

A C H I L L E B O N I T O O L I V A



I N I M A L I A

A N I T A L I A N V I S I O N I N 2 0 T H - C E N T U R Y A R T

Electa



Untitled
 Untitled, 1996
 optic fiber wigs, painted
 wood, neon, glass table,
 70¼ × 47½ × 39¾ in.

Giardino
 Garden, 1998
 carbon fiber
 base: 118 × 118 in.;
 flowers 67 in.;
 max. height (170 cm);
 three ladybugs,
 diam. 17¾ in.

The artist focuses on two terms with two radically opposing meanings: trace and absence. Ultimately, however, both convey messages. There is a particular affinity between the abandoned object and the object apparently awaiting for something and/or someone.

Their structure and composition, the anonymity of the subject created with futuristic materials, stand to indicate that the investigation is moving on elsewhere.

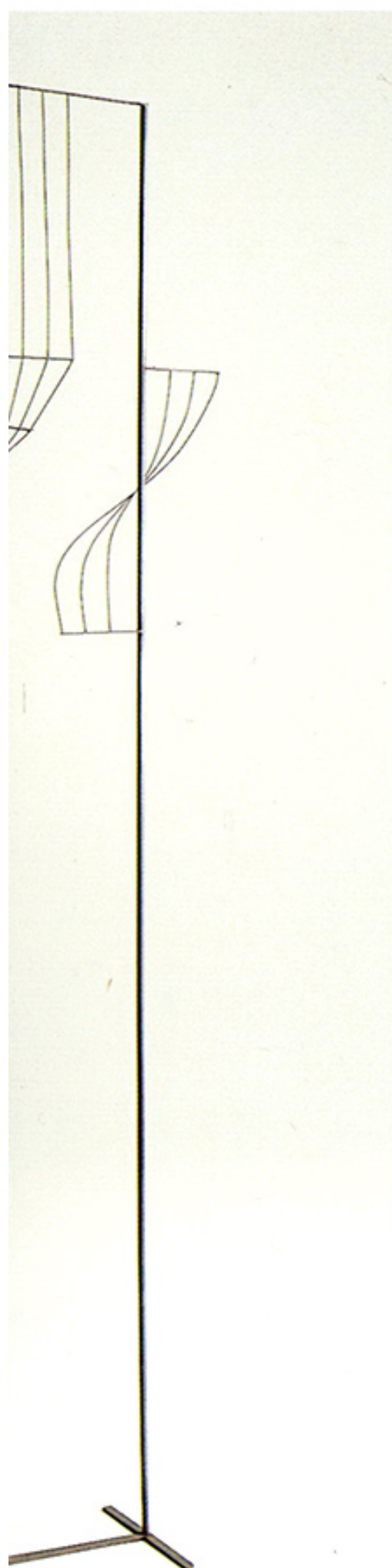
Their being-there is potentially conditioned by other presences that cannot, for the moment, be suspected. Will a response be given to these potentialities at some point in the future, or has the future already begun? In which case, we could speak of hypotheses rather than traces, and waiting rather than absence. The play of materials seems to point to this ambivalence; their undaunted indifference suggests detachment. A title could, however, contradict this reading and lead us, rather with a somewhat malicious intent, towards normal behavior, this time in the absence of protagonists.

If there can be no identification without a cultural connotation, then in Raffaella Nappo's poetic vision, reducing the means of expression to the minimum does not impede a strong involvement. There is an ironic eye that evaluates, a critical eye that judges, a mnemonic eye that "deposits." If the greatest error of our time is to confuse memory with history or turn them into the same thing, Nappo shows us ways to avoid this by distinguishing the ephemeral from the lasting without giving in to nostalgia or utopian dreams. The radical gesture that consists in placing an object, without comment, serves to hypothesize the sheer eventuality of mediation.

In *Senza titolo* (Untitled), a luminous panel with fiber-optic wigs, the seductive nature of the work as a whole is in contrast to the coldness of the materials. Inside the helmet the wig, as the subject, leads one to think of something else. New explorations arise between the lightness and the strength of the object. It is, however, in *Indumenti* (Clothes, 1998) that the absence of the body, a body that may have worn the clothes or could wear them, is felt with the greatest intensity. The clothes are not real garments. They appear as suggestions of form—the anatomical—that does not manifest itself in its physical being but in the memory of it.

Can the new post-human man perhaps be born from the halo on the plastic chair?





Fausto Melotti
Sculptura n. 17
 Sculpture no. 17, 1935
 nickel-plated steel,
 77½ × 3½ × 9½ in.

always linked to recognizable objects in order to endow them with a different identity and an elevated position fed by a subtle mental energy that establishes particular relations between forms, between apparent stasis and conceptual shifts. Idea and form live incarnated between them because they help objects to lose the weight that characterizes them. Memory is not a weight but a propellant of such strength that the forms arrange themselves as new on the silent stage.

