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Practices of intensity. Achille Bonito Oliva's exhibitions

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The greatest gift that Achille Bonito Oliva received from nature is the word: the written word, and perhaps even more so the spoken word, a form of dematerialized writing (after all, a lot of great literature is born in oral form). There is, however, a third form of writing, which Bonito Oliva calls “curatorial writing.” For him, the field of the exhibition is the *magical territory* in which to put into practice the creativity and the autonomy that he has demanded for the figure of the critic. The designs of his exhibitions reflect great creativity: the use of unusual venues, which often present more asymmetry than symmetry, and new juxtapositions. Bonito Oliva favors large collective exhibitions, especially *theme-based* exhibitions, where the personality of the critic/curator emerges more clearly. Another characteristic is that of crossing, a diachronic progress that, through thematic analogies, gathers together artists who are the expression of different historical moments. Ancient art is re-read in the light of the contemporary. A flux of images connects epochs that are far apart, and a critical idea links artists who are very different.

A premise (the first exhibition: *Mambor, Pascali, 1966*)

On January 14, 1966, at the Libreria/Galleria Guida in Port'Alba, Naples, a lively outpost that organized meetings with writers and intellectuals, a young critic (and poet) curated his first exhibition (and his first, small catalog): a double solo show with two artists from Rome who were only slightly older than him: Renato Mambor and Pino Pascali.

A group of friends, a group of artists (*Amore mio* and *Vitalità del negativo, 1970*)

It is 1970, and in the wake of 1968 a group of artists decides to stop having exhibitions in museums. Gino Marotta, [Paolo] Scheggi, [Gianni] Colombo, and [Michelangelo] Pistoletto are fresh from the experience of Foligno. Gino obtains Palazzo Ricci in Montepulciano, a fine Renaissance palace, and provides the exhibition with its title: *Amore mio*. [Jannis] Kounellis, [Fabio] Mauri and [Mario] Ceroli will also take part. I am invited with Achille to take care of what was called design. It was a self-elected group.

The artists draw up the organigram of the exhibition, Pistoletto invites Vettor Pisani... While the usual discussions about the division of the spaces continue, I invent something that would now no longer be possible to do: tracks built at hardly any cost that would allow just one person to pass. You had to choose a track without knowing where it would take you... This idea creates solidarity.

The core group was made up of people who had an affinity: Mauri, Colombo, Scheggi, Gino, and me.¹

This is how *Amore mio* was born.² The Executive Committee, as recorded in the catalog, published by Centro Di, included Achille Bonito Oliva as general secretary, Piero Sartogo as image coordinator

(a term that he himself had coined), and Maria Vincenti Russo as head of organization. Bonito Oliva wrote:

The exhibition aims to inaugurate a different behavior, completely new in the history of cultural customs: to establish for each artist the direct responsibility to place themselves critically, without the usual mediation of the art critic. So the artists invited themselves through a series of consultations, turning the institutional procedure of a normal exhibition upside-down.

The names of Bonito Oliva himself and of Sartogo were included among the “participants,” and thus among the artists. In the pages devoted to him Bonito Oliva created an intervention of his own, formed of his photo-portrait repeated eight times and accompanied by phrases. The mechanism at the heart of the exhibition, with the artists choosing each other, was evident in the invitation that Pistoletto sent directly to Vettor Pisani (whose first solo exhibition had taken place shortly before at the Galleria La Salita in Rome). *Amore mio* also had consequences, as Graziella Lonardi recalls:

I open the Incontri [Internazionali d'Arte] with *Vitalità del negativo*. I followed exhibitions and I went to Montepulciano for *Amore mio*: Achille Bonito Oliva came toward me with his impressive moustache and the newspapers under his arm. I fell in love with that exhibition. I decided to open the Incontri with that group of artists and with Achille, who was initially part of the group. I used to frequent the Messaggerie bookshop in Piazza di Spagna in Rome, where Bruno Corà would advise me. I asked Bruno to come and work with me in a little office in Piazza Ferro di Cavallo.³

Once again, it is worth underlining the young Bonito Oliva's inclusion in the group of artists. Sartogo continues his account as follows:

One evening we were having dinner on the terrace at my house, and around midnight Graziella Lonardi turned up with Francesco Aldobrandini, and invited us to Capri. On the trip, which we took to look at the possibility of organizing an exhibition in Capri, [...] Achille Bonito Oliva was present. We decided to return on the first hydrofoil at 6.30am and Fabio Mauri, the group's man of letters, was charged with writing a letter with our apologies, and also with a challenge. The gist was: “A contemporary art exhibition in Capri is not really possible... if you can get hold of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni we'll do it in Rome...” On August 15, Graziella calls us and says: “I got the Palazzo!”

It must have been a true challenge, because this is how everyone remembers the genesis of the exhibition. In the words of Lonardi:

Initially I wanted to put on an exhibition in Capri so I took the group there, but it was a disaster, the Festival of Neapolitan Songs was on... and I returned to Rome defeated. Achille and the artists challenged me: “If you're worth your salt, get hold of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni.” In fact the place was very run-down, there was just a caretaker. I went to the Ministry of Education with Piero Sartogo, who was also in the group with the artists, and on behalf of the group he illustrated the exhibition we wanted to put on. Ennio Brion gave me all the TV-sets that we placed in the colonnade of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni to show what was happening inside; I asked who the best photographer was, and I engaged Ugo Mulas to take the photos of the rooms.

And in those of Bonito Oliva:

Challenged by *us* (a group also including artists of various origins), in a very short time she managed to organize *Vitalità del negativo*, an exhibition on Italian art in the 1960s, put together in an original, surprising way.⁴

Lonardi recalled that the project met with great skepticism from critics like Giulio Carlo Argan, Maurizio Calvesi, and Alberto Boatto, and got support only from the collector Giorgio Franchetti and from Bonito Oliva, whom she defined as “brilliant, impulsive, and also very kind toward me.”⁵ This, then, was the genesis in 1970 of *Vitalità del negativo nell’arte italiana 1960/70*,⁶ an exhibition devoted to Italian art from the previous decade, and largely composed, as if indicating its pervasive synthesis, of works that bear within them their own action (Vincenzo Agnetti’s *Libro dimenticato a memoria*, Giovanni Anselmo’s *Neon nel cemento*, Michelangelo Pistoletto’s *Metro cubo d’infinito*), or by fully fledged immersive environments (Enrico Castellani’s *Ambiente bianco*, Gino Marotta’s *Mare* and *Pioggia*, Eliseo Mattiacci’s *Tube*, Fabio Mauri’s *Luna*).

The exhibition was also highly innovative in terms of the fact that a small private organization such as the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, which had only recently been founded, could act with the freedom typical of an experimental body but also with the mentality and vision typical of a public institution. Above all, there was recurrent emphasis on being part of a group, on the *us*.

