

Luce, giorno.

Antonio Calderara

Helene Appel

Arte Contemporanea

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ANTONIO CALDERARA / HELENE APPEL
Luce, giorno. / Day, light.
curated by Davide Ferri

from 23/11/2013 to 11/01/2014
P420

Antono Calderara / Helene Appel
Luce, giorno. (Day, light.)

di Davide Ferri, 2013

Is it possible to establish a dialogue between two very different artists, two painters hailing from different contexts and even from different eras? It is possible to approach a discourse on certain aspects of painting by overlaying works that are only comparable in terms of contrast? How can we gauge the distance between two approaches that are apparently mutually exclusive (yet germinal with respect to any discussion on painting), between Neo-Platonism and mimesis, or more simply between the rigor of Calderara and the virtuosity of Appel?

Antonio Calderara died in 1978. After teaching himself to paint, he lived his life in Milan and at Lake Orta. He seldom traveled elsewhere, though he moved a few times to improve the conditions for his work. A sort of arduously achieved independence, the “room of one’s own” often evoked as an indispensable, necessary condition.

Helene Appel was born in 1976 in Karlsruhe. After studying in London, the city where she made her debut, she has recently returned to Germany, to Berlin.

I Calderara’s paintings are abstract or, more precisely, they have been so since 1958, the year of his decisive shift towards abstraction, a conversion like few others in the Italian 20th century due to its modes, timing and resolve. «In 1958, with the drawing of my mother – Calderara narrates in a long autobiographical piece – I drew my last curved line».

Appel’s works, on the other hand, are figurative, based on an obsessive, intimate hyperrealism, and they depict certain objects in great detail – rice kernels, small plants and branches, screens, sewing thread, fabrics and plastic films – paintings on raw canvas, on a scale of 1:1, of items that seem to be scattered/placed in a more or less random way.

The simple, essential abstraction of Calderara is an evolution – but in a more lyrical, more irreducibly human key – of the abstract/concrete painting of the 20th century, a certain modernist output (Mondrian and Albers, above all others). What exactly goes into this lyricism of Calderara? It is composed of the formats, the material thickness of the small panels. The thin, invisible lines, never too definite or assertive. Their tremors and uncertainties. The subdued, delicately impure tones, porous and permeable to their neighbors. The relationships of force (between areas, color fields, etc) that are always potentially swappable, like equivalent possibilities. A atmospheric, landscape-like quality always present in the paintings: like a dense mist laden with light, blurring contours and relationships between things.

Many have pointed out that Calderara’s abstraction has a figurative matrix, originating in the transformation of a landscape that is stripped down to the encounter of vertical and horizontal lines. Certain figurative paintings of the early 1950s, in fact, are landscapes that forecast and reveal the immaterial, disembodied dimension of the abstract works. Calderara, then, gradually simplified, selected and distilled the elements of reality to the point of reaching abstraction, inescapably, in a natural way. But it is as if the landscape had survived in his paintings, the echo of a faded memory. To what extent is it legitimate to interpret the lines, the small squares and rectangles, as distances, horizons, or simple reflections and flashes of things seen around a lake? And then: is it possible that the absence, the emptiness in Calderara’s paintings is inseparable from the immovable presence of something?

The hyperrealism of Helene Appel, on the other hand, makes continuous references to the history of abstraction. By this I mean: her work always reveals its abstract

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semantics (it would be too easy – too predictably symmetrical – to hold forth at this point on the fact that Appel's first approach to painting was effectively that of an abstract painter, yet that is precisely what happened...).

The paintings with the peels, or the screens, are thus variations/infractions of the modernist grid, testing its integrity as the skeleton of every image. Just as the position and properties of the painted objects (which can be concentrated at one point or dispersed at the edges, or can seem to bend, roll and spread out on the canvas) explore the potentialities and limits of the surface as a concrete datum.

The raw canvas, then, is the emblematic element of Helene Appel's work. Its physical qualities, for example, interact/interfere in a substantial way with the depicted objects (it is on the basis of the different texturing of the surface, as well as the qualities of the real objects, that Appel decides, with each new beginning, what technique to utilize). But there's more: her paintings are not simply still lifes, because the raw canvas cannot be considered a table or a counter, conveying the illusion of a plausible place (the objects have to rely on their own presence to prompt an illusion in the viewer). The raw canvas is more like a material presence, insuperable, on which the objects find themselves requisitioned as in a middle ground, overlapping awareness of the painting as object ("domestic," in the case of Appel) and, at the same time, as a vehicle of representation.

