

# MARIO NIGRO

## FROM "TOTAL SPACE" TO "STRUCTURES"

EXHIBITION: Mario Nigro. From "Total Space" to "Structures"

CURATED BY: Hans Günter Golinski, Director of Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum;

Prof. Paolo Bolpagni, Director of Fondazione Ragghianti, Lucca;

Prof. Francesca Pola, Curator of the Archivio Mario Nigro, Milan

MONOGRAPHY WITH: introduction by Gianni Nigro, President of the Archivio Mario Nigro, Milan;

essays by Paolo Bolpagni, Carlo Invernizzi, Francesca Pola

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EXHIBITION PERIOD: 24 March - 12 May 2019

ORGANISATION: Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum

IN COLLABORATION WITH: Archivio Mario Nigro, Milan

UNDER THE AEGIS OF: Italian Consulate in Dortmund, Dortmund;

Italian Cultural Institute, Cologne

The Kunstmuseum Bochum presents an anthological exhibition of works by the Italian artist Mario Nigro (Pistoia 1917 - 1992 Livorno), one of the great exponents of twentieth-century art in Italy. Retracing the artist's career from 1948 to 1992, the retrospective is curated by Hans Günter Golinski, Paolo Bolpagni and Francesca Pola, and is realized in collaboration with the Archivio Mario Nigro in Milan.

Mario Nigro was one of the great protagonists of Italian and European art from the late 1940s onwards: notwithstanding intricate references to and links with the international context, he immediately embarked upon a highly personal form of artistic research, which he constantly revised and updated, never losing any of his poetic verve. Combining his vocation for painting with his musical and scientific interests, which were a feature of his vision from the time of his training onwards, Nigro created a particular form of abstractionism, based on the dynamics of human relations and on a vision of art as a form of knowledge. He turned this into a vast wealth of compositional, chromatic, and spatial solutions.

The exhibition presents thirty-four works that were of fundamental importance for his creative journey: in particular, these include large-format environmental and installation works that he exhibited at major international shows, including various editions of the Venice Biennale. These have been specially selected for the spaces of the Kunstmuseum Bochum in order to focus on a series of key moments in the development of his kaleidoscopic artistic career.

Nigro's work combines geometrical compositional discipline with chromatic expressiveness, and it is here that we see how it fits perfectly with some of the main roots of international visual culture, which are such a feature of German culture. These include the Expressionism and Concretism of the first half of the twentieth century, as demonstrated by the success of his work with critics and in exhibitions in Germany. The expressive clarity of his works interprets these aspects with a quintessentially Italian form of sensitivity, opening up to a singular combination, unlike any other, that will be clearly illustrated in the exhibition.

The exhibition starts with the first series of paintings, which were inspired by the canons of Suprematism and Neo-Plasticism, as in the case of *Ritmo verticale* [*Vertical Rhythm*] (1948), and it continues with the "visual chessboards" of the "Pannelli a scacchi" ["Chequered Panels"] series (1950). It ventures on through to the multiplication of lattices and grids arranged in planes of colours of varying intensities in the "Spazio totale" ["Total Space"] series, on which the artist worked from 1952-53 until the second half of the 1960s.

A number of environmental and installation works, such as *Dal tempo totale: passeggiata ritmica progressiva con variazione cromatica (il corso della vita: le stagioni)* [*From Total Time: Progressive Rhythmical Walk with Chromatic Variation (The Course of Life: The Seasons)*] (1967-68) and *Lettera di un raro amore* [*Letter of a Rare Love*] (1972), illustrate the evolution of the artist's research towards the subsequent "Tempo totale" ["Total

Time"] series and on to the "Analisi della linea" ["Analysis of Line"] and "Metafisica del colore" ["Metaphysics of Colour"] in the 1970s.

After studying and introducing mathematical and geometrical formulas, in 1980 and 1981 Nigro created the "Terremoto" ["Earthquake"] series, which also arose from his emotional involvement in events of the time and from his reflections on the inexorable flow of history and on the constant possibility of imminent catastrophe.

From the mid-1980s, the drive towards elimination, viewed as an expression of the absolute, became more intense, leading to the fragmentation of the line itself. In the works in the "Orizzonti" ["Horizons"] series, the surface is run through by a single sequence of dots, which cross it horizontally without reaching all the way to the edge. In just one year, the artist first created the "Orme" ["Footprints"] series, in which the colour is spread in clearly distinct brushstrokes, creating uniform patches, and later achieved the greatest possible dilation and enlargement of the individual component. This led to a single amalgam of colour that reached the entire height of the canvas. The closing cycle of this analysis, which sounds out the very foundations of painting, is that of the "Dipinti satanici" ["Satanic Paintings"], ending with works from "Meditazioni" ["Meditations"] and "Strutture" ["Structures"], the artist's last two series in the early 1990s. These two series mark a return to meditations on the relationship between space and form, and they go back once again to a more structured form of construction: in the former the geometric element is actually more suggested than constructed by the brushstrokes, while in the others we again find the concept of the grid. This is evoked by a juxtaposition and overlapping of signs, which are divided into groups, once again arranged in an orthogonal composition.

On the occasion of the exhibition, a trilingual monographic volume will be published - in German, Italian, and English - with an introduction by Hans Günter Golinski and Gianni Nigro, essays by Paolo Bolpagni, Carlo Invernizzi and Francesca Pola, who will examine various aspects of Nigro's artistic vision, accompanied by colour illustrations and bio-bibliographical notes.