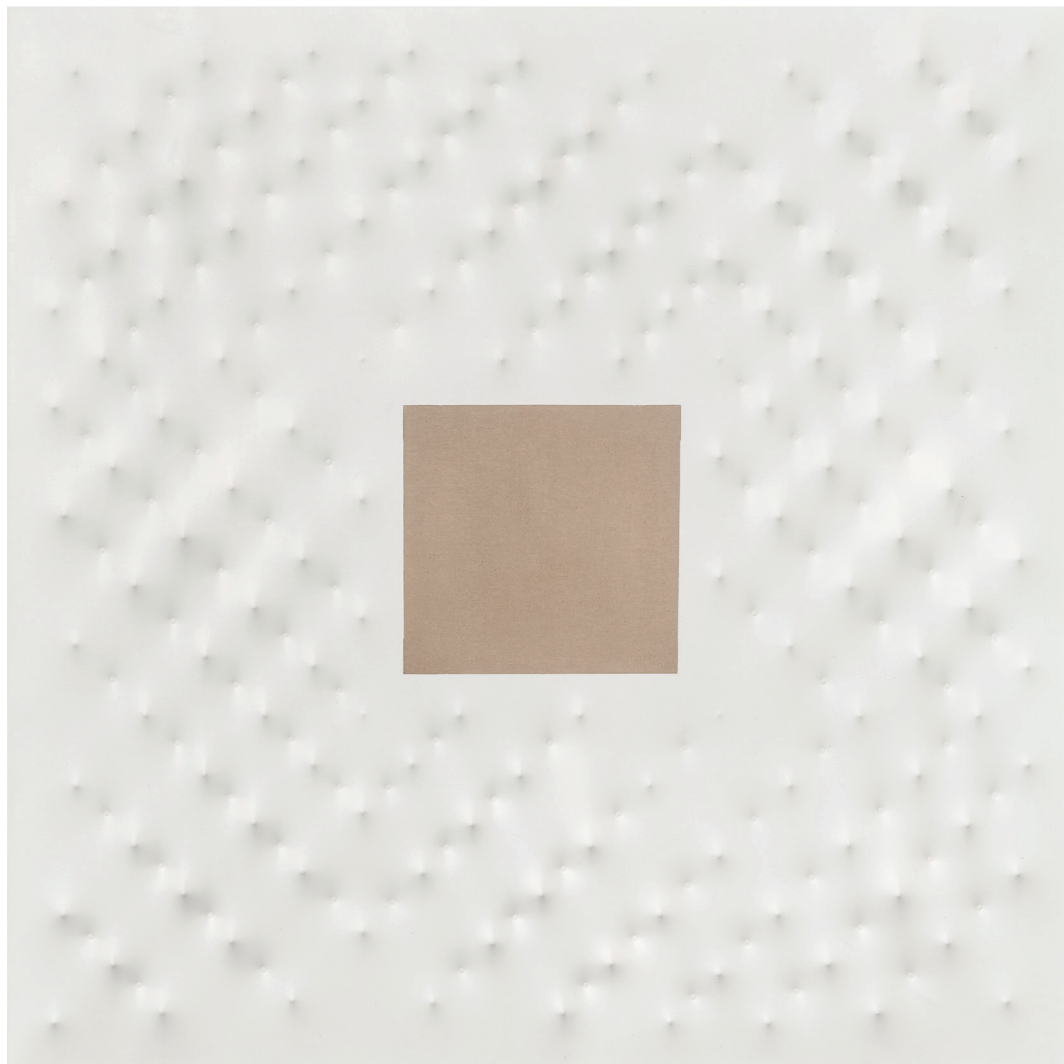


Dominique Lévy
London, UK
Until 8 April 2016

Enrico Castellani



Enrico Castellani
**Superficie bianca con
quadrato grezzo**, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 150 cm
Delfanne Photography
Courtesy Fondazione
Enrico Castellani

Dominique Lévy is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition in London by Enrico Castellani, with whom the gallery has worked since its inception in 2012. The exhibition explores the ways in which painting can occupy three-dimensional space by showcasing recent as well as historical works by the artist, most of which are on view in London for the first time.



A selection of Castellani's large-scale shaped relief canvases *Superfici bianche* (White Surfaces) are presented in juxtaposition with recent angular metallic paintings titled *Biangolare cromato* (Bi-angular Chrome) and *Angolare cromato* (Angular Chrome), the latter of which Castellani installs in corners. These white and metallic works are placed in dialogue with one another, highlighting the ambient light and shadow effects that occur as the works activate the architectural space in which they are situated. These three-dimensional paintings are complemented by the recent sculpture *Spartito*, in which Castellani references a seminal work made in 1969 by bolting hundreds of sheets of paper together, creating a biomorphic minimalist form.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive book featuring a newly commissioned essay by Angela Vettese, former President of the International Jury of the Venice Biennale and director of the graduate programme at the Università Iuav di Venezia. This publication also includes a rarely seen interview between Castellani and Hans-Ulrich Obrist from 2009, which provides meaningful insight into the themes and concepts that have played an important role in the artist's oeuvre.

