

Galleria Pieroni

Mario Pieroni and Dora Stiefelmeier inaugurated their gallery in Rome in January 1979, on Via Panisperna at number 203. Pieroni had been working intensely in the art field for ten years already, in his hometown of Pescara. His first experiences dated back to 1970, when he promoted two initiatives in collaboration with his family's furniture company, where he was employed. Together with his cousin, Federica Coen, he had launched a line of furniture and tapestries by Balla, conceived in agreement with the artist's daughters Luce and Elica. That same year, from an idea by Getulio Alviani and together with his childhood friend Lucrezia De Domizio, Pieroni also started *Dal mondo delle idee*, a project combining art and design featuring interior decoration pieces and furnishings designed by a group of artists he was close friends with at the time – Alviani, Mario Ceroli, Laura Grisi, Enrico Job, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Concetto Pozzati, Paolo Scheggi and Ettore Spalletti.

In a recent interview, Pieroni said that by 1975 he was longing to break out of his bourgeois upbringing and had decided to embark on a more challenging project by opening a proper gallery of his own. His first space was an evocative setting steeped in history, within an area that was once the city's Bourbon fortress, in Via delle Caserme, which had been converted into a prison in the Eighteenth Century. The gallery opened in February 1975, with the Luciano Fabro installation *Allestimento teatrale*. The piece involved an actor reciting lines from a play inside a cube of mirrors, after which the work developed through a series of rooms separated by transparent sheets instead of doors. The gradually diminishing light source as the rooms progressed ended up with the viewer in a final room that was completely dark, a reference to the unlit conditions in medieval dungeons. From 1975 to 1978, Pieroni ran solo shows of Jannis Kounellis, Ettore Spalletti, Mario Merz, Francesco Lo Savio and Vettor Pisani, enlivening Pescara with some of the most promising names in the Italian art scene of the 1960s and '70s.

Pironi and Dora Stiefelmeier first met in 1977. Originally from Zurich, Stiefelmeier had graduated in sociology from the Sorbonne in 1967 and was working as an editor for “nuova DWF – Donna Woman Femme”, a periodical of international women’s studies founded in Rome in 1975. They soon decided to open a new gallery together. Both shared a common vision of the art world, which they saw as a place of exploration made up of personal contacts and shared projects of transformation and development. They also shared a critical judgment of the increasingly impersonal mechanisms that were taking hold in the art market. Pironi closed his Pescara gallery and in January 1979 he inaugurated the Galleria Pironi in Rome, with a group show of works by Gino De Dominicis, Jannis Kounellis and Ettore Spalletti. The new gallery was in a second-floor apartment at the top end of Via Panisperna, in the city’s Rione Monti area, not far from Via Nazionale and the Palazzo delle Esposizioni.

Between 1979 and 1992, the year the gallery closed, the Galleria Pironi ran a total of 62 shows. In its first there were a series of solo shows devoted to artists with whom Pironi had collaborated while he was still in Pescara. One of these was the show of Luciano Fabro, entitled *Oggi ripeto cos’è la scultura*, which included his piece *Il giudizio di Paride* – four oval elements in terracotta, in which the shape and surface texture of each piece (more or less smooth or rough) was intended to convey the physical and psychological identity of the mythological characters they were representing: Juno, Minerva and Venus around Paris. From March 1980 onwards, the gallery supplemented its calendar of shows featuring Italian artists with many shows devoted to international artists. The first was Gerhard Richter, who presented some of his monochrome works dating from the end of the 1960s – grey paintings on glass and canvas – alongside a more recent series of paintings in which colour was reintroduced to interact with the two-dimensional identity of the canvas. In 1987 the gallery collaborated with the American Academy and the Canadian Academy for the exhibition *Non in codice*, curated by Dan Graham, with works by Graham himself, Judith Barry, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Ess, Rodney Graham and John Knight.