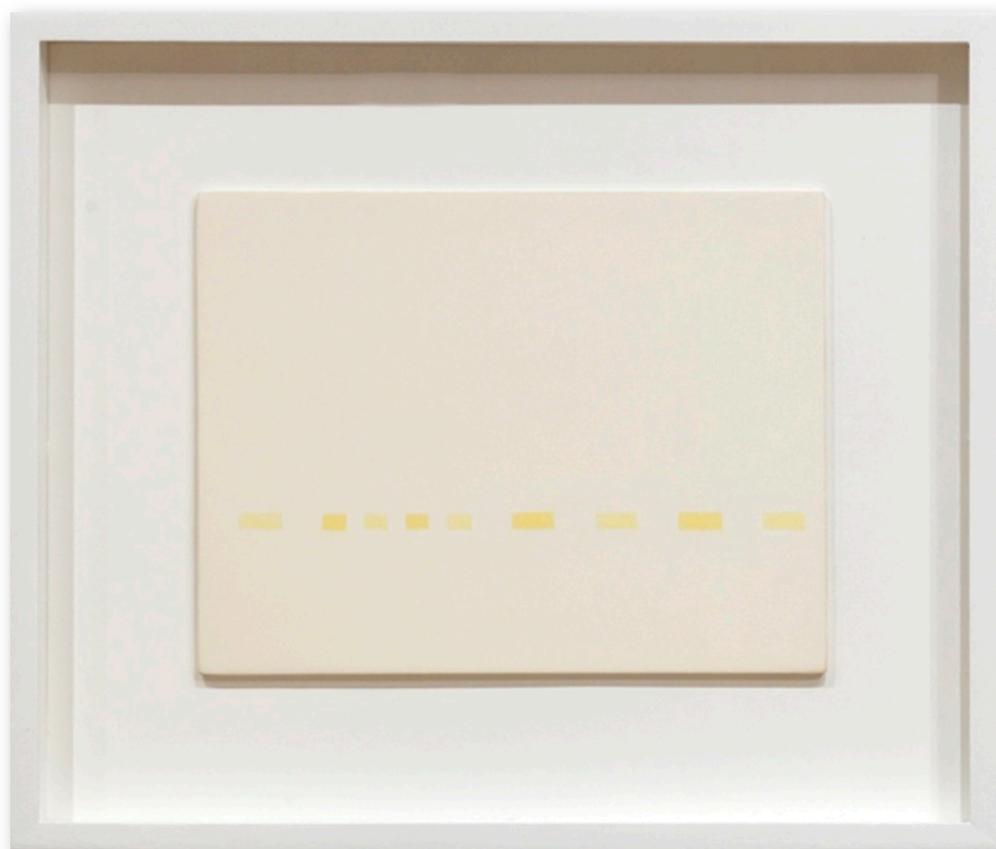
So where does the resemblance lie between the works of Antonio Calderara and Helene Appel? What do they have in common? Is it the uncertain territory they both occupy, the contrasts that sustain them? Is it a care, an attention that has to do with "everyday practice" (both work very slowly, in successive layers), that translates into a request to the observer to gradually put things into focus, in an extended time of viewing? Or is it their intrinsic diurnal character?

Claudio Verna once told me about a visit to Calderara in the early 1970s, and his impression of that artist who was so "incredibly amiable and orderly," and his home at Vacciago. «It seemed as if everything in the rooms, down to the smallest objects, occupied a position that was not random, but had been thought about at length. There were also two exposed pipes, on the right and left walls of the living room, that were so symmetrical that you couldn't help noticing. It seemed strange, and I asked him how he had managed to find a room with such perfectly identical pipes». «No, no – Calderara replied – one pipe is real, I had the other one placed there. It is actually fake. It has no purpose except to fix an unbearable imbalance».

The view of Appel's objects always zenithal, essential, is the same as when you clearly see the contours of a small disaster in the home, or the aftermath of a dinner, maybe the next morning, after deciding the night before to leave things just as they were, postponing the housekeeping. I have always imagined Calderara already at work early in the morning, seated at a table, though he actually used an easel. *Light, day* is an exhibition of paintings by Antonio Calderara and Helene Appel, who meet in a diurnal, southern, inexorable light.