The "Italian work of art" of the nineties is the result of a stylistic interweaving that incorporates abstract ornamentation and figurative essentiality, the geometry of a language constructed in accordance with the order of a soft plan, the foundation of a linguistic order that seeks formal definition and not only expression. This is exemplified in the work of Martegani. These characteristics correspond to a systematic urgency and a creative tension lying between the polarities of a constructive and combinatorial language, as in the work of Dellavedova. A language that is also capable—in terms of result and not otherwise—of expressing the artist's identity, as can be seen in the work of Manfredini. The creative efforts of these young artists unquestionably seek to provide art once again with a language that is unified even though developed through a formal fragmentation that preserves the scattered character of an operation that does not believe in pure creation or Romantic vision. This can be seen in the work of Pancrazzi.

If anything, these artists are driven by a formal tension aimed at constructing new types of artistic objects or painting, forms that are in any case representative of a moral condition that seeks to counter the disorder of the world with the motivated formal order of its own work, as in the case of Pirri.

Now, in the second half of the 1990s and at the end of the twentieth century, art finds itself faced with a difficult context dominated by computer technology that finds productive identity in virtual reality, in the anorexia of the image and a general culture undergoing a constant loss of depth.

The immaterialization and dematerialization of the object enhance the capacity of computer technology to penetrate the domestic environment, thus calling into question also the static architecture of museums and galleries.

Art is fortunately developing a resistance to this spuriously vital anorexia, which finds its terminal in the domestic habitat and space, through the production of "ultra-bodies" whose forms develop through circumscribed objects up to the pervasiveness of the installation, as seen in the work of Nappo and Moro.

In this way the idea of the habitat as womb, the architectonic and indestructible archetype of Mediterranean civilization, is demolished.

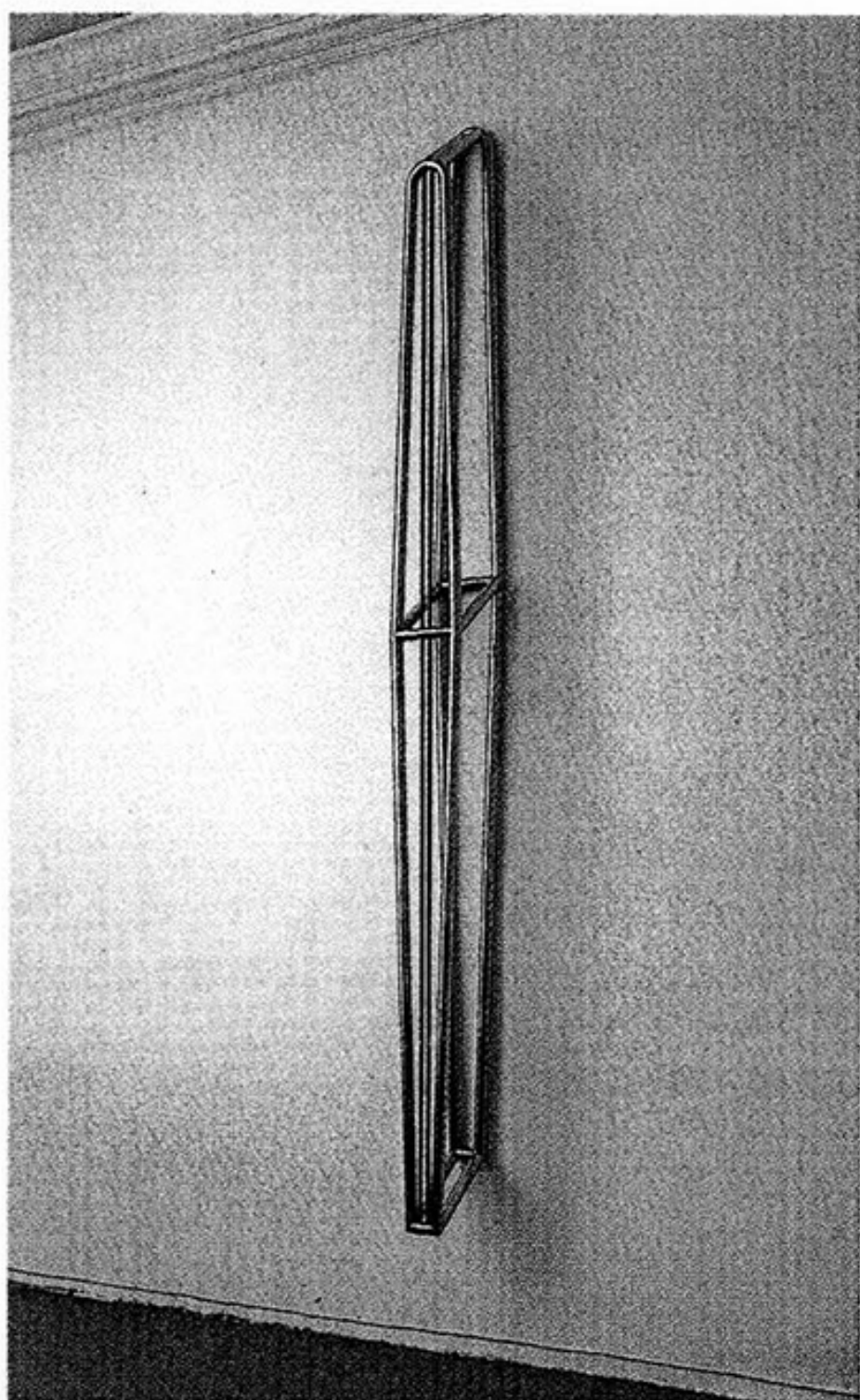
The precariousness of the installation posits the mobility of a post-Mediterranean home, understood as a non-place no longer anchored to the concept of geographical permanence, as seen in the work of Rüdiger and Airò.

