

PIERO MANAI

Opening:
Friday 27 September 2019
6–8.30 pm
Until 9 November 2019

Press conference:
Thursday 26 September
11 am at P420
Followed by a visit
to both exhibitions

P420
Via Azzo Gardino 9, Bologna
info@p420.it / www.p420.it

CAR DRDE
Via Azzo Gardino 14/a, Bologna
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The galleries P420 and CAR DRDE are pleased to announce a solo show by Piero Manai, one of the most extraordinary and enigmatic artists of recent decades, who died prematurely in 1988, at the age of 37.

In 1991 Umberto Eco wrote that “Manai, after Giorgio Morandi, was continuing the discourse of great painting in Bologna.”

The exhibition organized in collaboration with the artist’s heirs is held in the spaces of P420 (Via Azzo Gardino 9) and CAR DRDE (Via Azzo Gardino 14/a), and includes a selection of works made by Manai in the 1980s.

Manai gained immediate notice in the early 1970s in Bolognese circles thanks to a kind of painting, to use the words of Flavio Caroli (who inserted the artist in his book *Trentasette, il mistero del genio adolescente*) and Pietro Bonfiglioli “blends hyperrealism and conceptual abstraction,” “always somehow depicting the idea of painting itself.”

In that period Manai, just into his twenties, fell ill, and it took a number of years for him to recover. This tragic experience brought about a drastic change in his way of painting and in his subjects, in the early 1980s, which became more convulsive and dramatic.

He had an almost obsessive need to draw or paint heads, nearly always deprived of most of their physiognomic features. The heads have a self-contained physical quality, blind and deaf (as underscored by some of the titles, *Deaf Figure* or *Blind Painter*), pensive and isolated inside their own weight, lost in a white space lacking in coordinates.

Lacking expression or psychology, almost coming apart, they are neither representations nor portraits. They are perhaps more precisely self-portraits, and they are not seen *from outside*, but *from inside*.

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Manai’s heads often bear weights, stones, figures that burden the body under their heft. “They are men with weights on their heads,” as he defined them. The heads and bodies often degenerate into volumes whose form is like that of a rock, a large stone, a monolith.

After again falling ill, Manai died in 1988. “It was as if he had an invisible weight in his head,” Pietro Bonfiglioli recalls, after meeting him slightly earlier.

At P420 the show presents a selection of the most significant *Figures*, *Heads* and *Monoliths* painted on canvas, mounted paper and acetate, a preferred technique for Manai. At CAR DRDE visitors can see some of the most outstanding *Still Lifes*, works that are particularly important for the artist’s path and already contain that disquiet, that sense of the precarious and perhaps the anatomy that so vividly set the tone of Manai’s output.

His pictorial language does not seem related to any of the various artistic practices current at the time, from Austrian-German Expressionism of the 1980s to the more Italian Transavanguardia, just to indicate two of them. In fact, in its diversity it seems to reunite them all, so much so that it is hard to find a (probably useless) way of classifying the work.

Manai showed in various galleries in Italy, and abroad at PS1 in New York (1982). He took part in the exhibitions *Nuova Immagine* at the Milan Triennale (1980), *Linee della ricerca artistica italiana 1960–80* at Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (1981), *Italian Art 1960–80* at the Hayward Gallery in London (1982), the Biennale des Jeunes in Paris (1982), and showed work at the Kunstverein in Hannover (1985) and Frankfurt (1986). The GAM in Bologna held a large retrospective in 2004, curated by Peter Weiermair.

The exhibition is accompanied by an essay by Alberto Salvadori.

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