

Matività (Nativity), 1987, mixed media. Installation view.

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Salvo, Ottomanie (Ottomans), 1986, oil on canvas, ca. 23½ × 31½".

Nothing was entrusted to chance. Everything was worked out to fit into and enhance the overall concept. Ceccobelli's work has always been

deeply marked by spiritual intensity, by the search for the most profound meanings of symbols, by the redemption of even the most chthonic aspects of pictorial matter. But that symbology, until now translated in the depth of the blacks and browns, in areas of burned canvas, in the wax melted onto the surface of a work, here unexpectedly explodes in space and through time, aspiring to historical truth. For the work of Ceccobelli, this crèche may also represent a point of no return: the passage from a hermetic symbology to explicit allegory that, like an evangelical message, tends toward universal spirituality.

- Alessandra Mammi

Translated from the Italian by Meg Shore.

MILAN

SALVO

ROTONDA DELLA BESANA

Salvo's work finds its most receptive audience in refined observers of things artistic; and certain refined discourses have sought in his work anticipations of developments in the late '70s, especially the ephemeral triumph of painting as our primary art form. Yet for me, Salvo remains—and this is confirmed by this recent retrospective of his work—the symptom of a crisis. His work's success or failure—i.e., whether its flowering and continued growth should be seen as healthy exuberance or as a sickly problem—is not, to my mind, the question that should be posed or addressed.

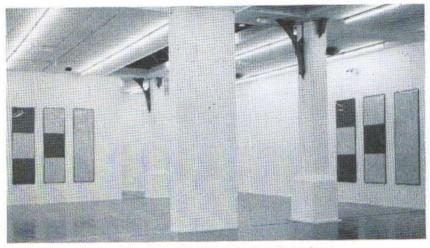
But if it is a question of crisis, a crisis

of what? The crisis of Modernity. But not that crisis experienced by the artist-prince who, closed off in his solitary tower, gathers the signs of the world's delusions, and who recognizes in those signs a latent affinity with certain of his own concerns, however private, that are now undergoing a revival under the name-umbrella of post-Modernism after a long period of repression dictated by the proscriptions of Modernism. No, this is a crisis of Modernity experienced by the creative pariah (here under a particular artistic guise) who measures the insufficiency of the heretofore dominant model of Western culture-the Modern-against himself, against his own sensitivity, as the slightly earlier body-artists were to do against their own skins.

This survey of Salvo's oeuvre from 1970 to '87 (curated by Renato Barilli) included some of his exhibitionistic selfportrait photographs from 1970; marble slabs engraved with names (his own; a cultural top 40) or sayings ("I am the best") in Italian, from 1971-72; painted or embroidered "maps" of Italy and Sicily generated out of a field of famous names from Italian culture, from 1976-77; and, in a much more traditional vein, the mythical scenes, still lifes, and landscapes that he has been painting since 1972. The first three groups of works betray a certain climate of influence on Salvo during that period: in terms of style, that of Giulio Paolini, of Luciano Fabro, and above all of Alighiero e Boetti; and in terms of substance, that of arte povera, which was centered in Turin, the city where Salvo had moved from his native Sicily. These works show a disturbing imitativeness, evidence of both a loss of initiative and an inability to elaborate upon the discourses (however tentatively defined) on which he drew. Considered in this light, Salvo's adoption of conventional easel painting in an illusionistic

figurative style can be seen as a return to certain traditions-specifically those of Italian painting of the 14th and 15th centuries (but minus the magic of scientifically accurate perspective), of popular Sicilian illustrations, and of illustrations of classical myths and legends for children. This sort of appeal to origins, to an archaic purity, can only occur by giving up many of the sophisticated techniques that have been refined over the centuries (including the present one). Despite the brilliance of his sense of design - and particularly the way he uses color - Salvo's revival of a reduced form of figuration is, fundamentally, not positive in nature (but then, no revival is, to any appreciable degree), and it appears as a wholesale denunciation of contem-

From this point on, his paintings are all fetishized genre paintings: bucolic scenes with classical ruins, landscapes with simplified architectonic volumes and strongly stylized trees and plants, up to his recent "Ottomanie" (Ottomans, 1985-86), seductive views of tropical landscapes with palm trees and minarets, all equally stylized, a reduced version of the enchanted childhood realm of the Thousand and One Nights, expurgated of souls. They reveal winks-more than mere references - to the pittura metafisica of Giorgio di Chirico and company (and the visionary ravings of naifs of all types) and to the Futurists' neoclassicism of the 1920s (but also to greeting cards of the 1930s and '40s). What comes across is an ambiguous tension between high values and low values, the former made banal through the simplified assumption of certain styles, and the latter manifested in a chromatic garishness that has nothing to do with the tradition of painting. This is inherent in his approach to making art, and in his very sensibility, and is at the heart of the crisis I spoke of earlier.