The artist thus confronts his context, albeit in terms of reflective laterality, through the production of forms that insist more on the conceptual level of difference than on the level of mimetic spectacularity.

Through the reduction of all metaphysical showcasing, twentieth-century Italian art apparently seeks to stimulate the production of a different form of visibility developed from the starting point of the "mental thing," the work of art, in order to bring about continuous reflective change in the viewer.

The visibility in question is not static and statistical, but productive of new visual realities. As Boccioni remarked of Balla, "He rigorously applies the theory of making a machine into a landscape."

A landscape certainly, but one that has definitely blossomed into a "mental thing."



The Artistic Object

Manipulated by artistic experience through acts of displacement and decontextualization—in the manner of Duchamp—or through simple constructive presentation—in the manner of Munari—objects, things and industrial materials have been converted within the aesthetic domain to become sites of propulsion for new linguistic stimuli and new formulations of thought—in the manner of Fabro, Piacentino and Scarpitta. Now that the old idea of a progressive development of history of art has been eclipsed, what characterizes the relationship with the artistic object in the works of the younger artists appears to be the quest for detail that is concrete, real and devoid of meaning for a system of images dominating reality, a "digital" and essentially technological system of images.

Underlying the creation of the works by Martegani, Nappo, and Rüdiger is a sort of process of identification and isolation within the visual field. This process does not fol-

low the rules of mimesis but subjects the object to linguistic transfiguration or formal re-foundation so that it becomes a thing among things, a thing that, in the barely perceptible merging of the already seen and other constructions, challenges the existing order of things.

The Autonomy of Art

One common feature of the work of Accardi, Agnetti, Castellani, Dadamaino, Manzoni, Nigro, Paolini, Prini, and Spalletti is a particular focus on the problems of the language of art.

The procedure employed by these artists is eminently analytical, based on a logic that is self-reflective or, more simply, located in an area delimited by reflection on art and its fundamental objects. The work is no longer representation but rather presentation of the tools and methods of artistic activity. It shuns metaphorical intentions and analogical associations to show itself as a simple object that clearly reveals its constituent data and the process underpinning its formation. These artists display an attitude of neutrality towards linguistic expressions and adopt, outside the sphere of obtuse rigidity, a sort of syntactical approach that defines a "model" grammar and establishes the methods whereby the individual elements of the work enter into relations with one another.

The goal is a form of objectivity making it possible to eschew the arbitrary and whimsical, but above all displaying the awareness that one is operating within a conventional reality – namely art—subdivided into different linguistic systems, a reality that does not seek to establish itself in synchrony with the contradictions of the world but strongly upholds the autonomy of its own language.

Art is a Mental Act

Fontana's slashes—acts which are in no way symbolic or gestural but literally deep and incisive—Pistoletto's mirror paintings—frontier outposts making it possible "to take art to the very edges of life in order to verify the whole system in which they both move"—the essen-

Gianni Piacentino
Corsa 8 (V.F.V.W.)
Race 8 (V.F.V.W.), 1992–93
various materials
106¼ × 7¾ × 9½ in.



Raffaella Nappo
Senza titolo
Untitled, 1996
plastic, anodized
aluminum alloy,
optic fiber,
15¾ × 23¾ × 17¾ in.

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