

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ETTORE SPALLETTI

*Works on paper, editions and books*

23 Golden Square, London, W1F 9JP

7 April – 4 June 2022

Opening reception: Thursday 7 April, 6 – 7.30 pm

Marian Goodman Projects is pleased to present an exhibition of works on paper, editions and books by Ettore Spalletti (1940-2019) to coincide with the publication of *Ettore Spalletti, libri*, edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist (Corraini Edizioni, 2022).

Many of Spalletti's artist books featured in the exhibition are being shown for the first time outside Italy, and a number of his impasto pieces will be seen for the first time outside the artist's studio. The exhibition will also feature the final edition to have been made by Spalletti: produced in 2018, the sheet of cotton paper is soaked with colour, front and back, a drawing in the form of a gold foil thread appearing against the rich blue hue.

The idea to create a 'book about books' originated during a conversation between Obrist and Spalletti in late 2018. While artists' books rarely receive the attention granted to other artworks, Obrist writes that 'the passion and precision with which Spalletti has worked on his books throughout his trajectory presents a wonderful example of their importance in an artist's *oeuvre*'. A 'meta book', *libri* posthumously brings into being the unrealised project that looks back across Spalletti's career to highlight the significance of the book as an object and as an artistic space. The exhibition at Marian Goodman Projects brings together Spalletti's books with a selection of his key unique works and editions to show a continuity of materials, of attention to form and colour, and of artistic experience evident throughout the artist's practice.

Spalletti's relationship with the book as an object is apparent throughout his career, as seen in the group of fifteen unique 'books' on display, the earliest in the exhibition dating to 1974 and the latest on view having been produced in 2012. Not all the books' pages are made of paper; instead, the pages sometimes take the form of coloured wood or alabaster, materials that characterise Spalletti's artistic output more broadly. Some pages are painted with the artist's signature impasto of colour, others are drawn. A drawing may be enclosed between a book's tissue paper pages. Multiple pieces of gold leaf often adorn the open book. In one book, a gold needle emerges directly from the page. Viewed in proximity with a number of Spalletti's key graphic

prints, impasto works, and alabaster sculpture also on display, the boundary between book, object, and artwork becomes difficult to define.

The exhibition includes Spalletti's 1998 artist book made for the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, and that serves as the first example of Spalletti working with tissue paper, a material he would use recurrently throughout his career for individual book pages, for entire books, or compressed to form a 'pillow' or 'canvas' for the series *Disegno* (1993-2010), of which eight works are also on view. The delicacy of tissue paper invites our touch while its fragility simultaneously warns against physical interaction.

This tactility of the artistic surface equally describes Spalletti's method for producing the impasto works for which he is widely known: Spalletti would first create a paste, to which he would add colour and, once dry, work the surface with sandpaper, resulting in an inviting powder quality. In Spalletti's words, the 1998 artist book 'told the story of red'. Similarly, the three impasto pieces, produced towards the end of Spalletti's career and exhibited here for the first time, serve as a testimony to the delicacy of colour itself, when in reciprocity with the material in which it is made, and when transformed by the changing light in which it is subsequently observed.

The exhibition also includes the impasto work, *Nero del carbone, oro-argento* (2007), presenting a colour rarely seen in Spalletti's painting: black. Black was seldom used by Spalletti because his painterly technique typically relied upon the inclusion of white chalk, which would turn the black to grey. The absence of white chalk, and the strength of the resulting colour, alludes to the hard graphite of pencil.

*A sheet of white paper, a full graphite pencil with a well done tip: the desire to draw ... When I am asked about the qualities I prefer in my work, I have always indicated the white, the colour and the drawing.*

Ettore Spalletti

Also on display is a set of fifty lithographic prints, reproducing drawings made by Spalletti between 1976 and 1992, held in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris. As well as celebrating the graphite pencil as an artist's tool for drawing, Spalletti often turned to the pencil as a structural device to support his projecting works, as documented in the photographic print on view, *Così com'è, matita bianca* (1981-2015).

Books are, by nature, designed to be handled. Yet the pages of many of Spalletti's artist books cannot be turned, most strikingly in the sculptural pieces on display: *Scatola di colore* (1991) comprises impasto in between sheets of alabaster, and *Portacipria* (2013) is made from onyx. Spalletti regularly chose to work with alabaster because of the beauty of its porosity and translucency. It is a material that casts doubt upon its own

solidity, accentuating the importance of colour, light, and the tactility of vision to which Spalletti gestured throughout his practice.

*The tactile wish in my work is very strong. I like the idea of the work expressing the wish to be touched, but I like that it cannot be done.*

*The constant desire, that has always accompanied me, is to be able to touch a form and offer it to the sight for contemplation.*

Ettore Spalletti

Ettore Spalletti (1940-2019) was born in Cappelle sul Tavo (Pescara) where he spent his whole life. He began his career when Arte Povera was revolutionizing visual culture in Italy and beyond. Spalletti developed a singular, solitary voice and a resultant body of work that exceeds any movement that circumscribes an artist to regional or ideological boundaries. Spalletti's formal vocabulary has always melded and balanced painting and sculpture, form and colour, interior and exterior space. Each work is the result of a meditative but rigorous process of applying a layer of colour at the same time of each day, to capture a specific tone that recalls an hour, a season, and the weather.

Spalletti has been the subject of major international exhibitions over the last 40 years, most recently at the Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Rome (2021); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2019); Palazzo Cini, Venice (2015); and a retrospective simultaneously presented at three Italian institutions: MADRE – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, and MAXXI – Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome (all 2014). Other notable solo exhibitions include GNAM – Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (2010); Académie de France, Villa Medici, Rome (2006); the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2005); Castello di Rivoli – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli, Turin (2004); Fundación la Caixa, Madrid (2000); Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg (1998); MUHKA – Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp (1995); and Museum Folkwang, Essen (1982).

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