

THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE



JASPER JOHNS: THE CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ REVIEWED

Rauschenberg and Courbet | Canaletto and his father | Girolamo dai Libri and Mariano del Buono

Caravaggio in Milan | Fragonard in Washington | Basquiat at the Barbican

Acquisitions at the National Portrait Gallery, London

DECEMBER 2017



68. *Horses by the sea*, by Giorgio de Chirico. c.1935. Canvas, 45 by 62 cm. (Robert Casamonti Collection, Florence; exh. Tornabuoni Art, London).

the work of de Chirico as a writer, and a collection of manuscript material from the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico in Rome is well displayed. This is expanded upon in the handsomely produced catalogue – although it is a shame that the reproductions are rather dark in tone.¹ An anthology contains a useful range of examples of his writing, manifestos, articles and poetry – even love letters to Cornelia Silbermann, here identified as the

subject of *Nude* (1930). Two texts, appreciations of the painter Gaetano Previati and the sculptor Vincenzo Gemito, are published for the first time in English. In her introduction Katherine Robinson discusses the innovative importance of *Hebdomeros* – a novel without narrative sequence, which begins and ends with a series of three dots – and reveals it as an autobiographical fantasy of the Nietzschean artist as warrior/philosopher who

wanders alone through a sequence of pictorial vistas, fulfilling a destiny of eternal return. Gavin Parkinson charts de Chirico's mission to 'rewrite modern art', examining his unfashionable admiration of the painting of Courbet and late Renoir and speculating that it may have influenced André Breton's comparable appreciation of Courbet's work in his 1928 novel *Nadja*. He has to admit in his conclusion the ultimate inscrutability of de Chirico's position. One senses that the artist would have been entirely happy with that outcome.

¹ Catalogue: *Reading de Chirico*. Edited by Katherine Robinson, with an essay by Gavin Parkinson. 255 pp. incl. 109 col + 23 b. & w. ill. (Forma Edizioni, Florence, 2017), £45. ISBN 978-88-99534-47-9. Unless otherwise stated in the text, all works mentioned belong to the gallery. There are no catalogue numbers.

Arte Povera

London

by FRANCESCO GUZZETTI

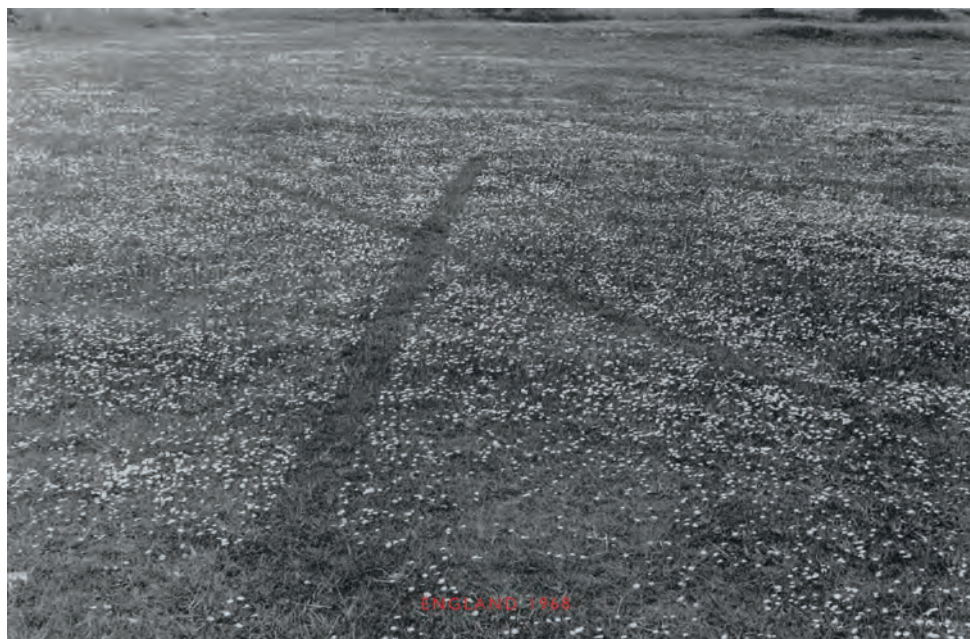
FIFTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since the birth of Arte Povera, the Italian avant-garde movement promoted by the critic Germano Celant, who coined the term in his 1967 manifesto 'Arte Povera: notes for a guerrilla war' and the collective exhibition *Arte Povera – e IM Spazio* at Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa.¹ One of numerous international exhibitions celebrating this anniversary, *Poor Art / Arte Povera: Italian Influences, British Responses* at the **Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London** (to 17th December), addresses the legacy of Arte Povera among British artists working from the 1980s onwards. This is the second time that the museum has hosted an exhibition devoted to the movement, following its 2005 retrospective for Marcello Levi.