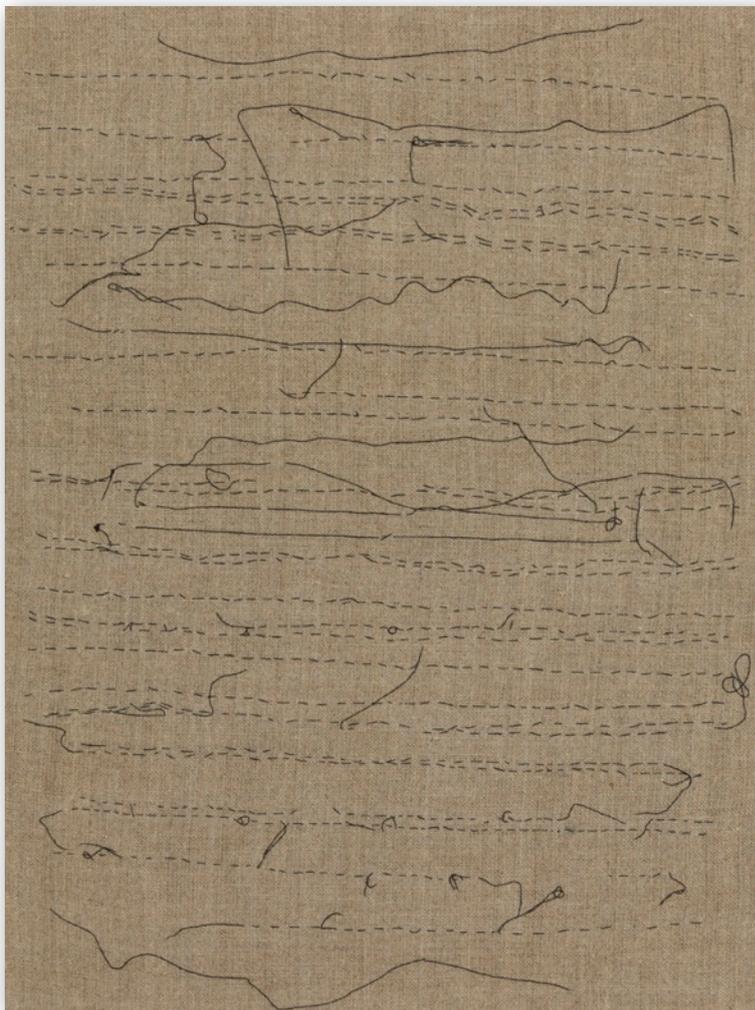
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1. Antonio Calderara, *Pittura*, 1970-71, oil on board, cm.21x27

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2. Helene Appel, *Black thread stitches*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, cm.38x28,5

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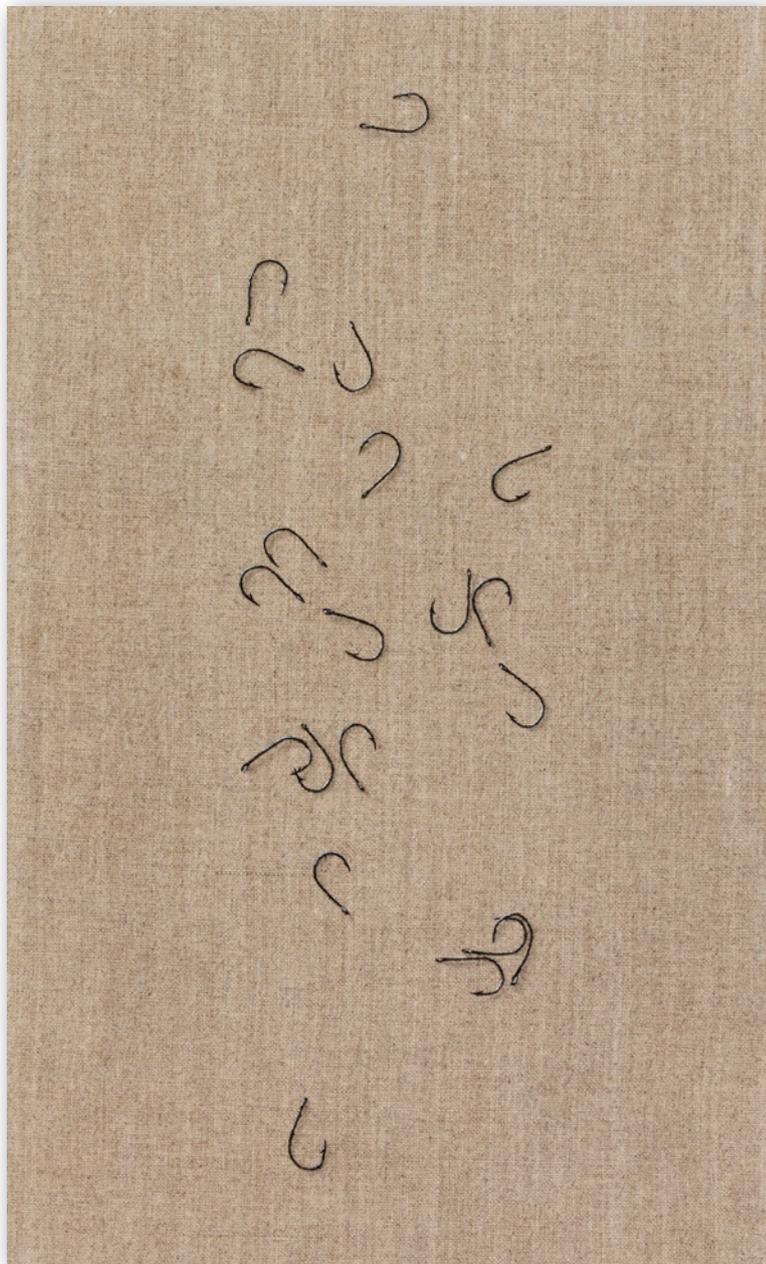
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3. Helene Appel, *Absorbant cloth*, 2013, oil on linen, cm.62x37

