

ARTFORUM

Niele Toroni

Ugo Ferranti

By Massimo Carboni (November 1994)

For the reopening of his gallery, Ferranti chose the same artist whose show inaugurated the gallery twenty years ago. Faithful to his pictorial practice, which now spans several decades, Niele Toroni left his number 50 brushstrokes at regular intervals of 30 centimeters on the wall of the gallery. Toroni is truly a pure painter; he leaves the literal mark of his work on any surface, “phenomenizing” his gesture and making it visible. It is a regularly repeated gesture, anonymous and yet individualized, since no brushstroke can be completely identical to any other. The act of covering a surface, letting a given material adhere to it, is the fundamental condition for painting. And the shape of the mark is the same as that of the tool that makes that shape concretely visible to the eye. Toroni goes to the very roots of pictorial practice, to what one might call its a priori. But this minimal statute, this literalness is always interwoven with and connected to a different space and environment that time and again proclaims its own individual quality.

This exhibition was typical in this regard. To cover certain pipes the gallery owner had reluctantly built boxlike structures projecting between wall and ceiling, hoping they wouldn't be noticed in the absolute whiteness of the environment, or at least that they wouldn't interfere too much with the linearity of the space. It was precisely with these spurious elements that Toroni began to work, connecting them, literally reinventing the space, beginning with what the space, according to the gallery owner, was not meant to contain. In other words, he brought out something that the space was meant to hide, a sort of exhibited “unconscious.” Reaching up to the corner formed by those crates placed high up on the walls, Toroni applied adhesive tape to the wall, making large rectangles, within which he painted. The change that the space underwent was also confirmed on two other walls, upon which the artist hung a white canvas, which did not constitute an impediment to the progression of marks (black in one case, red in the others) that moved from the wall to the canvas, and then again onto the wall, invading all available surfaces. It was as if the space, with the artist's intervention, became a site that is an open symbolic structure, producing a specific meaning, an intersection of perceptual and conceptual references.

Toroni's works, while closely tied to the physical spaces in which they are created, are generally ephemeral. After the show closed, the marks were covered by a layer of white paint. But it is precisely their temporal condition that confirms the contingent, immanent dimension of their pictorial making, an act that has value in and of itself at the moment it is carried out, a practice

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endowed with its own specific duration that limits its range of action to the gesture that renders it visible. This is why for years now Toroni's work has been one of the most significant proofs that art is basically a small thing: that a small mark of pure color supported by an idea, a concept, can transform everything around it.

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