

Irma Blank / Gehen

Stephen Rosenthal / Notations

Opening

Saturday 6 May, 3–8 pm

6 May–10 June 2023

P420 is pleased to announce the opening on Saturday 6 May, at 3PM, of two solo exhibitions by Irma Blank (Celle, 1934 – Milan, 2023) and Stephen Rosenthal (Washington D.C., 1935), with the most recent works of both artists. The exhibitions, organized separately in the two rooms of the gallery, share this fact of featuring the latest production – which also becomes the last, in the case of Irma Blank, due to her recent passing – of both artists: the cycle titled *Gehen, second life* by Irma Blank, then interpreted in very recent period in the version *Ways*, also included in the show, and the canvases and works on paper of the series *Notations* by Stephen Rosenthal, made from 2019 to 2022.

After almost 50 years of work, which began in 1968 when she was still living in Sicily, and then continued over the decades in Milan, where the artist moved in the early 1970s, Irma Blank became immobilized on the right side of her body due to a health problem, starting in 2016. After several months in which she was only partially able to recoup her strength and motivation, Blank decided to concentrate not on what she had lost, but on what remained, taking up her pencils, markers and ballpoint pens to return to making her works, though this time with the left hand only.

Gehen, second life is the result of this self-taught process. Every work in the series consists of a single or double page, or multiple pages in a row, with lines that imply – as in all the artist's work – the appearance of a text without narrating, describing, without being readable, because once again – this time in a profound, moving manner – they represent the trace of Blank's very existence, her own story told through something other than words.

"I think we are inside our making through our body, in time – Irma Blank wrote in 2018. – Time accompanies us, but we do the same thing with time, and as we proceed every occurrence, including the errors, finds a balance, until life coincides with the path of the signs, a path that extends from the beginning to the end. This movement is legible in all my works, but recently there has been a personal event that has an impact on me, an illness that prevents me from being able to walk any longer. As always happens, first there is a lack, a painful situation, and the creative gesture stems from there. Now I have a very different relationship with what I do: before this block I always went from inside towards the outside, I always thought of the hand as the tool to go towards others. Now I think about the foot, the ground, the space to cross. For a year and a half, I have called all my new works *Gehen, second life*: and you see, in these works I move once more, I live in the going."

"Something passes through these lines – writes Riccardo Venturi in the essay that accompanies the exhibition – just as electricity passes through a wire. At a more elementary level, what passes is time: the physical – or, as people say with an extraordinary adjective – material time that is employed

to trace them, and at this point it matters little where the line begins and in which direction it is headed. Even if we invert the order with which we observe them (the same is true of a handwritten or printed text), the fact remains that they translate, measure and visualize the time of their making. They cannot deny it in the way they can deny the alphanumeric code; at best, they can find an original way to bear witness to that temporal passage. (...) An inner seismograph – Venturi continues – where the tip of the pen becomes a device that translates a sensation. Or perhaps all that remains is to let the hand flow, to abandon oneself to the pleasure of tracing a line, a logic of scribbling that is inseparable from the practice of drawing. Rather than capturing a mood, these lines portray a breath, as if Blank had found a graphic way to breathe, always equal and always different. Displayed one beside the next, her drawings continue in our mind, making the series a cycle without a beginning and without an end."

Active since the late 1960s, after almost five decades of research on painting, during the course of the 2000s Stephen Rosenthal has created a series of works generically presented under the heading *Constellations*. These pieces were already shown in the solo exhibition *Islands, Archipelagoes, Constellations* held by P420 with the American artist in 2018. The act of painting is simply the first phase in the making of these works. Using rags and solvents, at a slow, meditative pace, Rosenthal removes his own brushstrokes and erases any recognizability of the canvas. He erases but does not eliminate everything. The artist's touch allows hints of color to survive, clusters of paint rounded by the repeated passage of the rag. These are only marks, faded memories. The work is thus produced by a process of successive, gradual and inexorable loss. Nevertheless, over the last few years something else has happened in his paintings. After the process of destruction, Rosenthal has begun to develop a new phase of reconstruction. His brush begins to make trails, his pencil writes, and one has the clear sensation that something is again being generated, to the point of balancing and perhaps even overwhelming the remaining traces of the previous phase. The works on paper and paintings in the exhibition, produced over the last 3-4 years, establish a forceful dialogue between the memory of what has been and the present life of what takes place.