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4. Helene Appel, *Fishing hooks*, 2013, acrylic and oil on canvas, cm.31,5x19

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5. Antonio Calderara, *Misura quadrata*, 1966, oil on board, cm.36x36

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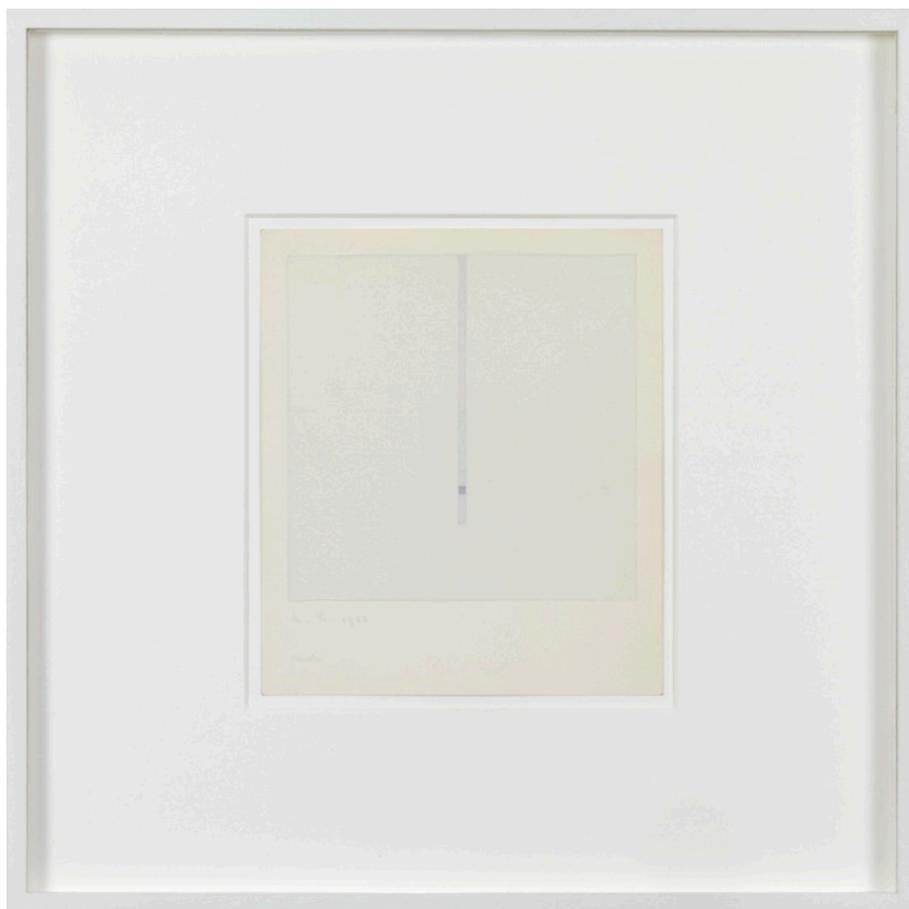


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6. Antonio Calderara, *Rettangoli di colore*, 1967, oil on board, cm.9x27

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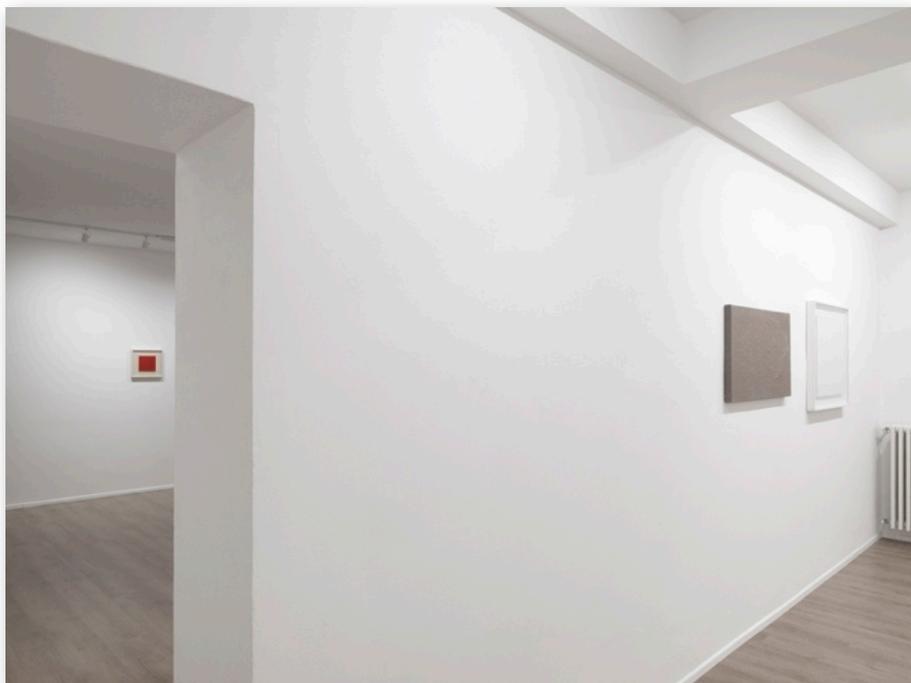
7. Antonio Calderara, Untitled, 1966, watercolour on paper, cm.18,2x15,5