Throughout his over five-decade-long career, Castellani has continued to investigate the premises he laid out when he started out as a painter in the late 1950s. Originally trained as an architect, he entered the art scene at a time when many artists in Europe were growing tired of the gestural abstract paintings of Informel and related movements. Leaving behind these ideas with their derivative links to Surrealism and the dark emotions of the Second World War, Castellani, along with his close friend Piero Manzoni, formed the gallery Azimut and accompanying journal *Azimuth* in Milan in 1959. With close links to the Zero group, as well as other forward-thinking artists and curators throughout Europe, America, and Japan, Azimut/h explored 'a new artistic >

Above: Enrico Castellani
Superficie bianca, 1971
 Acrylic on canvas
 141 x 212 cm
 Delfanne Photography
 Courtesy Fondazione
 Enrico Castellani

Facing page: Enrico Castellani
Superficie angolare cromata, 2010-2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 80 x 80 cm
 Delfanne Photography
 Courtesy Fondazione
 Enrico Castellani





Enrico Castellani. **Superficie biangolare cromata**, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 50 x 100 cm
Delfanne Photography, Courtesy Fondazione Enrico Castellani

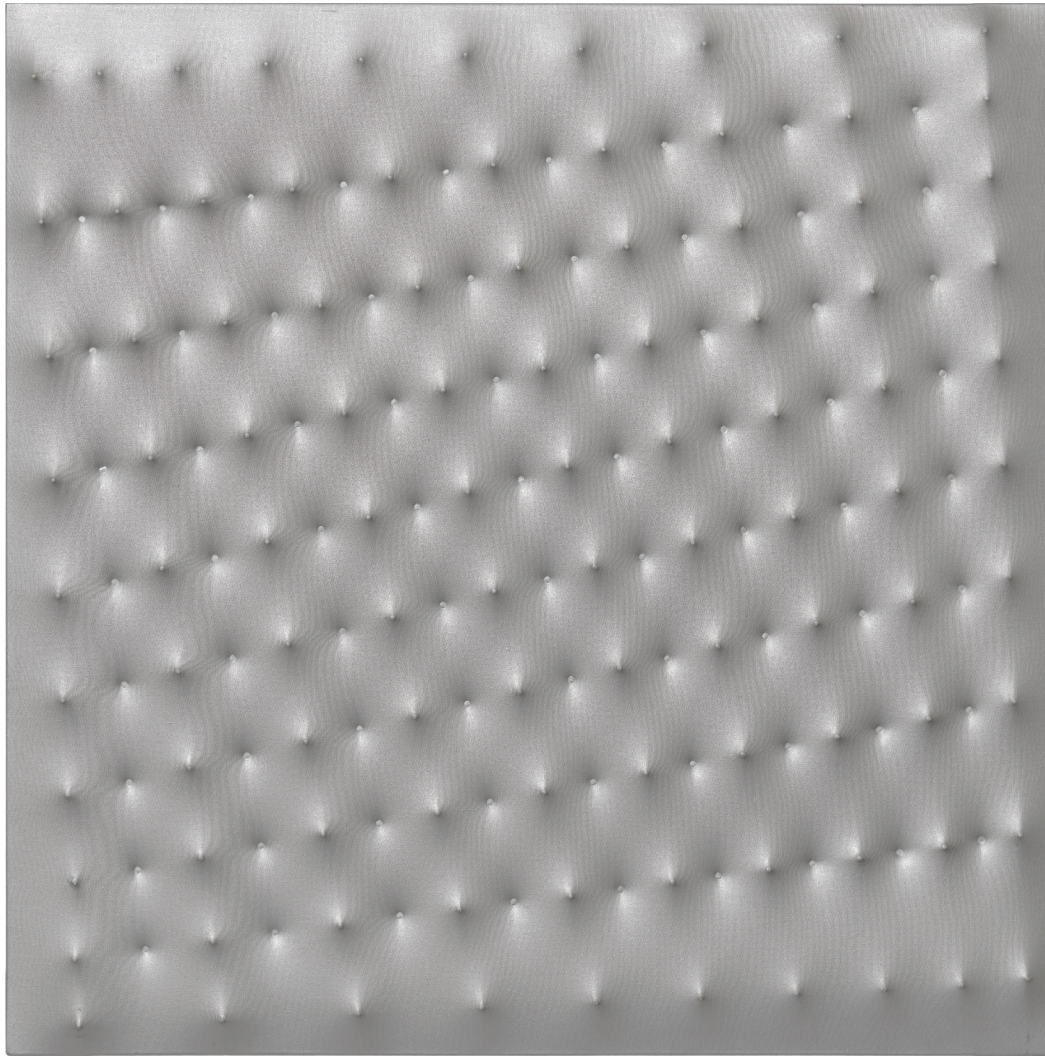
conception' in which works were devoid of referents and achieved a state of autonomy and objectivity. Castellani was also influenced by the reduced semantics of Piet Mondrian, the all-over compositions of Jackson Pollock, and the spatial explorations of Lucio Fontana, and in his own work sought out a pure and harmonious art form, which goes beyond its physical borders to alter the light and space around it and evoke the infinite.

