

GIUSEPPE UNCINI (1929–2008)

Giuseppe Uncini was born in Fabriano and started as a self-taught artist. In 1948 he found a permanent job as an artist and lithographer in commercial art, and hence had the opportunity to become familiar with the technique of engraving. He spent his free time painting and drawing. In 1953 he met the sculptor Edgardo Mannucci in Fabriano, who on seeing his work invited him to come to Rome. Uncini decided to give up his job, move to Rome and live there in a room in Edgardo Mannucci's studio. The studio was a meeting place for the Roman avant-garde, and thus Uncini got to know Giuseppe Capogrossi, Afro, Alberto Burri, Ettore Colla, Giulio Turcato, Leoncillo, Franco Gentilini, Pericle Fazzini, Nino Franchina and other artists. In 1955 he was already exhibiting at the "VII Quadriennale di Roma", while he exhibited for the first time in Germany in 1957 at the exhibition "Abstrakte italienische Kunst" [Abstract Italian Art] in Frankfurt am Main.

The 1950s

At the beginning of his career as an artist he used surfaces for painting such as Masonite and plywood instead of canvas, and worked with materials such as sand, cement, ashes, coal and soil. In 1957 he began the cycle "Terre" using coal, soil and cement. In the period immediately following he worked with traditional and modern construction materials such as tufa, soil, cement, plywood and iron. A year later he produced his first "Cementarmato" works using cement with metal supports. In his sculptures, a supporting steel framework becomes visible at various points, creating a contrast between the rough, compact surface which often shows the veining of the wooden cladding and the linear-constructive inner life. The presence of the iron reinforcement and the moulding in the wooden cladding gives the works a hard, sharp-edged profile. Uncini aims at clear geometric-spatial solutions in his works, with a constructive architectonic principle kept in the foreground. In short, his works may be classified as predecessors of "Arte Povera".

From 1961 to 1983 Uncini taught at the art school in Rome. In 1961 his first important one-man show took place at the "Galleria l'Attico" in Rome. His steel and concrete sculptures became structurally substantially more compact and definite. "Traliccio" was the first of his works that no longer compressed space and forced it into the concrete: it consists of a form repeated in triplicate, with only one form made of concrete and the other two consisting of iron grids. The parts made of iron comprise a conceptual reference to volume.

"Gruppo Uno"

In December, 1962 he founded the Roman "Gruppo Uno" [Group One] with Gastone Biggi, Nato Frascà, Achille Pace, Pasquale Santoro and Nicola Carrino. In the art critic Giulio Carlo Argan they found a forceful advocate for their group. They were particularly interested in observing the relationship between art and science. They distanced themselves from Informel, whose influence was on the wane, and returned to geometric forms and representational themes in their work. They experimented in part with optical effects, luminous paint and new constructivist forms and made use of the most diverse materials. Their works also form part of the new visual art, with their investigations during

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Biography of Giuseppe Uncini

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the final years of their collaboration concentrating on multidimensional space and the creation of a “spazio-ambiente” [Space-Environment]. Uncini later explained with reference to these works that they revealed their origin and structure and actually only existed on the basis of their structure – something that enabled him to step outside the “representational image”. In 1967 Carrino, Frascà and Uncini announced the break-up of the group.

1960s–1980s

Soon thereafter Uncini produced the series of “Ferrocementi” [Iron-Cements] in which the cement is so polished and smoothed that it almost completely loses its material qualities — the iron reinforcement becomes the real protagonist. It is the iron that determines the expanse of the cement and the relationship between interior and exterior. In the series “Strutture spazio” [Space Structures] in 1966-1967, the cement is deliberately neglected, because Uncini is concerned with dematerialization in favor of a pure spatial projection. With his works “Spazio-strutture con ombra” in the second half of the 1960s, he concentrated on the definition of space and on the relationship between objects and their shadows, which are materialized in iron or cement. Between 1969 and 1970 he completed the “Muri” with bricks that were arranged into arches, columns or supporting walls.

At the end of the 1960’s the space occupied by his works was extended by forming their shadows into tangible objects in themselves. This is an important phase of his creative work in which the object and its shadow have the same material consistency. At the end of the 1970’s Uncini began the series of the “Rilievi” [Reliefs], in which he moved from the construction of shadows to the construction of space. With a rejection of complete three-dimensionality, the surface shows only gentle depressions and elevations. He returned to the theme of the “Rilievi” in the 1980s with the bas-reliefs “Muri d’ombra” [Shadow Walls], which he executed in coloured cement, beginning in 1986. These sculptures, which are based purely on rational construction, sometimes take on a metaphysical quality.