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8. Antonio Calderara, Untitled, 1966, watercolour on paper, cm.18,2x15,5

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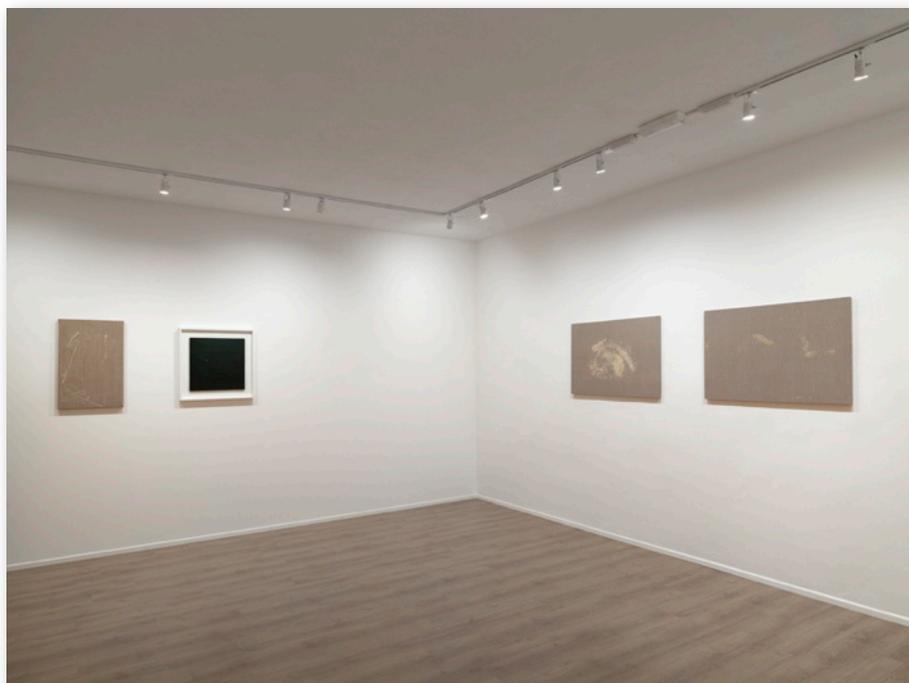


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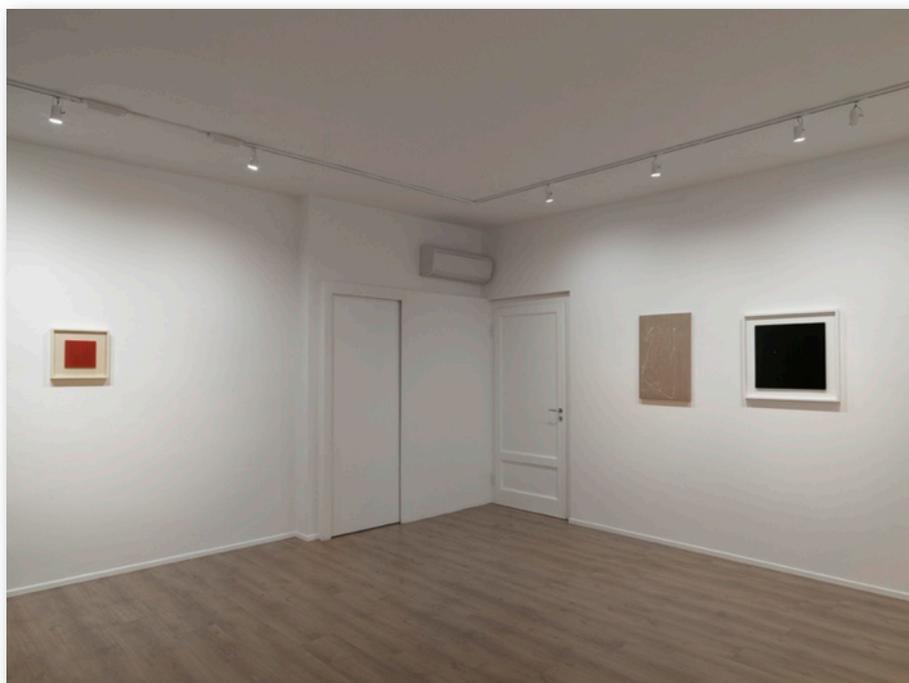
9. Helene Appel, *Small fishing net*, 2013, acrylic and oil on linen, cm.50x80

