

GIULIO PAOLINI 1960-1972

Curated by Germano Celant, Prada Foundation, Milan,
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The perception upon entering the gallery is one of absence. *Fuori Catalogo (November 5th 1940 - September 18th 1960)* is the first work to present itself to the spectator. Dated from the artist's birthday, November 5th 1940 to the 18th of September 1960 (a date 43 years ago that indicated the completion of an initial period of the artist's pursuit), the piece has also been given the opening date of the exhibition at the Prada Foundation, October 29th 2003, as if prolonged over the entire period of time, marked by the margins of the dates, together with the idea of a continuation into the future. The work brings together fragments of the artist's life, from the first drawings to those executed later on, from his youthful photo to excerpts from articles and texts. The ensemble is displayed in a transparent case mounted on a pedestal, as a measurement of memory in a dimension that is minimal, in a rarefied setting.

Behind this piece, the white walls that define the exhibition space are placed diagonally in the large room, set one after the other in either parallel or perpendicular succession. And thus one enters into a labyrinth of symmetrical and concordant rooms, set so that it is possible to see from one into the next. The perimeter of this construction reaches toward the gallery's external limit, its lines seemingly reaching beyond it in a flight to infinity. In the centre, the installation of a project dating from 1963, *Ipotesi per una mostra* (Hypothesis for an Exhibition) acts as the exhibition's fulcrum. The silhouettes of hypothetical guests at the exhibition's inauguration are printed on sheets of glass distributed along a central axis, creating a sequence of four closed but transparent spaces. While standing in front of one of these, our eyes naturally take in the panels behind in such a way that the black and white profiles of the spectators multiply, as does the exhibition space itself. The installation, in its continuous reproduction of itself and its crowd of

spectators fixes the subject matter on the spectators as the makers of the exhibition itself, whilst the artworks delineate themselves along the borders of the glass, showing themselves transparently at the margins.

At this point the space dilates, crossing the border of time. 1960 - 1972. The dates do not delimit a temporal confine as such. Moreover, the works exhibited by Giulio Paolini today form a parenthesis of fixed moments, at a distance of thirty years from their creation. They are in effect dated, though carry within themselves the conceptual assumption of art's contemporaneity: each time manifesting itself anew, although not as repetition. When standing in front of the works on show, one has the impression of being pervaded for a moment by a sense of emptiness: with the white, the minimal markings, the clarity and essentiality that qualifies them, something is withdrawn from vision to give way to experience. Dimensions such as time, the universe, eternity and infinity have a decisive advantage, although the works do not inso-much hold traces of these but rather form the perfect coordinates to allow one to orient oneself again and again, in a process of identification.

A work from 1971, *Early Dynastic* is composed of a number of pilasters standing on bases, like columns, distributed at regular distances in a room. Corresponding outlines of the columns are reproduced on the walls. The semi-columns are of a height that I would not know how to define other than "correct". On top of each of these, stands a smaller column, half the size of the one underneath, as if the first column had been interrupted half way up and continues with a smaller column, measuring exactly half of its half. Rather than an infinitesimal relationship being created, the perfection of a proportion and therefore of a model, is made explicit.

In the artist's work *Nécessaire*, 1968, white sheets are deposited day after day, one on top of the other; in *Senza titolo*, 1960, his materials are inserted into the painting: the paper's colours transpire through a thin canvas that acts as a container; in *Senza titolo*, 1961, the canvas prepared with gesso is fixed to the frame; in *Disegno geometrico* 1960, the drawing on the white canvas is a squaring-up of the surface. Each element finds its own dimension and thus its meaning, and with these works so do we. Yesterday's photographs are those of today, yesterday's artists are those of all time, not summoned from the past for re-examination but revealed one through the other in transparency because they coincide: Giulio Paolini's self-portrait is de Chirico, *Et quid amab nisi quod enigma est?*; Ingres is superimposed on Raphael in *L'invenzione di Ingres*, 1968; and whilst the eyes of a young man look at Lorenzo Lotto, *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto*, 1967, they also look at us.

Translated by Katherine Robinson