

Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Bendini. 1965 works from the Sentimento Come Storia and Senso Operante series', in *Vasco Bendini*, catalogue of the exhibition at Galleria l'Attico, March 1966, Rome

(Translation by M.C.Lapetina)

The current phase of Bendini's painting is, in its problematic substance, exceptionally lucid; consequently in the somewhat agitated and confused current situation, it is to be taken seriously into consideration. After the informal experience, pursued along untrodden paths and without any concession to fashion, Bendini did not pose himself the dilemma of the apocalyptic and the integrated. Knowing that he had reached a limit, he did not devote himself to futile retrievals; since there could be nothing beyond the experience achieved that did not comprise his motives, he undertook a methodologically precise analysis of the process of his own painting. He arrived at the conclusions that we see, and which, in the meantime, proved how the matter of the informal was not at all a limit beyond which no other hypothesis was possible. Thus he has approached the boundary of the fifth dimension: the dimension beyond existence and which is posited (and could not be otherwise) solely as hypothesis. The experimentation thus is valid to the extent to which the hypothesis may become phenomenon.

Already in the informal phase Bendini had never let up probing the penetrability and practicability of matter, seeking in it a possibility of existence that would not be confused with that of the matter itself; thus he had found stratifications of images and profound signal itineraries. He continued to draw within the matter: his graphics, very abundant in those years, are the best guide to grasping the sense of his material research. After he had succeeded in clearing, piercing and going beyond the wall of matter, the first question had necessarily to concern the dimension, certainly no longer existential, which opened up beyond, and the extent of which could not be known. All that he knew of it, as a general concept, was that it no longer presented itself as synthesis but as a spatial-temporal continuum. Conscious of the limits of his own sphere of experience, painting, and of the necessity of dealing with the concrete data of the problem, Bendini identified that hypothetical spatiality with the pure and simple surface of the white canvas. For any painter, of whatever epoch and culture, the surface of the painting to be done is not simply a material support, but an initial problematic datum: it poses the problem of its own two-dimensionality, of a flat, solid and coloured extension which, nevertheless, is symbolically and conventionally

conceived as virtuality, availability, and unlimited spatiality. It is like the land on which we are to construct a building: only a bad architect would limit himself to considering it solely in terms of its capacity to support the material weight of the walls. From Cezanne on, the story of space in painting is in the non-painted, in the context. In Bendini's case the white canvas is something achieved and found afterwards, beyond a disintegrated, dissolved, vanished matter. In fact, it no longer has any bearing capacity; it is a screen that gathers vagrant remnants of images and does not even appropriate them, because its extension is entirely beyond the coloured veils and the applied strips. That it is a screen or diaphragm is demonstrated by the fact that the painter has to move it, to display it in certain inclinations in order to allow it to intercept currents of signs originating from an as yet unknown transmitter, and otherwise undetectable. The division into diptychs and triptychs, inclined panels and different levels is not intended to decompose, but rather, by moving the screens, to reconstruct the unity or the continuity of the projection. The imprecision of the terms "screen" and "diaphragm", provisionally used, is immediately apparent: the white canvas is, in fact, only the intercision of an inverted perspective depth which dilates rather than contracts as it recedes. The spatiality of this painting is, in reality, a spatiality in expansion, such as that described by modern cosmology. It is probably on account of this inevitable cosmological interest, and this passage from one dimension to another, that the most reliable historic reference for this phase of Bendini's painting is Kandinsky in the period of the Improvisations (1913-15). More than a screen or diaphragm, therefore, it would be correct to speak of a "threshold", of a zone of transition, because what actually interests the artist is the layer, of a certain depth, in which for an unspecified duration images that had a significance and a value in the existential dimension continue to present themselves. We have to acknowledge that we are on the border of metaphysical ambiguity, or at least of an eschatological theory: could these not be images of the hasty elimination of lived experience as soon as the "threshold" was crossed? I don't exclude that this may be one of the components of Bendini's poetics: the title of a work, "Sentimento come storia" (Feeling as History) suggests that it is. But the artist gazes out from the "threshold" with limpid, secular steadiness, determined not to record anything that does not offer itself with phenomenic evidence. Nothing that is not yet, and maybe only briefly, real can impress the sensitivity of his screens, colour the first layers of the new extension. Analyzing the signs that appear on the white canvases we cannot fail to recognise the mnemonic origin; they come from past

experiences, and have deposited in transit the meanings they had in the dimension of existence. They have highly diverse origins, but this is no longer very important. The lines are straight and oblique, parallel, divergent, intersecting: they are undoubtedly the features of a three-dimensional perspective structure, but appear to be broken and bent like the famous stick immersed in the water. There are figurative fragments: a chair, a window, human contours, glimpses of sky. But I don't see the jubilation, destined to turn to tears, of the propagandists of the "new figuration": these vain shadows of persons and things, brought thus far by the caprice of an obscure current, will never take shape, they will fade much sooner than others because, in the dimension of the non-existent, their very physical nature renders them infinitely fragile and fleeting. Finally, there are patches of colour that preserve and pass on the last trace of a material impasto or a gestural action: but the matter is devoid of substance, the gesture devoid of strength. The relations too are inverted: the brightest and most luminous colour is the black, the sky that we see from the window is on this side of the wall.

Already in Bendini's previous painting Calvesi noted a tendency to the lability of the image. Now the theme of lability becomes a precept, a key. The spreading of the colours is thin, sparse; they only just adhere to the canvas, like films which could be detached, and sometimes are. We feel that the images emerge from a laceration, although we cannot tell where or when it has occurred, because in the work there is no sign of it. It brings to mind a childhood game: the transfers that always came out wrong, a piece of the figure would remain on the template, another would be transferred to the paper, askew, slithering on the veil of water. The critical moment, when the image tore and was no longer either here or there, was the moment in which the template was separated from the sheet. In the same way Bendini's images remain suspended, neither here nor there: the fragments can never be recomposed in line with any known syntax. In saying that this is a poetics of laceration or detachment, however, we are simply referring to an experience common to all men of our time: what in art has led to the irreversible extreme of the informal. Bendini set out to seek what has remained beyond, and what has come this way, and found only fragments. A historic laceration never clearly separates the obsolete values from the current, the dead eras from the living, the closed spaces from the open. However, he did ask himself whether the images of his memory still had enough strength to impress the white canvas, to sustain it, to give a finite sense to its virtual, indefinite and entirely available spatiality. In other words, he wanted to ascertain whether the flotsam of memory was still sufficiently

vital to nourish and elaborate imaginative activity. He replied affirmatively to the question in the triptych entitled "Senso operante" (Operating Faculty). Read as it ought to be read, from left to right, it shows a still confusedly carnal image, a palpitating shred of memory, which is matched, beyond the pause, by a geometrical structure that is settling itself into a lucid combination of orthogonal co-ordinates. The memory-imagination relationship, which represents the problematic nucleus of Bendini's current research, evidently implies the theme of history. Interpreted in the phenomenological key most suited to this research method, it is the theme of the Erlebnis, which is not reduced to the immobility of the So-se/n, nor is in itself sufficient to give the future the structurality of a project, but nevertheless opens up to that intermediate region which is the region of the e/de. of infinite possibilities, of the imagination that prepares the materials for the future teleological choices. If this is the correct key for interpretation, then we must no longer speak of metaphysical ambiguity but of suspension of judgement, of Husserl's epoché.