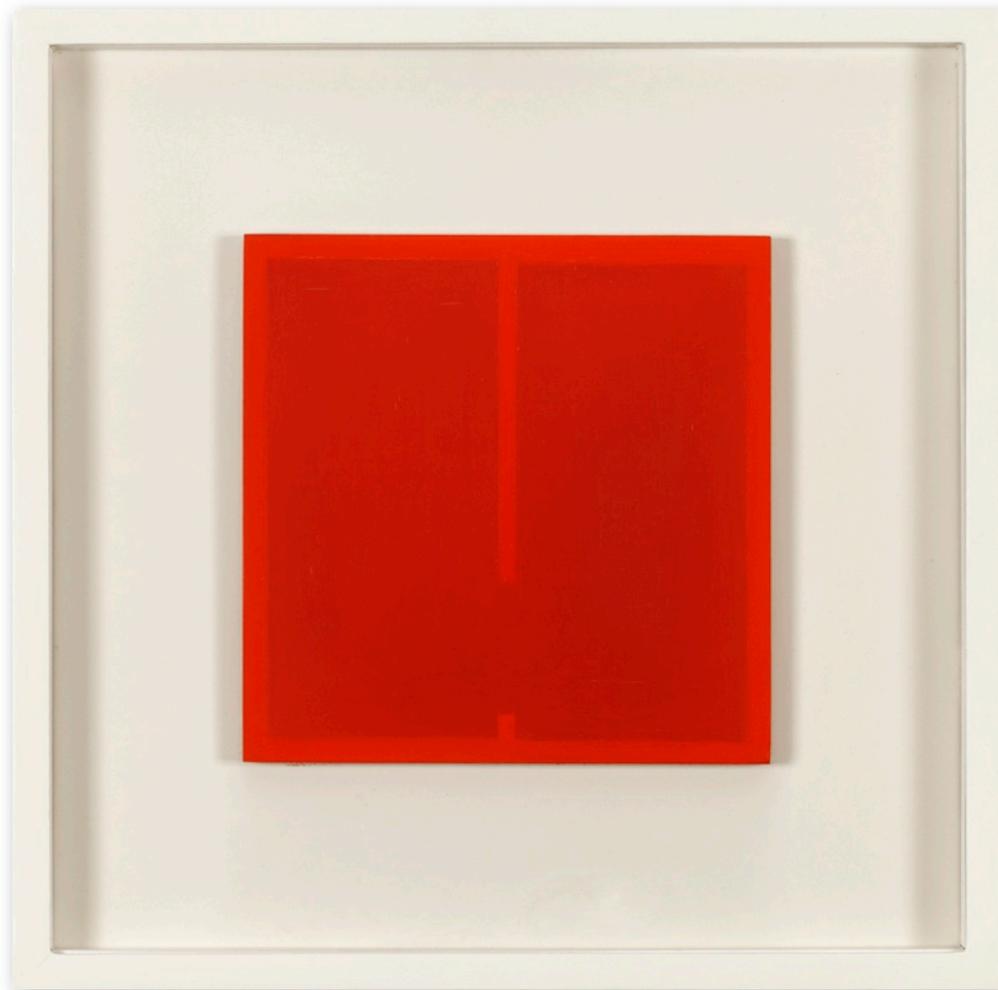
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10. Antonio Calderara, *Forma rossa sul quadrato rosso*, 1968, oil on board, cm.18x18