It is the things you do not know that will change your life (*Contemporanea*, 1973–74)

Christo’s *empaquetage* at Porta Pinciana in Rome is, in a certain sense, the emblem of *Contemporanea*.⁷ A great work of art belonging to the Dadaist tradition, it interacted with the context, pitted itself against the city, highlighted one of the fundamental urban structures by hiding it, and reflected on the art system through the analysis of costs, materials, and instruments. It was the beginning of 1974, and that monumental work was an external appendix (the premonition of that which would come to be defined with the unhappy term “public art”) of *Contemporanea*, the great interdisciplinary exhibition organized once again by the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte. As the curator of the Art section, Bonito Oliva took on the lion’s share (it was with this exhibition that he acquired the autonomy and the centrality to which he had always aspired), flanked by a dozen or so curators: Fabio Sargentini for Music and Dance, Daniela Palazzoli for Photography, Alessandro Mendini for Architecture and Design, Giuseppe Bartolucci for Theater, Paolo Bertetto for Cinema, Mario Diacono for Visual Poetry, Yvon Lambert and Michel Claura for Books and Records, and Bruno Corà, Leietta Gervasio, and Paolo Medori for Counterinformation. Sartogo was charged with image coordination, understood as a “critical thesis expressed through images.” The exhibition had already opened toward the end of 1973 (on November 30), meeting with great success and obviously also provoking great controversy. I was at the opening (my first!), accompanied by my high-school art history teacher Rosaria D’Angelo, who worked with Bonito Oliva on that occasion together with many other young scholars. I was spellbound: contemporary art revealed to me its remarkable depth and its manifold seductive faces. At the opening, which was crowded and fashionable, a beautiful woman passed before me: it was Graziella Lonardi. Many years later, she would describe the exhibition to me as follows:

By then, we had focused on Italy and we decided to organize an international exhibition. I was a friend of Leo Castelli and we got in touch with him. Achille played his part, and broke away from the group, becoming a leader. *Contemporanea* was an incredible experience! The Music and Dance section was wonderful. Sargentini demanded *carte blanche* and invited Charlemagne

Palestine, Joan Jonas... the Theater section included Odin Teatret, Memé Perlini, Remondi and Caporossi, Carmelo Bene, Leo and Perla's Sud, Giancarlo Nanni... in the Photography section Diane Arbus could be seen for the first time in Italy... Artists, curators... everyone worked together in this garage, all pulling in the same direction, the Fluxus group, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, Lucio Amelio... all together without any divisions or distinctions.⁸

This was the real secret of an exhibition that has become legendary. Graziella and Achille were a formidable team, while a whole community moved together with and around them. Wolf Vostell conceived the manifesto for the occasion: "It is the things you do not know that will change your life." And *Contemporanea* certainly changed mine.⁹

A garage (more about *Contemporanea*)

The metal grids arranged by Sartogo allow the intersection between the various languages to emerge. In the contemporary cave of the car park in Villa Borghese, the venue of the exhibition, was George Segal's girl on a swing, whose male alter ego you could meet at the bar. Luciano Fabro displayed *Lo spirato* for the first time, while Mario Merz presented an enormous igloo. Mario Schifano showed his peremptory *NO*, and there was also Jasper Johns's flag. Lonardi recalls:

[Robert] Rauschenberg came out with me, among the scrap, and took a tricycle and some cardboard boxes and turned them into masterpieces. Two years later, Ileana Sonnabend asked me for the works to take them to an exhibition in Israel. I remember the performance by [Joseph] Beuys, *Arena*, [Wolf] Vostell's loaves wrapped in *l'Unità*, [Daniel] Buren's bands of pink and white descending from above, Vettor Pisani's *Carne umana e oro*, and Jannis Kounellis's table *Untitled*.

I, too, remember the highly intense works by Beuys, Pisani, and Kounellis, which struck me most. In the open space you could also see the first performances by Luigi Ontani (who impersonated Tarzan) and Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 10*, in which she stabbed knives between her fingers. In the catalog, Bonito Oliva proposed the method of critical bias and the "amoral awareness" that one can only work within contradictions in order to create explosions. Understanding can only start out from the present, so the path was backwards, from 1973 to 1955. The curator identified three lines—Analytical, Processual, and Synthetic—though it is clear that his own thought lay mainly in the latter, above all in the conception of behavior that he set about theorizing in those years, represented in the exhibition by artists such as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers, Gino De Dominicis, Gilbert & George, Jannis Kounellis, Urs Lüthi, and Vettor Pisani. Bonito Oliva tended to discard pre-constituted frameworks, not employing current terms like Pop Art, Conceptual Art, or Arte Povera, but re-interpreting the logic of the exhibition with the *invention* of three different categories, within which there lay a deeper divide: that between (idealistic and ideological) European culture and (pragmatic and analytical) American culture, another theme typical of Bonito Oliva, who would soon publish the volume *Europe/America. The different avant-gardes*.¹⁰ As Lonardi explains:

The idea of the garage came because I knew [Loris] Corbi. I always saw this empty garage so I asked the Condotte d'Acqua company if we could use it.

And although Bonito Oliva puts the choice down to the need for ample spaces, the underground aspect of the garage undoubtedly gave the exhibition its symbolic form. For a concluding comment we can turn once again to the words of Lonardi:

The cultural climate was in the air. We had the library of the Centro Di. It was the first time I'd seen young children at an exhibition. [...] I had thought that at least some of the works could stay there, and some of the artists left them for me. But then they kicked us out because the Counterinformation, where Basaglia, Sofri and others came in, was full of things against Andreotti... the political part was too strong. Pity, because it would have been the first museum of contemporary art in Rome and in Italy.¹¹

The Transavantgarde: characteristics, motivations, and themes Around the late 1970s and early 1980s, the artistic current that goes under the name Transavantgarde was born, marking a distinct shift in direction from the established trends of the 1970s: Conceptualism (a mental approach, with the exclusion of the manual element), Minimalism (the dominant presence of the object), and Arte Povera (the direct presentation of primitive natural materials, significant in themselves). Signs of this change in climate and sensibility had already emerged in the mid-1970s, and it is above all through the means of *drawing* that it is possible to trace anticipations of the new mindset. In 1976, for example, Bonito Oliva, the critic who would coin the fortunate label "Transavantgarde," curated an exhibition entitled *Drawing/Transparence. Disegno/Trasparenza*.¹² Drawing was a vehicle, a go-between, because it is the link or the moment of passage between the conceptual phase and the pictorial phase; it is part both of the mental aspect of reflection and conception and of the manual element and the relationship with the material, albeit the delicate material of paper and pencil. In fact, the first exhibitions of Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, and Mimmo Paladino reveal the privileged role of drawing, used at times in combination with installation, photography, and painting, which finally reappears. In an exhibition of the work of Clemente (significantly entitled *Pitture barbare*, 1976), the drawing on the wall serves to connect the photos. The definition coined by Bonito Oliva, the neologism "Transavantgarde," means that these artists stand outside the logic of the avant-garde; they do not want to feel confined in an outpost, in a (supposedly) advanced position; they have no intention of provoking the public. They want to go beyond the avant-garde, to overturn its logic, but to do so also means turning back, being free to rediscover the dignity of the work, the tradition of the craft, the value of the image. They no longer want to live with an overwhelming sense of guilt with respect to social and political issues; they want, instead, to feel happy once again to be artists. The prefix "trans" in the synthetic term is thus a key of interpretation.