Jean-Plerre Bertrand. Installation view. Photo: Quentin Bertoux.



Salvo, like so many other artists, has lost the true meaning of the great works of Western art in his attempt to imitate the works of antiquity without understanding their underlying revolutionary content; in his work, all that remains of painting's mythic beginnings is a ghost of a style, a flash of forms, gaudy rather than precious, even fatuous, which corresponds to the crudest popular understanding of our classical heritage.

-Pier Luigi Tazzi

Translated from the Italian by Meg Shore.

GRENOBLE

JEAN-PIERRE BERTRAND

MAGASIN, CENTRE NATIONAL D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

Jean-Pierre Bertrand has steadily moved to the fore of the French contemporary art scene, but his role, like his work, is difficult to categorize. Coming from the world of films (he was an assistant movie director in the '60s), Bertrand began to make art objects and show them in gallery exhibitions in the early '70s. Strictly speaking, in purely formal terms, one cannot call him either a painter or a sculptor, although his work has at times resembled simple sculpture, or, more often, large abstract monochromatic paintings; he is no longer a filmmaker, in spite of the small experimental films and video works that he continues to make; and he is not an installation artist or a photographer, even though he never leaves the installation of his work to chance and will occasionally include a photograph.

Far from ascribing to any particular contemporary issue, Bertrand has centered his approach to art making around a mystical relation with certain elements, which continue to inspire the various forms his work takes. These elements are mainly salt, lemon, honey, and, for a while now, brass. Take, for example, the Boîtes à sel (Salt boxes. 1980-85) that were shown in Bertrand's large exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1985, which seemed to fall into the category of Minimalist sculpture or arte povera. These two piles of boxes were a "living work," as the salt continued to corrode the white iron, turning it brown and covering it with blisters, which caused it to lose its reflective quality-a sort of metaphorical display of the progressive death of light.

Bertrand's show here was comparable, in that at first glance it appeared to be a simple exhibition of paintings. Certainly it involved flat, colored surfaces, framed and classically hung on the wall, and therefore, in one sense, they were paintings. However, even at a distance, one could see that more was involved. There were nine works, each work consisting of three vertical panels ("plaque" is the word used by the artist to designate these objects), which Bertrand had arranged with great care and precision to create a rhythm of visual correspondences. Each plaque is composed of three monochrome squares stacked one above the other, with the color of the top square repeated in the bottom square (red/beige/red, for example), the whole thing covered with a sheet of clear plastic and enclosed by a simple frame. In each triptych the first two plaques are always red/beige/red and beige/red/beige, with the third one alternately yellow/beige/ yellow or gold/beige/gold. (The only element of variation is the spacing of the three plaques in each work: in six of the triptychs shown here they are arranged close together, while in the other three they are spaced further apart.) Such regularity produces an effect of ritualized order,

transforming the experience of seeing the exhibition into a meditative strell that always returns the visitor to the same truths.

This impression is confirmed and deepened by a closer look at the planes. What from a distance appear to be somple monochromatic paintings rethemselves to be something else entirely. something much more unusual and a be disconcerting. One sees, behind the clear plastic, not "paintings" but active surfaces that seem to want to burst through these protective covering, surfaces treated with those elements of Bertrand's predilection The red is in fact a mixture of acrylic and honey; the beige-this word only appearimates the actual color - is the result of the action of salt on the paper; the yellow comes from lemon; and the gold turns out to be brass. It is the living, fragile result of a true alchemy that seems to have been mysteriously imprisoned in each plague and that awakens in the viewer a minute sensual and emotive experience, more magical than esthetic in nature.

- Daniel South

MT 2-3

Translated from the French by Home Bond

DARIS

"CITES-CINES"

LA GRANDE HALLE DE LA VILLETTE

After picking up a pair of headphone at the entrance to this exhibition. I wake into a spacious room in which dies into a space of the Man with a Morie Camera. 1929, were being shown. Verton dies into a space one of the most emblematic of all film as ages, featuring the protagonism the cameraman of the title) perchanges as steel girder high above the city and passing the protagonism as steel girder high above the city and passing the protagonism.