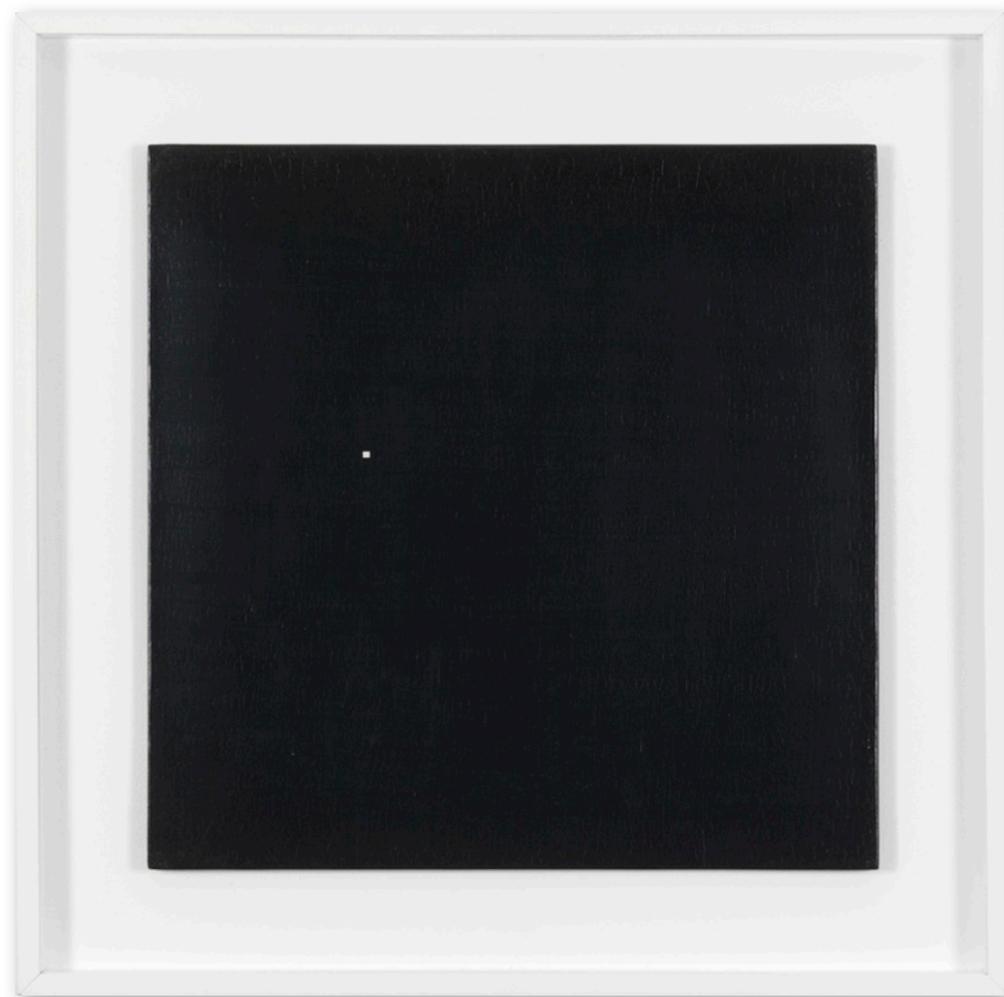
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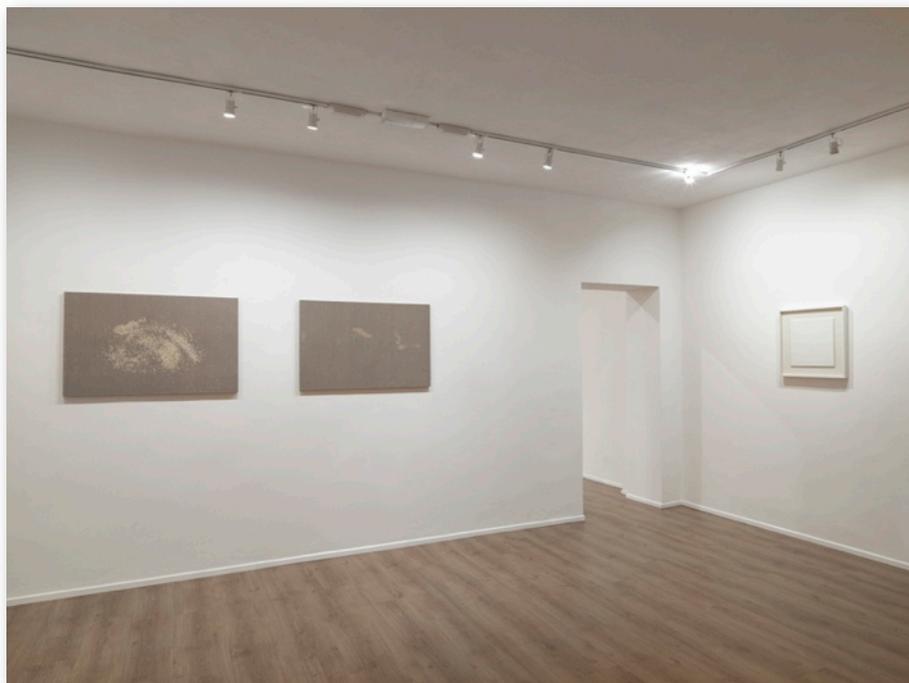
11. Helene Appel, *Bag*, 2013, watercolour and oil on canvas, cm.70x44



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12. Antonio Calderara, *Quadrato bianco in espansione organizzata in quadrato nero. Omaggio a Will T.Cooks*, 1960, oil on board, cm.46x46

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13. Helene Appel, *Distribution of wheat (1)*, 2013, oil and acrylic on linen, cm.64x99

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14. Helene Appel, *Wheat*, 2013, oil and acrylic on canvas, cm.64x99

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15. Antonio Calderara, *Presenza quadrata e rettangolone nel quadrato bianco*, 1967, oil on board, cm.36x36