The avant-garde has always sought to reveal the mechanisms within the work, considering it a mechanical device, to be put together and taken apart. This required a cold, non-emotional execution, coherent rigor in planning, and clarity of materials. These artists, on the other hand, consider the work as an organic whole, endowed with a life of its own, with a biological breath. And if artifice is indispensable, it will be hidden, camouflaged, mixed with the thick, warm paste of painting, as in the case of citation, which is never explicit because it is never, when used in its proper sense, a drawing of attention to an element that indicates a preference or a particular meaning. Anything can be cited in any way (some have seen this as postmodern "laxity") when the painter finds something that he can make use of at that moment. The attitude is that of *eclecticism*: "If coherence does not exist, then nor does contradiction," writes Bonito Oliva. The operation of these artists can be compared in some way to that of an artist like Francis Picabia, who declared his own *kleptomania*: "If the work of another translates one of my dreams, his work is mine."¹³ However, instead of being highlighted as citations, the images are masked, merged together and mixed with the subjective imagination. It is the impact on the public that these artists seek, a return to communication; it is not an erudite operation, and hardly ever a case of textual revival. The Transavantgarde countered what Bonito

Oliva called the “Darwinism” of the historical avant-gardes (in the sense of an evolutionary theory of art marked by the false myth of necessary, unstoppable progress) with its linguistic “nomadism” (the prefix *trans* itself implies a journey), also capable of moving backwards. It is evident that this tendency can be placed in the general framework of the postmodern condition of culture, which took shape in art as a return to painting, or to be more precise, as a return to the specific, with characteristics such as the withdrawal within the borders of the painting (though not always), and the recovery of *manuality* and figuration (though not absolute). Another consequent characteristic is the *genius loci*: against the international standardization of the historical avant-gardes and of the neo-avant-gardes, art rediscovered local traditions (this also happened in architecture with the revival of styles and of materials typical of the individual context). Although particularly related to figuration, the return to painting should not be seen exclusively in this sense; indeed, both De Maria and Paladino bear witness to a great interest in the abstract tradition, and De Maria in particular to the relationship with the previous generation, that of Arte Povera, in the use of certain materials and above all in the extension of painting to the environment and the interest in the problem of space. It is, however, necessary to analyze the work of the individual artists, which is highly varied precisely because of the aspect of a rediscovered *subjectivity*. They never formed a full-fledged group (unlike the historical avant-gardes), with no manifesto, no declaration of poetics, and they eventually took very different paths.

Perhaps it is only in Italy that this kind of art could be born, capable of wisely repropounding the force of the past, though in a propulsive manner. In Italy, there is a natural relationship with art. Art is part of our life; we see it every day, and it is not considered with intellectual detachment. This specific quality of Italian art was also alive in the recent past. Chia and Paladino were born in 1946 and 1948 respectively; Cucchi was born in 1949, Clemente in 1951 and De Maria in 1954. So they were not exactly the same age, but they were all young and they represented a powerfully innovative generation.

The Transavantgarde: a brief but truthful history

On the occasion of an exhibition of drawings by Chia and Cucchi at the Galleria Mazzoli in Modena, Bonito Oliva, who had already been following some of these artists, produced a booklet together with them. Entitled *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*, it was the first in the “Con-arte” series, published by Emilio Mazzoli and edited by Bonito Oliva himself, which would also include short monographs on the two artists and on Clemente and Paladino. It consisted of fragments of the critical text (an itinerary of his initials, A.B.O.) and of those of the artists, which merge indistinctly in a carefully made montage, a mixture distinguished only by the uninterrupted characters, in an incessantly beating, though irregular rhythm. As well as Mazzoli, one of the most assiduous and active, other Italian galleries supported the new scene, and some in particular acted as go-betweens with the international scene: the gallery of Gian Enzo Sperone would be one of the lines of communication with America, while a bridge with Europe, and especially with Germany,¹⁴ would be formed by Lucio Amelio in Naples, the first gallery to have presented De Maria, where Clemente and Paladino, among others, also held exhibitions.

In the meantime, *Flash Art* published Bonito Oliva’s article “La Trans-Avanguardia italiana,” which first proposed a definition of the neologism that would become a happy label: it does not indicate an opposition to the avant-garde, but the possibility of crossing it, the rediscovered freedom to go backwards in time, and forwards toward the future. The concepts dealt with include those of *opulence*, *intensity*, and above all *nomadism*.¹⁵

On November 4, 1979 an exhibition entitled *Opere fatte ad arte*¹⁶ opened at the Palazzo di Città in Acireale: curated by Bonito Oliva, it presented the five artists. At the entrance, visitors were met by a figure flying downwards (like an angel in a medieval painting) on a large red canvas by Paladino

(*Silenzioso. Angelo*). De Maria presented a canvas lined with clear, elegant signs, placed high up, with no frame, fixed only at one corner like a standard, while small works were spread over three walls. Chia showed four paintings and a small sculpture, linked by a series of common features: the drawing placed on the head of the sculpture relates to the painting in which a man flees, standing at the same time on the road and on the roof of a house; from a small painting there emerges a ray of light that continues along the wall revealing a snowman. Cucchi presented a large blue painting with small figurines and two paintings with ceramic insertions and appendices. Clemente showed several works from the series of *Emblemi*, an ironic painting entitled *Abbasso la scuola* and an intense self-portrait on paper. “*Since we have been a conversation, it is possible to re-establish the circuit, to circulate beauty and arrange it in such a way that its communication takes place without obstacles, in the pleasure of its artifice and in the admiring astonishment of its visitors,*” wrote Bonito Oliva, citing the words of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin: to recreate a link with the spectator, not through the decoding or the demagoguery of involvement, but through the intensity produced by the very presence of the work, to restore the circuit of communication.¹⁷