In the early 1980s, with Transavanguardia rising in prominence both in Italy and internationally, the Galleria Pironi continued to focus on a spectrum of artistic research more in line with Conceptual Art and Arte Povera. While continuing to follow those artists with whom they had consolidated their collaboration over the years, Pironi and Stiefelmeier also began working with Emilio Prini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giulio Paolini, Alighiero Boetti, Sol LeWitt and with a younger generation of artists such as Remo Salvadori, Marco Bagnoli and Felice Levini. At the same time, their interest in international art grew substantially. In 1981 the gallery organised the screening of a film by British artists Gilbert & George, followed in 1984 by a show of their work. They also ran a solo of drawings by Swiss-German artist Meret Oppenheim. After making the acquaintance of art historian Jan Hoet, director of the contemporary art museum in Ghent, the gallery came into

contact with the Belgian art scene. This generated the exhibition projects involving Jan Vercruyse in 1987 and 1990 (reproduced for this event at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni), Thierry De Cordier and Jan Fabre. The gallery also showcased the work of several prominent American artists such as Dennis Oppenheim, Maria Nordman and Dan Graham. The two final shows to run at the Via Panisperna venue in the spring of 1992 were Carla Accardi, with whom Pieroni and Stiefelmeier had entertained a strong partnership since 1982, and French artist Bertrand Lavier.

Lavier's artistic research straddled the dividing line between artwork and design, forming a natural evolution from Pieroni's early projects in Pescara in the 1970s – which combined art with industrial manufacture – and the new projects Pieroni and Stiefelmeier would go on to launch after they closed the gallery. In 1991, in fact, they founded the Zerynthia Associazione per l'Arte Contemporanea in Paliano, on a farm south of Rome, where for many years the guesthouses were the setting for friendly gatherings, collaborations between artists and new cultural initiatives.

The association worked alongside public and private institutions in developing a variety of contemporary art projects, from shows to conferences and publications. From 1997 up until 2002, together with the Académie de France, which in those years had entrusted them with the organisation of its contemporary arts programme, they organised *Atelier nel bosco*, a series of thirteen monograph exhibitions each devoted to an artist with strong ties to the city of Rome – Carla Accardi, Jannis Kounellis, Sol LeWitt and Giulio Paolini, among others. From 1995 up until 2000 Zerynthia also took over the artistic direction of the Centro Civico per l'Arte Contemporanea at Serre di Rapolano, in Tuscany. In 1998, together with the S.M.A.K. museum of Ghent and the contemporary art museum of Lyon, it organised *Indoor*, a laboratory-exhibition with Mario Airò, Massimo Bartolini, Jimmie Durham, Bruna Esposito, Johannes Kahrs, Fabrice Hyber, Annie Ratti and others.

After winning a European tender in 2003, Mario Pieroni and Dora Stiefelmeier founded RAM-radioartemobile, a contemporary art platform based in Rome and engaged in the promotion of projects relating the visual arts with Sound Art. In 2004 RAM launched the project of a permanent archive of sound artworks, the SAM SoundArtMuseum, together with the RAM LIVE radio web which streams 24 hours a day, offering information and interdisciplinary experimentation.

Still with the idea of contributing towards a greater interdisciplinary dialogue, RAM began a collaboration with Michelangelo Pistoletto's Fondazione Cittadellarte and his *Terzo Paradiso* project. Since 2012 RAM has run a cycle of innovative initiatives entitled "D/A/C denominazione artistica condivisa", round table discussions between artists and entrepreneurs focused on

manufacturing according to the art world values of creativity, transformation and dialogue – exactly what Pieroni achieved in the 1970s at the start of his career as a gallery owner.

One of the association's most recent initiatives, set up thanks to the mediation of Arnaldo Mosca Mondadori and developed in collaboration with the Opera prison of Milan, consisted in the joint creation of a work by Jannis Kounellis and composer Carlo Crivelli. The project was sadly left unfinished following Kounellis' death in February 2017 but was commemorated in a tribute concert by Carlo Crivelli entitled *Il Violino di Kounellis*, performed at Frigoriferi Milanesi.

In 2016 Zerynthia was involved in setting up the Fondazione No Man's Land, based near Pescara at Loreto Aprutino and devoted to the work and theory of French-Hungarian artist-architect Yona Friedman, who is its honorary president. (PB)

Jan Vercruysse

Tombeaux (Stanza)

Galleria Pieroni

February 24th – April 10th 1990

“The works you see in this new show are called *Tombeaux*, which in French has two meanings: tomb, a place of silence and non-being, and a composition in medieval poetry indicating verse written in tribute to a deceased person”. This is an excerpt taken from the press release issued for the show of Jan Vercruysse, presented at the Galleria Pieroni in February 1990 and which has been partly reproduced in one of the rooms of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni.

