

Roman Opałka Dire il tempo / Telling the Time

Curated by Chiara Bertola

Venice Roman Opałka Mariateresa Sartori

FONDAZIONE QUERINI STAMPALIA, Castello 5252, Venice
7 May 2019 – 24 November 2019
Press preview: Monday 6 May 2019, 11 am – 3pm
Public opening: Monday 6 May 2019, 6pm

Milan Roman Opałka, a retrospective

BUILDING, Via Monte di Pietà 23, Milan
4 May 2019 – 20 July 2019
Press preview: Friday 3 May 2019, 12:30pm
Opening (invitation only): Friday 3 May 2019, 6pm

Roman Opałka. Telling the Time, a project curated by **Chiara Bertola**, is conceived and produced by BUILDING and Fondazione Querini Stampalia.

An exhibition in two parts: in **Venice** at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia museum and in **Milan** at BUILDING. Both exhibitions are centred on the **OPAŁKA 1965 / 1-∞** programme, which the artist worked on for much of his life in an attempt to depict the passing of time and to circumscribe the infinite in visible and measurable forms. **In Venice a nucleus of works by Mariateresa Sartori (Venice, 1961) – with whom the artist had formed an intense relationship in the city – will be presented.**

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Interested in neuroscience, music and language, her works initiate a dialogue with Opałka's, through their common research on the themes of time, duration and contingency, and the shared search for something visible capable of expressing the invisible.

Dire il tempo / Telling the Time springs from the desire to examine Roman Opałka's work through a selection of works which are fundamental stages of his research, **many of which have never been presented or exhibited in Italy before**, coming from important private and public collections, including the **Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź** and above all the **Fonds de Dotation Roman Opałka**, with which a close relationship was formed during the ideation of the project.

From 4 May until 20 July 2019, **Roman Opałka, a Retrospective**, the first chapter of this project, opens to the public in the Milanese spaces of BUILDING, which is setting aside all of its four exhibition floors to the exhibition.

From 7 May until 24 November 2019, the second chapter, **Roman Opałka. Mariateresa Sartori** will run in the rooms of the Museum Home at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice, where the works of Roman Opałka and Mariateresa Sartori are placed in relation both to each other and to those of the institution's historic collection.

Both the Milanese and the Venetian chapters revolve around OPAŁKA 1965 / 1-∞, a project the artist dedicated much of his life to in the attempt to depict something immeasurable: the passing of time.

Of particular importance for the critical awareness of the artist, **the Venetian chapter reunites and presents for the first time two fundamental works for the entire OPAŁKA 1965 / 1-∞ programme**: the first *Détail*, on loan from the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź in Poland and exhibited for the first time in Italy, and the last, which remains unfinished, has never presented to the public and is on loan from a private collection. The Alpha and the Omega finally reunited. As the curator Chiara Bertola writes: "Seeing them together for the first time and being able to grasp the whole picture of what the artist had decided to trace one day is a strong and moving emotion. The project that is so explicitly shown also bears the tragedy of its very assumption: "He is no longer with us; there is the completed work". Alongside these two important *Détails* is a series of **photographic self-portraits and a sound recording of the artist's voice**, as well as **two 'exercises'**, two 'artist tests' that Opałka made shortly before beginning his OPAŁKA 1965 / 1-∞ programme, which have also never been shown to the public before.

On 6 and 7 May 2019 **Didier Morin's film "Le dernier Détail peint de Roman Opałka"** will be presented **to the public for the first time**. It depicts Opałka's painting time, set to the rhythm of everyday life, in his atelier at Bois Mauclair, where everything turns sacred when the artist repeats out loud the numbers he is painting. The artist was filmed and recorded over approximately forty sessions while he was working on what would be his last *Détail*.

"Le dernier Détail peint de Roman Opałka"

duration: 225 minutes

language: Polish, French, with English subtitles

Screenings:

- 6 May 11am first screening, 6pm second screening

- 7 May 10am first screening, 2pm second screening

It is with these works that Mariateresa Sartori establishes a dialogue in the rooms of the Querini Stampalia Museum. As the curator highlights: "Her work provides the chance to create emptiness and new spaces of perception and understanding reality beyond pre-established meanings; it provides the entry key to new languages. Thanks to juxtapositions, deviations, superimpositions and intersections between different alphabets, Sartori's work intercepts the subtle thread of relations which exist between nature and artifice, the epic and the everyday, visible and invisible, past and present, and objectivity and subjectivity, without ever being defined, always leaving the tension towards the infinite open... The purpose of all her research is about identifying the mechanism and the possible fragmentation in which the infinite seems to let itself to be harnessed. Above all, her work is about managing to represent the infinite in something finite, measurable and visible. Just as it was for Opałka..."

In the site-specific installation **Il tempo del suono. Onde / The Time of Sound: Waves** on display here, the sheets of paper – individual particles of a wider totality – are recomposed on the wall in a single continuous series. The work, which translates the sound of the sea waves into a visual form,

represents her attempt to listen to the passing of time and is the result of an immense musical score which codifies the sonorous and temporal flow.

Before reaching the room where the installation is housed, you walk down a long corridor where some self-portraits by Roman Opałka are placed in sequence. As you walk down the corridor you listen to the Polish sonority of the artist's voice, which pronounces the numbers he is painting. These two different forms of representing infinite time resound contextually.

Time is also etched in the two series of pinhole photos, **Feuilles** and **Cronache**. With a simple black cardboard box held together with sticking tape to make a pinhole camera, Mariateresa Sartori goes around gathering instances of the sensitive world, almost like evidence "that reality exists". The results are the small images spread on the engraved table in the mythological room and those entirely covering the mirrors mounted in the stucco decoration of the museum boudoir.