On November 30, the exhibition *Le stanze*¹⁸ opened at the Castello Colonna in Genazzano; curated by Bonito Oliva, it included the work of 17 Italian artists of different generations: as well as Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, and Paladino, there were works by Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Jannis Kounellis, Mario and Marisa Merz, Maurizio Mochetti, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Vettor Pisani, Salvo, and Gilberto Zorio. The juxtaposition between exponents of Arte Povera and the five artists of the Transavantgarde was entirely new. The introductory text by the curator is an excellent example of “creative criticism” (as theorized by Bonito Oliva himself): the central figure is the child Dionysus surrounded by precious, symbolic toys, attributes like the mirror, the dice, the ball, the spinning top, golden apples... (the theme of childhood fits perfectly with the ludic attitude of the Transavantgarde artists). In it the artists are called “*Vista del Dio*” (Sight of God) and “*popolo dell’occhio*” (people of the eye), again with reference to the theme of seeing. Cucchi presented a large red canvas with a floating image that recalls Osvaldo Licini’s *Amalasuunta*. In one room Paladino placed a work called *Porta*, painted on two sides with the primary colors and black—a work on the very foundations of painting. A light sculpture in wire stuck out from the wall and a small painting with intense colors was placed against a door jamb by De Maria. Chia showed two large paintings with an intense presence: the luminous, iridescent blue grotto is entitled *In acqua strana e cupa, se brilla un punto bianco, se salta una pupa, al volo suo m’affianco*. Clemente created a mosaic on site, almost a Roman floor in a narrow hall that overlooks the landscape. The year 1980 began for the five young artists with several exhibitions in European museums.¹⁹ In March, at the Loggetta Lombardesca in Ravenna, Bonito Oliva opened the exhibition *Italiana: Nuova Immagine*.²⁰ His text was published in issue no. 11 of the journal *La tradizione del nuovo*, which served as the catalog. Among the texts by the artists, on the other hand, Chia began from his childhood: “even before thinking I might be a painter or a sculptor I caught sight of images and was struck and involved by them. No point now trying to remember which images, or rather which ghosts; but I do remember that I sought protection and help against their pleasure.” The text by Clemente is an analysis and an interpretation of the “mental” part of the work, entitled *Titoli delle illustrazioni, illustrazioni dei titoli*. Cucchi evokes the power of his relationship with places: “I was a courageous young boy. I thought that art is from dawn to dusk. Yes, I am the Marches,” he wrote, identifying with his home region (“And thus I am a region”). “I like uncertainties, mural ideas, lights, a statue in Greek bronze, rugs and drapes,” wrote Paladino in a brief, intense text.

The first great international success for the artists of the Italian Transavantgarde came in the spring, in Basel, where Jean-Christophe Ammann curated the exhibition *Sieben Junge Künstler aus Italien*.

*Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, Luigi Ontani, Mimmo Paladino, Ernesto Tatafiore.*²¹ The catalog consisted of a cardboard box, which contained a booklet with texts by the curator, Bonito Oliva, and Germano Celant, together with biographical and bibliographical information, and seven short monographs. Each artist took a different approach to the creation of his own little catalog (some of them, indeed, seem to have devoted great care to their volume, as if it were an independent work). This reflects a real and significant development: a new-found subjectivity.

Official consecration came in the same year at the Venice Biennale with the *Aperto '80* section, curated by Bonito Oliva and Harald Szeemann, held at the Magazzini del Sale alle Zattere from June 1 to September 28. The director was Luigi Carluccio; the general catalog, edited by Gianfranco Dogliani, also contained texts by the two curators. The exhibition presented the new artistic generation under the label *Aperto* (which would become the title of all the following exhibitions devoted to young artists, up to the 1995 edition). As Szeemann observed, there was an attempt to create a link between the historical section—*L'arte negli anni Settanta*, at the Giardini, also curated by Szeemann and Bonito Oliva with Michael Compton and Martin Kunz— and *Aperto '80*. In the former were placed artists who had already been historicized, such as Jörg Immendorff, Markus Lupertz, Günter Brus, AR Penck, and Sigmar Polke. Already partly or exclusively using means such as painting and drawing, they were evidently chosen for their closeness to the development of the new pictorial sensibility.

It should be noted that the two exhibitions had the same title, *L'arte negli anni Settanta*, and that *Aperto '80* (generally remembered and cited as the actual title) was only the subtitle of the second show: to be more precise, the two exhibitions should thus be defined as two sections of the same exhibition held in different venues. Also worth underlining is the presence in the German Pavilion of Georg Baselitz (1938) and Anselm Kiefer (1945). Among others, *Aperto '80* gathered together artists like Richard Artschwager, Jonathan Borofsky, Michael Buthe, Luciano Castelli, Tony Cragg, Martin Disler, Robert Kushner, Susan Rothenberg, Julian Schnabel, and Robert S. Zakanitch, beyond geographical borders and strictly generational criteria (considering the many “over-age” artists). There were seven Italians: Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, Mimmo Paladino with Mimmo Germanà and Ernesto Tatafiore. In his text, Szeemann regrets having had to separate the two events, which he had wanted to merge; however, the link between the two exhibitions is restored through painting and drawing. These, in fact, are the means that dominated *Aperto '80* (although Bonito Oliva warns that we are not faced with a new case of linguistic standardization): “The media are more traditional,” admits Szeemann on the subject of contemporary artistic research, “and the program less speculative, but on the other hand the contributions of imagination and sensual freedoms have increased.” Bonito Oliva underlines the recovery of the image, the ironic vein, and the different anthropological characters of American and European art, while Szeemann urges us to get rid of preconceived subdivisions:

Let us welcome energies wherever they are found. Let us eliminate formulas like “decorative,” “pattern,” “new image” from all languages... Enough, too, of “young Italians,” “young Americans,” “young Germans” and all that Olympian nonsense of the 1970s. We want to mix everything up: men and women, children and adults, painting and film, static and dynamic, duration and consumption.²²

Contemporary and non-contemporary meet incessantly without codes of creative behavior, as far as the work of art is concerned. [...] At the same time an ironic vein and a sense of play have now become a stable part of the field of artistic production, and accompany the

condition of the artist, who claims for himself a space of pleasure and of realization within the system of art.²³

Paladino showed a large white triptych, the vertical door and *Lampeggiante*, Cucchi three large canvases, one of which was entitled *Le case vanno in discesa*. Among Chia's paintings was *Molto rumore per un bacio*. Clemente presented a triptych in encaustic. It is interesting to note that in the writings of its first theorists, not only Szeemann and Bonito Oliva but also Ammann, among others, what many critics subsequently considered to be a movement typical of the 1980s was actually linked to the previous decade. Consider, for example, Bonito Oliva's observation that "the idea of art in the 1970s was to find within itself the pleasure and the danger of handling the material." In fact, the most significant years seem to be those at the end of the decade, when all these characteristic elements could already clearly be seen. In short, the 1980s were already present in the 1970s.