Riccardo Venturi, whose critical essay accompanies the exhibition, goes back to Ad Reinhardt for a few but incisive words with which to describe Rosenthal's paintings: *More & more about less & less*. A phrase without a verb, a sort of bare-bones manifesto, which in spite of its Beckett-like terseness says more than many critical writings.

For Rosenthal, "making painting – Venturi continues – is simply a way of thinking, even when it pushes into a *liminal* territory, where addition (more & more) meets subtraction (less & less)."

Irma Blank (Celle, 1934 – Milano, 2023). Selected recent exhibitions: *Amour Systémique*, CAPC contemporary art museum of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, FR (2023); *Earth: A Retrospective*, Bombas Gens Centre d'art, Valencia, ES (2022). *Concrete Experience*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, DE (2023); *A Fine Line: Highlights from the Berkowitz Contemporary Foundation*, The Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami, Miami, US (2022); *On the Lookout*, Fondation CAB, Brussels, BE (2022); *Works 1970 - 2018*, Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich, CH (solo, 2022); *Splendid Isolation*, S.M.A.K., Gent, BE (2022); *Vita Nuova. Nuove sfide per l'arte in Italia 1960-1975*, MAMAC, Nice, FR (2022); *Blank*, ICA, Milano,

IT (solo, 2022); *IMAGES FOR SOUNDS: Artist Covers for Music Records*, Villa Lontana, Roma, IT (2022); *The self-taught enigma*, MAMC+ Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole, Saint-Étienne, FR (2021); *Blank*, Bombas Gens Centre d'art, Valencia, ES (solo, 2021); *Ecrire, c'est dessiner*, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz, FR (2021); *Ink Dreams: Selections from the Fondation INK Collection*, LACMA – Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, US (2021); *Blank*, Museo Villa Dei Cedri, Bellinzona, CH (solo, 2021); *Io dico io (I say I)*, Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Roma, IT (2021); *Blank*, CCA – Center for

Contemporary Art Tel Aviv and the Bauhaus Foundation, Tel Aviv, IL; CAPC contemporary art museum of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, FR (solo, 2020); *E subito riprende il viaggio*, P420, Bologna, IT (2020); *Silent Revolutions: Italian Drawings from the Twentieth Century*, Menil Drawing Institute, Houston (TX), US (2020); *Fuori*, XVII Quadriennale d'arte, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma, IT (2020); *Drawing Wow 2*, Kunstsaale Berlin, Berlin, DE (2020); *Hyperspaces*, Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, València, ES (2020); *Sounds Lasting and Leaving*, Luxembourg & Dayan, New York, US (2020); *Scrivere Disegnando. Quand la langue cherche son autre*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva CH (2020).

Stephen Rosenthal (Washington D.C., 1935). Selected exhibitions: *E subito riprende il viaggio*, P420, Bologna, IT (2020); *Islands, Archipelagoes, Constellations. Works on canvas and paper 2006-2018*, P420, Bologna, IT (solo, 2018); *Senza Tema. Carta / Paper*, Studio La Città, Verona, IT (2018); Premio Lissone 2018, *Desidero fare qualcosa di così bello come una tela vuota*, MAC - Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Lissone, IT (2018); *Stephen Rosenthal*, Margarete Roeder Gallery, New York, US (solo, 2016); *Feral Objects*, Creon Gallery, New York, US (2014); *Many things placed here and there*, the Vogel Collection at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, US (2013); Galerie Margarete Roeder,

Cologne, DE (solo, 2013); Julian Preto Gallery, a survey, Minus Space, New York, US (2013); *Zero plus, The White Box*, New York, US (2013); Margarete Roeder Gallery, New York, US (solo, 2012); *Selected Paintings*, BLT Gallery, New York, US (solo, 2009); Margarete Roeder Gallery, New York, US (solo, 2008); Fred Wagemans, Beetsterzwaag, NL (2006); *Blobs, Wiggles and Dots*, The Work Space, New York, US (2002); Stark Gallery, New York, US (solo, 2001); Galerie Renate Schröder, Cologne, DE (solo, 2001); *Fifteen Years of Painting*, Stark Gallery, New York, US (2001); *Nebeneinander III*, Galerie Renate Schröder, Cologne, DE (2001).