Dealing with the ways in which younger artists became aware of and responded to the new avant-garde of the late 1960s is tricky. Distinguishing between the effects of direct influences, shared concerns and themes, and the broader cultural developments ignited by the social and cultural revolutions of the 1960s can be especially difficult. This problem is arguably amplified in the present exhibition, since the curator, Stephen Nelson, is also an artist, and has included a number of his own works. The use of artist-curators can limit an exhibition's ability to achieve an objective and critical point of view, but it can also inspire a fresh and more open-minded approach that goes beyond established critical interpretations, as is the case here.

In fact, as essays in the catalogue highlight, although critics labelled them as a group, the artists associated with Arte Povera felt that they were bound only by common



69. *Still life*, by Giorgio de Chirico. 1958. Oil on paper laid on canvas, 50 by 60 cm. (Robert Casamonti Collection, Florence; exh. Tornabuoni Art, London).



70. *England 1968*, by Richard Long. 1968. Photograph and text, 87 by 130 by 4 cm. (Courtesy Lisson Gallery; © Richard Long; photograph Dave Morgan; exh. Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London).

experiences.² Rather than including all the movement's artists therefore, the exhibition focuses on arresting and historically significant works by a selection of them. *Io* (cat. p.26; Fig.71) by Mario Ceroli and *Cone* (c.1967; Tate, London; p.39) by Mario Merz dominate the two rooms. Whereas Merz has always been considered a spokesman for the movement, Ceroli was not included in the Arte Povera exhibitions or publications arranged by Celant after 1969, when Ceroli developed his own artistic concerns, independent of those of any other gathering or collective. Both works exemplify the signature strategy of Arte Povera, the use of everyday materials and procedures to elaborate on archetypal artistic forms and processes. Tony Cragg's *Runner* (1985), a wall-based work of brightly coloured plastic fragments, demonstrates the adoption and adaptation of these strategies. Cragg's work, like that of Jefford Horrigan, Eric Bainbridge, Ceal Floyer and Jo Stockham (artists also included in the exhibition), often expresses a taste for ironic *détournement* reminiscent of Pino Pascali, the most significant absence from the exhibition.

Broad interpretations of Arte Povera tend to reflect its focus on natural processes, organic forms and wild environments, as in the work of Giuseppe Penone, represented here by a study for *Breath of clay* (1978; pp.44–45), which clearly inspired Anya Gallaccio's bronze casts of natural objects such as Brussels sprouts. Among the few film and video works on display is Mona Hatoum's *Roadworks* (1985; pp.32–33), which demonstrates her questioning of cultural and political issues of authorship, spectatorship and iconography in art through performances in urban spaces. This may echo Arte Povera performances and happenings, such as Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Walking sculpture* (1967). Hatoum's concern with geopolitics also inspired her se-

ries of laser-cut velvet planispheres based on the Gall-Peters rectangular map projection (2013), which have an affinity with Alighiero Boetti's embroidered *Mappe* – made from the early 1970s onwards and a regrettable omission from the exhibition.

Works by Gavin Turk, who has often paid homage to Boetti, provide further evidence of his broad influence. His *Small gold senza titolo* (2012; p.53) is openly inspired by Boetti's series of *Arazzi*, embroideries of block letters arranged in grids. Works on paper, such as Boetti's *Untitled* (1968; private collection;

p.25), and photography, including landmark works by Giulio Paolini, notably *Aperture 8* (1965; private collection; p.42) and *D867* (1967; private collection; p.43), shed light on less acknowledged, but nonetheless substantial, concerns shared by Arte Povera artists, namely their endeavour to renew traditional artistic practices and explore the possibilities of the two-dimensional image.

Richard Long's *England 1968* (pp.36–37; Fig.70) is the only work here by a British artist from the time of Arte Povera's emergence, and so provides the exhibition's only hint of the close relationship between Italian and British artists in the late 1960s and 1970s. Long's land art pieces were broadly exhibited and realised in Italy at that time, including at the historic first international gathering of Arte Povera artists *Arte Povera più azioni povere*, curated by Celant and held in Amalfi in 1968. Long's environmental concern had many affinities with the work of Italian artists such as Penone.

This period should have been examined in more depth in order better to frame the examination of the way Arte Povera was diffused in Britain from the 1980s onwards. The movement's international influence is still rarely acknowledged by critics and scholars, and so exhibitions of this depth are a starting point for future discussion.

¹ G. Celant: 'Arte Povera. Appunti per una guerriglia', *Flash Art* 5 (November–December 1967), p.3.

² Catalogue: *Poor Art / Arte Povera: Italian Influences British Responses*. By Stephen Nelson and Martin Holman, with contributions by Roberta Minnucci and Paul Bonaventura. 56 pp. incl. 22 cols. ills. (Estorick Foundation, London, 2017), £10.95. ISBN 978-0-9567868-7-6.



71. *Io*, by Mario Ceroli. 1968. Iron and coal, height 92 cm. (Private collection, Florence; courtesy Tornabuoni Art, London; exh. Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London).