During the summer of 1959, at the height of the *Azimut/h* period, Castellani's oeuvre took a dramatic and important turn when he produced his earliest *Superfici* works. The first of these consisted of a black canvas pulled over a structure made of hazelnuts (*Superficie nera*, 1959), and subsequent works mostly comprised of a monochrome canvas

stretched over a framework of nails arranged in an orthogonal sequence. This resulted in an undulating surface with a rhythmic quality akin to music or poetry. The geometric pattern of the nails, indefinitely continuous in concept, as well as the consciously unframed canvas imply the infinite and activates the wall on which the work is hung. The disruption of light and shadow over the systemised texture of the canvas further energises the space. The tension of the surface as it pushes and pulls over the structure finds parallels in a tension between analytics and craftsmanship, rationality and ritual, the mental act and the material outcome, light and shadow, space and time. Castellani's *Spartito* (which translates to 'musical score'), originally constructed in 1969 with a second version created in 2004, echoes the ideas of structure,

repetition, and form in his *Superfici*. These sculptural works, made of paper, one of the most ephemeral materials, also invoke the fourth dimension of time, which has been a constant theme for Castellani.

Within Castellani's oeuvre the monochrome surface, and especially the noncolour of white, has played a key role from early on. To the artist, white acts as a *tabula rasa*, in its objectivity and anonymity, and has a limitless quality. He also values white for its reflectiveness and its ability to change its surroundings; in a recent interview with Scott Indrisek, he explained, "The colour white does not exist in nature: snow takes on the blue of the sky and the red sunsets and the grey of London. White only exists in the jar, but as soon as it gets out, it takes on the colour of the surrounding environment



Enrico Castellani. **Superficie argentata**, 1971. Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm
Delfanne Photography, Courtesy Fondazione Enrico Castellani

because white is not a colour but an opportunistic entity that takes advantage of the reflection of colours diffused in the environment.' The impact and importance of white on the architectural space culminated in Castellani's *Ambiente bianco* (White Environment) of 1967, created for the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine* (The Space of the Image) in Foligno the same year. This installation filled an entire room with shaped canvases, including the corners, all in a pristine white. It transformed a room into a colourless, timeless, and borderless space, creating a transcendental experience.

Alongside his *Superfici*, Castellani began his *Angolari* series in 1960, making around fifteen works in total between this year and 1966. These works, painted red, white, and black, are to be hung

in corners of a room, at once disrupting the space and yet simultaneously creating continuity within it. In 2010 he revisited this seminal group, creating several works in *cromato*, a silvery coating of metallic paint. With their strong and mercurial reactions to light, the recent chromatic *Angolari* and *Biangolari* works change not only internally as the viewer moves around them, but also imbues the space in which they are hung with dynamism as they animatedly reflect the light in the room. In 2009, Adachiara Zevi stated, 'it is our belief that the white and aluminum surfaces, extreme in their ability to capture and restore light, constitute Castellani's truly original invention.' Confronted by Castellani's white and chromatic works, the viewer enters an architectural space of a different dimension, a spiritual site of contemplation ☉

About the Artist

Enrico Castellani is regarded as one of Italy's most important living artists. Born in Castelnuovo in 1930, he studied art and architecture at Belgium's Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts and École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, respectively, in the early 1950s and soon began a practice challenging the confines of painting, sculpture, and architecture in search of a new paradigm. A catalytic figure in the European post-war avant-garde, he founded the *Azimuth* gallery—and the related journal *Azimuth*—in Milan in 1959, with Piero Manzoni. They organised international exhibitions and published essays that opposed the dominant art movements in Europe at the time, and promoted the idea of an art that did not imitate but instead sprang self-referentially from its own techniques and materials. In 1959 Castellani also showed his now celebrated *Superficie nera* pieces for the first time. To make them, he worked his monochrome canvases with a nail gun to produce a relief-life surface that induced light and shade effects through alternating depressions and raised areas. In the 1970s and 1980s, he expanded his approach to include other materials; but Castellani's focus upon a poetic marriage of painting, sculpture, architecture, and space has never wavered.

Castellani has exhibited at prestigious museums around the world, including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich. He represented Italy at the Venice Biennale in 1964, 1966, 1984, and 2010 (with solo exhibitions in 1966 and 1984 and as part of group exhibitions in 1964 and 2010). In the latter year he became the first Italian artist ever to receive the Praemium Imperiale for Painting, awarded by the Emperor of Japan. His works are included in numerous public collections including the Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki; Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Fondazione Prada, Milan; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma (MACRO), Rome; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart; Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Turin; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.