Mario Pieroni and Dora Stiefelmeier had embarked on their collaboration with the Belgian artist in 1987, after they had been introduced by the art historian Jan Hoet, director at the time of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Ghent. Vercruysse’s work was much in tune with the gallery’s interests, which at that time were concentrated on new developments in Conceptual Art and Arte Povera. In 1987 the Galleria Pieroni had run a first solo show dedicated to Vercruysse, which presented works from the *Atopie* series. Three years later, in 1990, the gallery ran the show “Tombeaux (Stanza)”. One of the rooms in the gallery’s Via Panisperna premises was set up with five of Vercruysse’s works in iron – five different declinations of doors or bulkheads separated from the wall by a series of metal strips, alternating along the five vertical levels in different horizontal sequences. Two of these five pieces have been included in the show here. In another room of the Pieroni gallery there were six painted wooden elements arranged in a line, all low-standing and identical, placed in an orderly sequence parallel to one of the walls. A very similar work dating from the same year, but consisting of seven elements, is presented at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni today.

Alongside the works from 1990, we have followed the artist’s project in recreating the space – also entitled *Tombeaux* – which Jan Vercruysse conceived in 1988 specially for the entrance of the

library and guest house which Mario Pieroni and Dora Stiefelmeier opened at Piazza Vittorio 144. A small, intimate space with two mirrors placed facing each other, so as to reflect into infinity anyone entering the space between them, and at the centre a gilded, table-like feature.

In the catalogue text published for the first show at the Galleria Pieroni in 1987, Jan Hoet recapitulated the long process of artistic research already trodden by Vercruyssen, who was just over forty at the time. Having abandoned his initial research into visual poetry, in the early 1980s the artist had devoted himself to trying to find a tangible expression of “the theoretical issues concerning the artist” and the mechanisms of the process of making art. This crystallised into a predilection for photographic images – often self-portraits – made into lithographs. From 1984 Vercruyssen had accompanied this rather more Conceptual side of his work with his series of *Camere*, which illustrate how his attention had shifted from analysing the actions of the artist to analysing art itself, in a new quest which hoped to define the rightful place of art in the world. The three-dimensional shapes of these imposing wooden structures were “the direct transposition of an isolated reality (art) into its own space (built with no exterior, opulently finished, like a temple, frontal, shunning contact, even elitist)”. The *Atopie* presented at the Galleria Pieroni are a continuation of the intent to indicate (literally) a “non-place” where the artwork is enshrined, set apart from reality.

In an interview he gave in those years, Vercruyssen declared that “art has to create something ‘else’, has to ‘be else’, for me, with archetypal images. ‘Image’ does not mean reproduction or representation, either. I want to feel in a work of art the strong wish of ‘distancing’. (...). Analysing society through reproduction is not enough”. The distancing of which Vercruyssen speaks is therefore not purely abstract, and he has not relinquished the idea of an artwork having a physical presence. His *Tombeaux* are objects that are not entirely abstract (even though simplified, their appearance is not determined by geometric laws) and neither are they figurative, midway between objects and non-objects. Their features escape a clear interpretation or practical use of any kind. “In these works,” wrote Hoet, “we are able to discern the principles connecting artwork (and art) to reality”, but at the same time “we live a sensual experience”. The experience Hoet refers to is a perception of space articulated in the presence of these new forms, each one different, in a sequence and pace that resembles the poetical, musical meter, and to which the title is an explicit reference.

For the 1990 solo show, the Galleria Pieroni also published an artist’s book, which is also on display here. In it Vercruyssen compiled five images (a drawing of a frame, an antique print, a detail of a mosaic, a detail of a fresco and a photograph of a fountain) doubled in different ways and reassembled amongst the pages of a sequence that offers a declination of how images can present

themselves to our gaze and stimulate our senses and intellect. One pair of images followed one another identically, another pair was reproduced in reflection, a pair alternated black and white and colour, and the final pair was duplicated one the right way up and the other upside down. (PB)