At the end of the year, Bonito Oliva's book *The Italian Trans-avantgarde* was published. Beneath its Italian tricolor cover, it contained images of Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, and Paladino, and five essays by the author. "The artist of the new generation discovers the privilege of the enclosure." In other words, he follows the path of a return to the specific, establishes a field of focus, gladly allows himself to be penned in by the edges of the frame. "If coherence does not exist, then nor does contradiction," writes Bonito Oliva, and coherence does not exist, for the artist travels through all the territories of the imagination. *The miniaturization of the sensibility* alludes to the reversal of all traditional perspectives: "Minority is another value recovered by the new mindset of art, which also moves in feminine ways, with a feminine, secret sensibility." "If France has had Marat, Italy has had Totò and *commedia dell'arte*": the rediscovery of the comic, combined with the tragic at the expense of the dramatic register, therefore also forms part of the recovery of national roots. "Art is the symbolic place of genetic selection," writes the author with reference to the story of Jacob, who became rich not by saving but with the experimental practice of the imagination, forcing nature to change shape.²⁴

On November 1, the Galleria Emilio Mazzoli in Modena presented *Tesoro*. The exhibition included works on paper by Chia ("treasure of style"), Clemente ("treasure of the emblem"), Cucchi ("treasure of grace"), De Maria ("treasure of the inner life"), and Paladino ("treasure of the memory"). The booklet that accompanied the exhibition was edited by Bonito Oliva. Meanwhile, there were further international events.²⁵ The exhibition *Transavanguardia: Italia/America*, curated by Bonito Oliva at the Galleria Civica of Modena,²⁶ presented works by Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, and Paladino, and by Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Deutsch, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and Robert S. Zakanitch. "Il nichilista compiuto" was the title of the essay by the curator. The comparative framework had already been employed by Bonito Oliva in 1976 in his book *Europe/America. The different avant-gardes*, but was now adapted to the new situation, with Europe represented by the Italian example and American by the New York area. "High" and "low" tradition are now no longer separate, but the different anthropological roots mean that the two areas draw on different sources: Italy on artisanal techniques, and America on comic strips and graffiti. While the Italians have the history of art behind them, the Americans aspire to specialization: decoration, abstraction, and figure. In 1982, the exhibition *Avanguardia Transavanguardia 68-77*,²⁷ curated by Bonito Oliva, was held along the Aurelian Walls in Rome. Rather than chronological limits, the dates indicate two ideological poles. The catalog text by the curator suggests that in the 1960s art was based on the *presentation* of materials, while the art of the 1970s combined presentation and *representation* as the intersection of nature and culture, and now art has chosen *representation* once and for all. In his text Giulio Carlo Argan considers the Transavantgarde to be the only phenomenon that maintains a certain capacity to raise questions, but believes that a critical evaluation is impossible, although he acknowl

edges that these images “do not pass by with the transience typical of TV or advertising images.” The other authors were intellectuals and writers such as Alberto Arbasino, Massimo Cacciari, Enrico Filippini, Ruggero Guarini, Alberto Moravia, Beniamino Placido, Paolo Portoghesi, Annemarie Sauzeau Boetti, and Gianni Vattimo, who do not deal only with the visual arts. Among the 45 artists were Carla Accardi, Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Alighiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Christo, Martin Disler, Luciano Fabro, Anselm Kiefer, Per Kirkeby, Sol LeWitt, Dennis Oppenheim, Giulio Paolini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Schifano, Julian Schnabel, Frank Stella, Giulio Turcato, Cy Twombly, Gerd van Elk, Emilio Vedova, as well as Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, and Paladino. The historical site was evocative, but made the presentation of the works a complicated task. Fabro chose an outdoor space, in an astonishing stroke of genius providing the roof with the canopy *Enfasi*. Along the lines of the space where the young artists were presented in *Contemporanea* (many of them performers), at the end of the path there was a space where young artists alternated, in this case almost all painters. The complex task of designing the exhibition was entrusted to Costantino Dardi, who “besieged” the open space of the Walls with tents like those of a barbarian camp.

Besides his activity as a curator, Bonito Oliva continued to write books and articles, developing the critical vision that also underpinned his curatorial choices. In *Transavantgarde International*, he expanded his focus to the international situation, involving writers of various nationalities.²⁸ In the meantime, other international exhibitions followed for the artists.²⁹ Their paths, which had been different right from the beginning but for a brief moment had seemed to cross, began increasingly to diverge. From now on, as they achieved international success, A.B.O. focused on what would become some of his key words and themes: *crossing* (*trans-disciplinary* and *multi-media art*), *eclecticism*, *genius loci*, *irony*, *nomadism*, *subjectivism*.

Themes

In 1979, Bonito Oliva curated an exhibition at the Artra Studio in Milan, which also published a small catalog, on the *Labirinto*, a mythological theme of great symbolic density that has attracted artists of all eras. The exhibition presented works by Berti, Boetti, Chia, Christo, Clemente, Cucchi, Gilbert & George, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Paladino, Paolini, Pisani, and Pistoletto. Although small, the exhibition also included international artists and anticipated the largescale event on the same theme, *In labirinto*, for which Bonito Oliva would curate the contemporary section.³⁰ In this case, the artists presented ranged from the modern to the contemporary, from Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, and René Magritte to Jackson Pollock and Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini, and Vettor Pisani. In Bonito Oliva’s text, Daedalus builds the labyrinth as a philosophical theater and Theseus is identified with the artist, he who faces “the beloved Beast.” In 1993, assisted by a team of curators, Bonito Oliva organized a major interdisciplinary exhibition on the myth of the eternal city at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome: the title of the exhibition was *Tutte le strade portano a Roma?* (All roads lead to Rome?), in which the question mark³¹ adds an element of doubt and irony that somehow undermines the myth. The exhibition features artists from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth who had drawn inspiration from the eternal city (including the remarkable Zavattini collection of small works devoted to sites in Rome), as well as a group of contemporary works produced for the occasion. On April 29, 1994 “*Preferirei di no.*” *Cinque stanze tra arte e depressione*, an exhibition on the relationship between art and melancholy curated by Bonito Oliva,³² opened at the Museo Correr in Venice. In the catalog Bonito Oliva wrote:

The title of the exhibition is taken from Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener*: it describes the passing of the life of a clerk who refuses to do anything. “I would prefer not to” is all he

gives away [...] The exhibition is conceived as a series of five *rooms*, exhibition spaces that bring together artworks from different areas and historical eras, around themes centered on five “figures” with which to assemble and disassemble the presence of depression in relation to art: the Alchemist, the Traitor, the Gambler, the Orderer, and the Builder.

The “rooms” present analogies with the “stations” of the exhibition co-curated by Bonito Oliva at the 1978 Venice Biennale, which explored the relationship between art and nature, and in this case, too, function in both a diachronic and a synchronic sense; here, however, the works do not come only from the modern and contemporary period, but also from earlier art. It is the theme that allows the coexistence of works from periods so far apart in time.

Biennale, a great love!