Cronache (Chronicles), the series of pinhole photos exhibited on the table in the museum's mythological room, constitutes one of the site-specific works present in the exhibition. The subjects of the photos are isolated details taken from paintings found hanging in that room: the face of an elderly man with a beard, the head of a little dog, a child leave the narration of their own time and suddenly and dramatically become current to the eyes of the person observing them: facts of contemporary chronicle which each of us can find in our own personal memory.

It is evidence of how the artist has managed to make the vision of paintings which risked no longer being seen and visible newly significant. This always happens with projects from the "Conserving the Future" programme: every time a contemporary artist relates to the past, the past demonstrates that it still has a lot to say.

Thanks to "Conserving the Future" another work present in the exhibition was made in 2008: **Il suono della lingua**, 11 audiobooks, which are now part of the museum's permanent collection. The languages undergo an unusual process and are stripped of their meaning to assume another in terms of musicality, rhythm and melody.

Once again the order that composes beauty is a question of rhythm, as is highlighted in another work in this exhibition in the Museum Portego: **Tutti quelli che vanno / All Those Who Come**. Two graphics but also two magnificent and enigmatic drawings which represent the flow of people walking around St Mark's Square in Venice at a precise time. This cycle of drawings arises from an association with a research group from the University of Bologna which studies pedestrian flows from a physical-mathematical viewpoint.

Finally, in the wardrobe room of the boudoir, the video **Omaggio a Chopin / Homage to Chopin** is screened, about which there was an important exchange between Mariateresa Sartori and Roman Opałka regarding a crucial point.

The video is dedicated to Roman Opałka, who died before he could see it with the formal solution that he had suggested.

"Both of these artists," writes Chiara Bertola, "has created a system, invented a metaphor, a new code, a mechanism, a model, in order to get closer to and brush up against the infinite. The emotional dimension has always allowed them to translate arid scientific data into something universal and broader, reminding us that although we move around in our small everyday space we do so within immeasurable spatial and temporal coordinates."

Biographical notes

Roman Opałka

Born 27 August 1931 in Hocquincourt, France, to a family of Polish origin.

The Opałkas returned to Poland in 1935, to then be deported to Germany in 1940, where they remained in a work camp until the end of the war. Once freed, they returned to France to then return finally to Warsaw, where Opałka attended the graphic design school Wałbrzych Nowa Ruda (1946-1948) and the art and design school in Łódź (1949). Between 1950 and 1956 he studied at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts and in 1957 he moved to Paris. In 1966 he held his first solo show at the Galeria Dom Artysty Plastyka in Warsaw. The following year he began the OPAŁKA 1965 / 1 – ∞ project, which he would dedicate the rest of his life to from 1970.

Opałka would thus become inextricably linked to conceptual art.

Between the 1960s and 1970s he won numerous prizes: the Grand Prize at the First British International Print Biennial, Bradford (1968), two awards at the seventh International Biennial Exhibition of Prints and the Art Museum Ohara, Tokyo (1970), and first prize from the Polish Ministry of Culture and Arts (1971). In 1972 he went to the USA for the first time.

In 1979 he moved to Bazérac, in France, and won a prize at the fourteenth Biennale of San Paolo. In 1985 he became a French citizen. Between 1985 and 1990 he taught at the Summer Academy of Salzburg. In the

following years Opatka would exhibit on numerous occasions and receive various prizes, such as the National Painting Prize, Paris (1991), and the Special Prize from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw (1996). In 1992 he had an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and in 1995 he represented Poland at the Venice Biennale. In 2002-2003 a large travelling anthology of his work would visit various European cities. In 2009 he was awarded the title of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in Paris, and the Gloria Artis Gold Medal in Warsaw. Opatka died in Chieti on 6 August 2011.

Mariateresa Sartori

Born in Venice in 1961 where she lives and works. Her research revolves around three thematic fulcrums: empirical scientific method; behavioural dynamics, often in relation to neuroscience; music and sound in relation to language. The educational aspect is important to her artistic practice: she has taught drawing for over a decade, applying the Betty Edwards *Drawing with the Right Side of the Brain* method, which is based on the same neuroscientific presuppositions which inspire her own artistic research. The artist often works in association with experts in the fields she explores: geologists, theoretical physicists, musicologists, musicians, singers, actors, botanists, ornithologists. Concrete data is empirically revealed and then analysed from perspectives which vary from work to work and which have different outcomes, from video to drawing, from pinhole photography to sound work. Constants and not exceptions, the universal and not contingencies drive her research, which is aimed at a clearly unattainable objectivity.

She has exhibited in numerous museums and galleries in Italy and abroad in personal and group shows: Cairn Centre d'art, Digne les-Bains, France; MMOMA, Moscow Museum of Modern Art; Palazzo Fortuny, Venice; Museum of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts, Saint Petersburg; Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice; ICA, The Showroom, London; NGBK Berlin; Hangar Bicocca, Milan; Macro, Rome; Neue Galerie, Graz; Palazzo delle esposizioni, Rome; Mucsarnok Hall of Art, Budapest; Careof, Milan; Folkwang Museum, Essen; Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice; Auditorium Parco della musica, Rome; Museo di Palazzo Poggi, Bologna; Serra dei giardini della Biennale, Venice; XLV Venice Biennale; Museo Mambo, Bologna; Kunsthau Centre d'art Pasquart, Biel, Switzerland; the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; Les Ateliers d'artistes, Marseille.

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