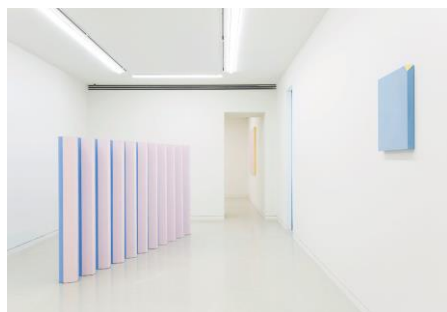


# ARTFORUM

## *Ettore Spalletti*

NOUVEAU MUSÉE NATIONAL DE MONACO | VILLA PALOMA

By Francesca Pola (January 2020)



View of "Ettore Spalletti," 2019. Background: Dittico, oro 9 (Diptych, Gold 9), 2019.  
From left: Vado di sole (I Go For the Sun), 2018; Ma, sì, azzurro (But, Yes, Blue), 2018.

Ettore Spalletti's exhibition at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco opened at the institution's Villa Paloma space only a few months before the artist's death this past October. As a consequence, the show, titled "Ombre d'azur, transparence" (Azure Shadow, Transparency), took on the significance of a spiritual testament—one both radical and poetic. Featuring some thirty paintings, sculptures, and works on paper made between 1981 and 2019, the presentation traced a path that unfolded according to sensory connections rather than to chronology. Paying homage to color and light, to clarity and purity, the exhibition conjured an experience of luminous, emotional immersion.

In the early 1970s, Spalletti developed his signature technique for creating his tactile and vibrant monochromes: He would apply a preparatory impasto of plaster and glue to various surfaces, then add successive layers of colored pigment of varying intensities that gradually penetrated the underlying material, coat after coat. The plaster thus absorbed and in the process modified the color, diluting the paint's substance and tone with its whiteness. As the chalky powder pervaded by color gradually dried, it would take on a variegated appearance; the artist would then intervene with sandpaper to obtain a smooth plane, drawing out colors hidden within the now-fused amalgam of plaster, glue, and pigment. The resulting monochrome vibrates with subtle tonal and luminous modulations and draws attention to its materiality.

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Spalletti initially employed this technique on walls and floors, later transposing it to the surfaces of autonomous wooden structures: geometric or archetypal solids (such as cubes, vases, or polygons evocative of architecture) or planes, often slightly twisted or warped. He sought to create images that establish a relationship between concrete space, volume, and color. The

result is a monochrome where the eschewal of any iconic or recognizable image allows for a uniquely varied color that becomes an autonomous and independent body.

Rather than negate color, as painters such as Robert Ryman have done, Spalletti made hue, in its very materiality, the image's generative element, placing him alongside artists such as Lawrence Carroll, Herbert Hamak, and John McCracken as an exponent of what has been called a "chromatic Minimalism." He is, moreover, an heir to the neo-Constructivist analytical tradition, owing to the clarity of his perceptual experiments and the rigor of his investigation of pictorial technique. Yet Spalletti's work is also characterized by an enveloping liquidity, which presupposes the emotional and interior involvement of the viewer. Spalletti's choice of colors—the artist favored gray, which constituted a purified sum of all other shades, or blue, the inspiration for the show's title, along with pinks and yellows—aims at effects of suggestion, poetry, and intimacy, almost as if to establish an empathic relationship between viewer and work. These colors do not describe tangible objects or situations but evoke atmospheres, places of experience, moments of vision. The luminosity that is so characteristic of Spalletti's work is a fundamental component of this affective involvement. The result is a meditative experience whose distilled quality is utterly contemporary, but which has precedent deep in the past: It is pure Italian Renaissance, recalling the hues of Raphael, one of Spalletti's favorites.