Uncini went on to produce the series of “Spazi di ferro” [Spaces of Iron], which was presented for the first time at the Venice Biennale in 1988. Here the metal framework of the reinforced concrete is in the foreground, with the iron supports stretched like a net between two or more blocks. Uncini’s drawings supplement the architectonic principle of construction, portraying a severe material structure that leaves little room for interpretation. They are defined as “the objectification of the space that lies between two or more solid bodies” which thus, as materialization of something that objectively viewed does not exist, are reunited by interacting with shadows.

The 1990s

After 1993 Uncini began the cycle “Spazicemento” [Space Concrete] in which he confronted the relationship between form and space, a look back to his first works at the end of the 1950s.

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One-man shows (Selection):

- 1958 First one-man show in Fabriano
- 1959 Galleria La Salita, Rome
- 1959 Contemporary Gallery, New York
- 1961 Galleria l'Attico, Rome
- 1966 XXXIII Venice Biennale
- 1968 Galleria Christian Stein, Turin
- 1969 Salone Annunciata, Milan
- 1970 Galleria Qui Arte Contemporanea, Rome
- 1973 Studio Marconi, Milan
- 1975 Galleria Christian Stein, Turin
- 1976 Galleria Peccolo, Livorno
- 1976 XXXVII Venice Biennale
- 1979 Palazzo di Consoli, Gubbio
- 1980 Studio Marconi, Milan
- 1983 Pinacoteca e Musei Comunali, Macerata
- 1986 Rome Quadriennale
- 1990 Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt

Retrospectives:

- 1985 Galleria De' Foscherari, Bologna
- 1987 Galleria Mara Coccia, Rome
- 1991 Galleria Tega, Milan
- 1995 Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo
- 1999 Centro Arti Visive, Pesaro

Group Exhibitions (Selection):

- 1958 Galleria Appia Antica, Rome
- 1959 Galleria La Salita, Rome
- 1960 Galleria Il Cancellone, Bologna
- 1960 Galleria La Salita, Rome
- 1965 Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich
- 1966 XXXIII Venice Biennale

Literature (Selection):

- Pierre Restany, *Cinque giovani pittori romani*, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria La Salita, Rome, 1960.
- Enrico Crispolti, *Giuseppe Uncini*, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1961.
- Giulio Carlo Argan, Palma Bucarelli, *Gruppo Uno*, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria Il Quadrante, Florence, 1963.
- Giulio Carlo Argan, Palma Bucarelli et al., *Gruppo Uno*, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria La Medusa, Rome, 1963.
- Marisa Volpi, *Uncini*, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria Editalia, Rome, 1970.
- Filiberto Menna, *Uncini. Opere dal 1959 al 1973*, Exhibition catalogue, Studio Marconi, Milan, 1973.
- Luciano Marziano, *Uncini. La logica fantastica*, Exhibition catalogue. Pinacoteca Comunale, Coopedit, Macerata, 1983.
- Giovanni Maria Accame, *Uncini. Figure del pensiero*, Edizioni TxT, Rimini, 1984.
- Mirella Bandini, Rosanna Maggio Serra, *Il Museo Sperimentale di Torino. Arte italiana degli anni Sessanta nelle collezioni della Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna*, Exhibition catalogue, Castello di Rivoli,

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Genoa, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Genoa, Fabbri, Milan, 1985.

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Giovanni Maria Accame, *Giuseppe Uncini – le origini del fare*, Lubrina, Bergamo, 1990.

Rosella Siligato (ed.), *Roma anni '60. Al di là della pittura*, Exhibition catalogue, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Carte Segrete, Rome, 1990.

Gillo Dorfles, *Giuseppe Uncini. Una collezione 1959–1976*, Marconi, Milan, 1995.

Giovanni Maria Accame, *Uncini e lo spaziocemento*, Fumagalli, Bergamo, 1995.

Marco Meneguzzo, *Giuseppe Uncini. Oeuvres 1959/1996*, Exhibition catalogue, Galerie Vivas, Paris, 1996.

Giovanni Maria Accame, *Giuseppe Uncini*, Istituto Grafico De Agostino, Novara, 1996.

Angelo Trimarco, *Trittico. Mastroianni, Uncini, Perez*, Exhibition catalogue, Certosa di San Lorenzo Padula, Electa, Naples, 1999.

Marco Meneguzzo, Anna Maria Maggi, *Giuseppe Uncini. Cementarmato*, Exhibition catalogue, Centro per le Arti Visive, Pesaro, 1999.

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