Over the years, the Venice Biennale has undoubtedly been the event that has most attracted Bonito Oliva, who has seen the world’s oldest contemporary art exhibition as the ideal stage for his action. Founded in 1893 and inaugurated in 1895 with the classic structure of national pavilions, along the lines of the great universal expositions, it is a great international showcase in the magnificent setting of Venice.

The first time Bonito Oliva collaborated with the Biennale was in 1978, under the presidency of Carlo Ripa di Meana: since the direction of the Art section was vacant, a group of curators was appointed—also including Jean-Christophe Ammann, Antonio del Guercio and Filiberto Menna—to put together what was defined at the time as the “great historical-critical exhibition.” In the framework of the general theme of that edition of the Biennale (*Dalla natura all’arte, dall’arte alla natura*), the four curators identified an acute critical path: *Sei stazioni per Artenatura. La natura dell’arte*. It was, therefore, a theme-based international exhibition that worked in both a diachronic and a synchronic sense, since it covered art of the modern and contemporary eras and analyzed it within thematic stations. The design, as in the following editions of the Biennale, was entrusted to Costantino Dardi. In 1980, the relationship between Bonito Oliva and the Biennale was marked by the success of the *Aperto* section. We have already mentioned some artists included in the historical section of *L’arte degli anni Settanta* distinguished by the use of painting and drawing, but all the languages most typical of that decade were represented in the exhibition: among the Italian artists who took part were Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, and Giuseppe Penone.

The 1990s were characterized as the decade in which the great periodic international exhibitions assumed increasing importance as opportunities for exchange and reflection. The two most traditional, the Biennale in Venice and DOCUMENTA in Kassel, were joined by many others around the world.³³ In 1993, Bonito Oliva was appointed as Director of the Venice Biennale. Having been the founder, together with Szeemann, of *Aperto*, the section that brought together young international artists, he logically decided to make that exhibition the core of his Biennale, with the theme *Emergenza/Emergency*, achieving his aim by assigning the role of head curator to Helena Kontova, the editor of *Flash Art International*. Kontova conceived the exhibition as a three-dimensional magazine, a chorus of over ten curators from different geographical and cultural origins, many of whom were contributors to *Flash Art* or other international magazines (like Matthew Slotover, editor of *Frieze*), an idea that Bonito Oliva welcomed enthusiastically. *Aperto ’93* thus became the first of the great exhibitions with many different curators, acting as a model for exhibitions such as Manifesta (which was born two years later) and the Biennales of Gwangju, Johannesburg, and others.³⁴ The idea was to present the complex multicultural situation that had developed as a result of globalization. A more limited, though very early example of this trend had been seen with *Molteplici Culture*, held in

Rome in 1992 (curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Ludovico Pratesi),³⁵ which brought together numerous curators from various backgrounds in order to record the emerging phenomenon of multiculturalism and cultural difference. The questions that the co-curators of *Aperto '93* (including Francesco Bonami, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Jeffrey Deitch) asked themselves were: “How do we approach others? How do we ensure that cultural differences do not disappear?” Through the internet it had recently become possible to experience an infinite contemporaneity. If the pavilion-based structure of the Venice Biennale is already in itself polyphonic, here we are faced with a further shuffling of the pack, because the curators did not invite artists from their own countries but, on the basis of an exchange information that is now extremely rapid (and also typical of the system of international contemporary art magazines), extended their vision to other countries.

Another novelty was the video section, not relegated to a reserved dark room, but literally spread right through the exhibition. Many of the participating artists would define the aesthetics of the following decades: among them were Kai Althoff, Matthew Barney, Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Félix González-Torres, Damien Hirst, Renée Green, Carsten Höller, Gabriel Orozco, Philippe Parreno, Pipilotti Rist, Doris Salcedo, Kiki Smith, Nedko Solakov, Rirkirt Tiravanija, and Andrea Zittel; among the Italians, Eva Marisaldi, Grazia Toderi, and Liliana Moro and Bernhard Rüdiger who made a work together. The catalog, too, was designed like an issue of the magazine, in which the essays by the curators alternated with an anthology of theorists of contemporary society like Michel Maffesoli and Slavoj Žižek. In a particularly effective essay, Bourriaud sets out from the idea that the danger is not the death of art, but its contraction, contesting the dogma of the autonomy of art by placing it within a network of relations.

In 1999, the decade was brought to a close by the memorable Venice Biennale directed by Harald Szeemann. *Aperto*—the section invented by Szeemann and Bonito Oliva in 1980—had been abolished by Jean Clair in 1995, but Szeemann would make the whole Biennale and the whole city of Venice a great edition of *Aperto* by mixing artists of various origins, languages, and generations under the title *d'APER TUTTO*. In 1993 there was already a proliferation of other exhibitions entrusted to different curators, often very young: the Italian Pavilion itself was divided into micro-sections with different curators. Indeed, the innovations also involved the pavilions, which were encouraged to take a transnational direction: Hungary presented its American descendant Joseph Kosuth, Germany showed the installation by Hans Haacke in the interior of its pavilion and hosted the video-installation by Nam June Paik outside, with the two artists jointly awarded the Golden Lion for the best national pavilion. In short, it was a Biennale that was *open* from all points of view, and which, as suggested by its title *Punti cardinali dell'arte*, was the largest and most complex exhibition ever planned by Bonito Oliva as a critic and curator. And while these are not the last words of A.B.O.'s curatorial writing, they are the ones that will conclude this text, devoted to over two decades of his exhibitions, of which I, as he himself states, have been a “(dependent) witness.”

¹ Piero Sartogo during the round table held at the gallery of Erica Ravenna Fiorentini in Rome on December 3, 2018 on the occasion of the solo exhibition by Gino Marotta (cited in the exhibition catalog).

² *Amore mio*, Palazzo Ricci, Montepulciano, June 30 – September 30, 1970.

³ In conversation with the author, Rome, 2010.

⁴ A. Bonito Oliva, “Visse d’arte, ma ancora...,” in C. Casorati and D. Lancioni, eds., *Omaggio a Graziella Lonardi Buontempo. Tutta la vita per l’arte*, exh. cat., PAN, Naples, December 17, 2011 – January 16, 2012 (Rome: Edizioni Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, 2011), pp. 8–9.

⁵ From the film *Donna di quadri* directed by Gabriele Raimondi, 2020.

⁶ *Vitalità del negativo nell’arte italiana 1960/70*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, November 30, 1970 – January 31, 1971.

⁷ *Contemporanea*, Parcheggio di Villa Borghese, Rome, November 30, 1973 – February 28, 1974.

⁸ In conversation with the author, Rome, 2010.