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OTHER WORKS

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16. Antonio Calderara, *Spazio Colore Luce*, 1972, oil on board, cm.18x27

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17. Antonio Calderara, *Pittura*, 1974, oil on board, cm.24x24

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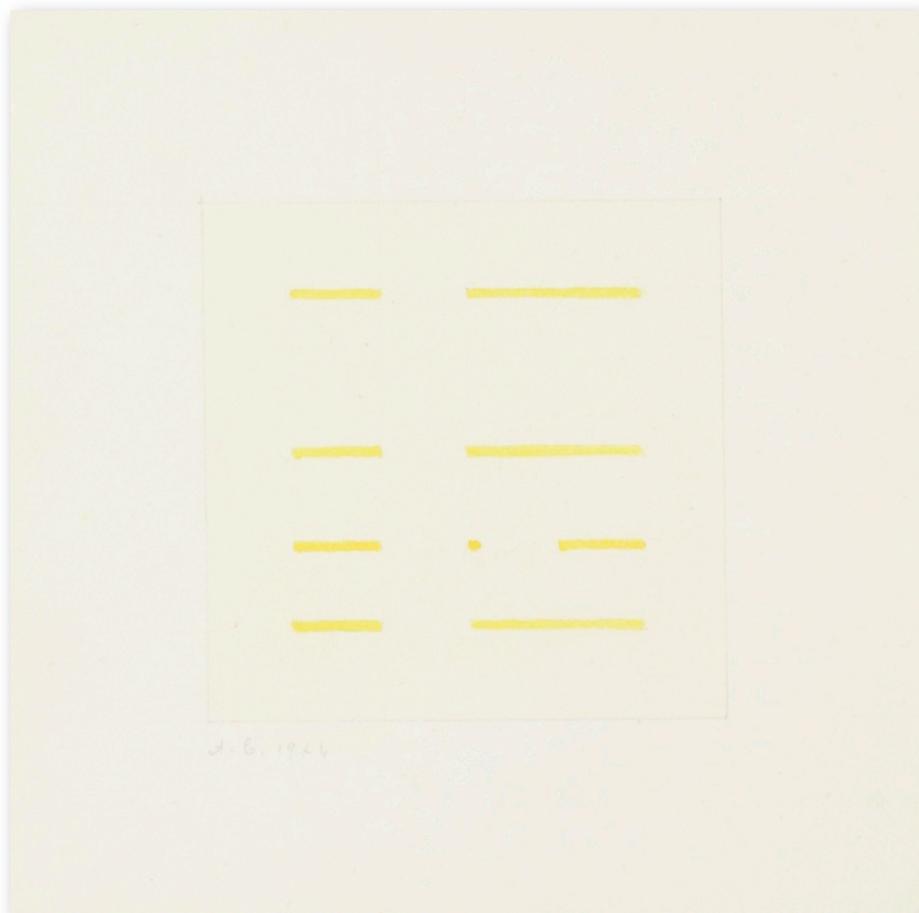


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18. Antonio Calderara, *Epigramma*, 1978, oil on board, cm.23,5x26

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19. Antonio Calderara, Untitled, 1974, watercolour on paper, cm. 15,8x15,9

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20. Helene Appel, *Potato peel*, 2013, oil on canvas, cm.67x58,5

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Antonio Calderara was born in Abbiategrasso (IT) in 1903 and died in Vacciago di Ameno (IT) in 1978. He exhibited in important private spaces abroad from the early '60s such as Berna, Zurich, Munich, Hannover, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Kiel, Vienna. Among the exhibitions in public spaces: Museum Ritter, Waldenbuch (2011), Museo Morandi, Bologna (2004), Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich, Josef Albers Museum and Moderne Galerie, Bottrop (2003), Kunsthaus Zurich (1993), Kunstmuseum Dusseldorf (1981), Stedelijk Museum Schiedam (1978), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1977, 1976), Kunstverien Braunschweig and Kunstverien Freiburg (1976). He participated in the Venice Biennale (1948, 1956, 1986) and Documenta Kassel in 1968.

Helene Appel was born in Karlsruhe (DE) in 1976. Lives and works in Berlin. She has held exhibitions at a number of international galleries such as The Approach, London (2013, 2010, 2009), Parasol Unit, London, James Cohen Gallery, New York, USA (2011), Luis Campana, Berlin (2008), Anna-Catharina Gebbers e Bibliothekswohnung, Berlin (2008); Gallery Serdtse, Moscow (2006). Among the group exhibitions in museums and institutions: *William Daniels in "Inevitable Figuration": A Scene of Painting Today*, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci (2013), Prato; *Index Kunstpreis*, Kunsthaus Hamburg (2010, 2005, 2003); Tate Britain, London, Royal College of Art, London (2009, 2006), Stadtgalerie Schwaz, Austria (2007).

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