⁹ Without *Contemporanea*, I would probably have been a very serious-minded and perhaps rather boring student of Roman Baroque. But in that underground exhibition, in the area of Rome where I was born and where I lived, I not only saw works of contemporary art for the first time, falling in love with them, but I also had my first experience of work. I was 18, and after finishing high school I had enrolled in Art History with Giulio Carlo Argan and had begun to work with my teacher, Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco. We shared a studio with an architect, Maurizio Di Puolo, and it was he who took me to Porta Pinciana, where Christo was about to wrap part of the Aurelian Walls. It was a great happening, which involved many different people: I remember Di Puolo (charged by Sartogo with following the event) in a flap on top of the wall, Christo's dealer Guido Le Noci shouting in the Apulian dialect, a protester who set light to one of the sheets... The only calm head was Christo himself. I still have a drawing of the wall he made on the tablecloth in a café.

¹⁰ A. Bonito Oliva, *Europe/America. The different avant-gardes* (Milan: Franco Maria Ricci and Parma: Deco Press, 1976).

¹¹ In conversation with the author, Rome, 2010.

¹² *Drawing/Transparence. Disegno/Trasparenza*, Studio d'Arte Cannaviello, Rome, from March 5, 1976. See L. Cherubini, "Paesaggi del sé," in N. Boschiero and L. Cherubini, eds., *Transavanguardia. La collezione Grassi* (Trento and Rovereto: MART and Milan: Skira, 2003).

¹³ Picabia seems, in fact, to be a true forerunner: he is perhaps the first artist who felt himself free to enter and exit the avant-garde at will; his career embraced all styles and all "isms," from Abstractionism to Cubism, from Dadaism to Surrealism, right up to Art informel; he was capable of the most transgressive avant-garde provocations and of painting naked women for art dealers.

¹⁴ Opened on June 21, 1979 at the Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne, the exhibition *Arte Cifra* brought together the work of six Italian artists who had rediscovered means considered (not entirely justifiably) to be traditional, such as painting and drawing: Chia, Clemente, De Maria, and Paladino, as well as Nino Longobardi and Ernesto Tatafiore. The subtitle reads *Licht und Honig Kampf und Dreck*. The concept of art has long been linked to the idea of intentionality, of the will for art, but now, as the curator Wolfgang Max Faust notes in the catalog, "in the place of intention *Arte Cifra* seeks to put intensity. The work of art must become the bearer of energy. Every profound confrontation with the work is thus a production of new, different intensities." The exhibition closed on July 21, 1979.

¹⁵ "The Transavantgarde means taking a nomadic position which respects no definitive engagement, which has no privileged ethics beyond that of obeying the dictates of a mental and material temperature synchronous to the instantaneity of the work": A. Bonito Oliva, "La Trans-Avanguardia italiana," in *Flash Art*, no. 92–93, Milan, October–November 1979, pp. 17–20. The article was also published in the international edition of the magazine. As well as Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria and Paladino, it also deals with Marco Bagnoli and Remo Salvadori.

¹⁶ *Opere fatte ad arte*, Palazzo di Città, Acireale, November 4 – December 15, 1979. The catalog, edited by L. Cherubini, was published by Centro Di in Florence.

¹⁷ In many works in the exhibition, such as *Sul tetto sulla casa* (in which the fact that the man fleeing from the painting places his foot on a jutting element is significant), Chia refers back to the tradition of twentieth-century Italian art: he loved the work of Carrà and read his writings. In the works of Cucchi shown in *Opere fatte ad arte* we can see Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Masaccio, and also the Marches, the artist's home region, a rural and manual technique like pottery that emerges from the first paintings (other techniques and materials would follow, like wax, glass, iron; engraving would be refined, but drawing above all would remain important), while the iconographic themes are varied (dogs, birds, men, and most importantly, houses), because painting is a world, in painting there is everything. Cucchi's work is never static (at times, in fact, it would be mounted on wheels that suggest the idea of the journey, as well as that of precariousness): these first paintings already contain the element of movement, made concrete in the ceramics that are "fleeing."

¹⁸ *Le stanze*, Castello Colonna, Genazzano, November 30, 1979 – February 29, 1980. The catalog, edited by L. Cherubini, was published by Centro Di in Florence.

¹⁹ *Die enthauptete Hand. 100 Zeichnungen aus Italien*. Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, Paladino, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, January 20 – February 28, 1980; Städtische Galerie, Wolfsburg, March 9 – April 6, 1980; Groninger Museum, Groningen, June 6 – July 6, 1980. The exhibition was curated by Margarethe Jochimsen and the catalog included texts by W. M. Faust and Bonito Oliva. The accent is on drawing and subjectivity: four different catalogs were created, one for each artist, similar to drawing albums. The *hand* as a "tool that mediates between the world and the Ego" is the focus of the text by Faust who, by making an analogy between the Italian artists and the French philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault on the theme of *desire*, underlines the fact that apart from being Italian and belonging to the same generation, the artists seem to have nothing in common except an extreme *subjectivism*. On March 30, the exhibition *Egonavigatio* opened at the Mannheimer Kunstverein with Chia, Clemente, De Maria and Paladino. The catalog-book was published by Paul Maenz: fragments of critical texts by Ammann, Bonito Oliva, Celant, Faust, and Jochimsen are interspersed with the artists' images. The catalog was clearly not aimed at information or explanation: criticism, too, must change in the face of art that has no intention of allowing itself to be dissected by analysis or pierced by the weapons of interpretation. The fact is that the revived image is subjected to a process of emptying and subtraction of meaning that reduces it to a *surface image*, of which a *literal* use is made by combining it with other images outside of conceptual analogies. This *literal* image does not travel through metaphorical figures, because its conceptual breadth is not considered, while the metaphor is a shift on the axis of meaning, although it works by means of metonymic *slides* that tend to establish relations of contiguity, not a semantic similarity. It is this

that makes the task of criticism more difficult, accustomed as it is to dealing with metaphors rather than with metonyms.

²⁰ *Italiana: Nuova Immagine*, Loggetta Lombardesca, Ravenna, March–April 1980. Together with Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Paladino, the exhibition included the artists Viviana Benassi, Duccio Berti, Domenico Bianchi, Bruno Ceccobelli, Marco Del Re, Gianni Dessi, Filippo Di Sambuy, Stefano Donati, Enzo Esposito, Pietro Fortuna, Giuseppe Gallo, Mimmo Germanà, Felice Levini, Nino Longobardi, Giuseppe Maraniello, Vittorio Messina, Giorgio Pagano, Giuseppe Salvatori, Ernesto Tatafiore, and Marco Tirelli.

²¹ The exhibition was the first presentation in an international museum, with the subsequent tour: Kunsthalle, Basel, May 10 – June 22, 1980; Museum Folkwang, Essen, October 17 – November 30, 1980; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, December 12, 1980 – January 31, 1981. The Basel exhibition played an important role and involved many artists, whose works, thanks to their acquisition by international museums, signaled the beginning of the establishment of the Transavantgarde on the art market.

²² H. Szeemann in *Aperto '80*, in G. Dogliani, ed., *Catalogo generale XXXIX Biennale di Venezia. Settore arti visive*, exh. cat., Magazzini del Sale, Zattere, Venice, June 1 – September 29, 1980 (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale, 1980), p. 45.

²³ A. Bonito Oliva in *ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁴ A. Bonito Oliva, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde / La Transavanguardia Italiana* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1980). The essays, some already published and partially revised, are “The Italian Trans-avantgarde,” “New Subjectivity,” “The Small Emotion of Art,” “The Mutations of Art,” and “The Tragic and the Comic.”

²⁵ The exhibition *A New Spirit in Painting* opened on January 15, 1981 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London; curated by C. Joachimides, N. Rosenthal, and N. Serota, it presented the work of 38 artists, including the Italians Pier Paolo Calzolari, Sandro Chia, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, and Mimmo Paladino. *Italian Art Now: An American Perspective*, curated by D. Waldman, opened on April 2 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The catalog contained texts by W. and L. Dennison. The show offered a picture of the current art scene in Italy and included works by Chia and Cucchi as well as Nino Longobardi, Luigi Ontani, Giuseppe Penone, Vettor Pisani, and Gilberto Zorio. *Westkunst Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1939*, a large historical exhibition of art from 1939 to 1972 curated by an international committee headed by K. König and with a catalog edited by L. Glozer, opened in Cologne on May 30, 1981. The section on the present day, “heute,” was organized in conjunction with galleries and included 34 artists from seven countries: the Italian representatives were Chia, Clemente, and Cucchi (presented by Gian Enzo Sperone), and De Maria and Paladino (presented by Lucio Amelio).

²⁶ *Transavanguardia: Italia/America*, Galleria Civica, Modena, March 21 – May 2, 1982.

²⁷ *Avanguardia Transavanguardia 68–77*, Aurelian Walls, Rome, April 4 – July 4, 1982.

²⁸ A. Bonito Oliva, *Transavantgarde International – La transavanguardia internazionale* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982). As well as essays by the editor and a conversation with G. C. Argan, the volume includes a section of writings on new painting in individual countries (C. Ratcliff, J. L. Simmen, L. Cherubini, A. Beaton, W. Skreiner, J. De Loisy, M. Boué, B. Curiger, H. Sizoo, F. Bex, B. Mats, A. Medved, I. Wallace, B. Murphy, A. Barzel, J. Glusberg, and G. Moure).

²⁹ The seventh edition of dOCUMENTA, directed by R. Fuchs, opened in Kassel on June 19. The exhibition *Zeitgeist*, curated by C. Joachimides and N. Rosenthal, opened on October 16 at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. It sought to record the “spirit of the times” that united artists from Italy (Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Paladino), Germany, England, and America. *Italia: La Transavanguardia*, Sala de Exposiciones de la Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, 1983, with texts in the catalog by A. Bonito Oliva and V. Combalia: the artists included in the exhibition were Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, Longobardi, Paladino, and Tatafiore. On February 13 of the same year, the exhibition *Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi: Bilder* opened at the Kunsthalle in Bielefeld (subsequently also presented at the Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk). The exhibition was curated by H. Bastian, with texts in the catalog by W. M. Faust and U. Weisner. On March 18 the exhibition *Concetto-Imago. Generationwechsel in Italien* opened at the Bonner Kunstverein in Bonn, curated by Z. Felix and with texts in the catalog by the curator and M. Jochimsen. The alternation of generations juxtaposed Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, and Paladino with Giovanni Anselmo, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, and Giulio Paolini, leading exponents of Arte Povera. On September 14, the exhibition *New Art at the Tate Gallery* opened in London, with works by Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Paladino. The catalog was edited by M. Compton who, after examining the curators and institutions who were dealing with the new situation, compares the Transavantgarde to an “informal café society of young painters.” Cucchi’s *Water Bearer* (1981) and Cucchi’s *Barbarian Landscape* (1983) were presented, as well as number 2 of Clemente’s *Sole di mezzanotte* series. The five artists took part in 1984 in *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*, curated by K. McShine at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Italian artists were Anselmo, Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, De Maria, Dessi, Fabro, Longobardi, Mariani, Paladino, Paolini, Penone, and Zorio. On June 30, 1984 *Contemporary Italian Masters*, curated by G. G. Knight and S. Ghez, opened at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. The catalog, edited by A. Hightower and P. Kostakis, contains texts by H. Geldzahler and J. Russi Kirshner. Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Paladino were present on this occasion together with Mario Merz, the only member of the previous generation. In 1985, the Grande Halle du Parc de la Villette in Paris hosted the *Nouvelle Biennale de Paris 1985*. As well as that by Bonito Oliva, the catalog contains texts by G. Boudouille, J.-P. Faye, A. Heiss, G. Gassiot-Talabot, M. L. Syring, and P. Courcelles. Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Paladino were present (also among the Italians were De

Dominicis and Vettor Pisani). On November 22, *New Art of Italy. Chia Clemente Cucchi Paladino* opened at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, before moving on February 1, 1986 to the Dade County Center for the Fine Arts in Miami and on April 4 to the Contemporary Arts Center of Cincinnati. The exhibition was curated by H. T. Day, who also wrote the texts in the catalog. Each text deals with an individual artist and his works: it was evidently becoming increasingly difficult to link such complex and distinct artistic personalities together in a single critical approach.

³⁰ *In labirinto*, organized by the City of Milan at the Palazzo della Permanente in 1981, consisted of a historical section, *Labirinti*, curated by Hermann Kern, and a contemporary section, *Luoghi del silenzio imparziale*, curated by Bonito Oliva and designed by Paolo Portoghesi (catalog published by Feltrinelli in Milan), while Jorge Luis Borges chaired an important conference on the theme at the Palazzo delle Stelline.

³¹ The question mark was suggested by Gino De Dominicis, who for the occasion executed a work in the rotunda entitled *Fondazione Sumera di Roma*. The catalog was published by Carte Segrete in Rome.

³² Flanked by five curators responsible for the various "rooms" (G. Alessandri, V. Baradel, C. Bertola, L. Cherubini, and T. Trini), and by a committee including psychiatrists such as G. B. Cassano, R. Rossi, and E. Smeraldi. The exhibition was designed by D. Ferretti. The catalog was published by Electa in Milan.

³³ In 1985 Bonito Oliva also co-curated the 13th edition of the Biennale de Paris (Plastic Arts section) with P. Courcelles, G. Gassiot-Talbot, A. Heiss, K. König, and A. Tronche (in the 1971 edition he had curated the Italian participation).

³⁴ The 1992 edition of dOCUMENTA, directed by J. Hoet, had already involved a group of curators, albeit a relatively small one.

³⁵ The following year, together with A. Heiss and A. Vettese, they would curate the exhibition *Il suono rapido delle cose. John Cage & Company* at the Biennale.