

DANIEL BUREN & ALBERTO GIACOMETTI ŒUVRES CONTEMPORAINES 1964-1966

29 April - 26 June 2010

Juxtaposing the work of two artists sometimes leaves few alternatives apart from forming either a dialogue (searching for the affinity, the complementary nature of the works, or the complicity between them) or a disparity (highlighting the differences). All the more so when one of them is no longer with us. So it is that the exhibition of Daniel Buren and Alberto Giacometti at galerie kamel mennour - the fruit of an extraordinary collaboration between the artist, the gallery and the Alberto and Annette Giacometti Foundation - could give rise to infinite comparisons and contrasts. Anyone seeking a convergence would underline the fact the both these artists stand out through the trademark that each invented: the stripe for Buren, and, in Giacometti's paintings, the elongated silhouettes, the portraits on the verge of disappearing. An opposing perspective would contrast Buren, who in his *Mise en garde* (1969), asserts that "painting should no longer be about any kind of vision/illusion, even mental, of a phenomenon (nature, the subconscious, geometry), but about the visuals of painting itself" with a Giacometti obsessed by the surfacing of truth from beneath the painted or sculpted figure. The list of convergences and divergences could be continued, but it would be pointless, except to even out each artist's achievements.

Thus the interest of this juxtaposition lies elsewhere: the short window of time (1964-1966) from which all the works have been taken provides the key. What happened to these two artists during this fleeting phase? For Buren, these two years correspond with the appearance of the stripe motif and an intense period of experimentation on the same theme. Whilst the first stripes, drawn using adhesive tape, were painted and served as a background to the organic forms that sometimes covered them, by the end of 1965, after the "miracle" of the Marché Saint-Pierre fabric store in Paris, they are replaced by manufactured striped fabric. Whether woven or silkscreen-printed, they condition the artist's pictorial intervention on these canvases differently. Buren has not, in fact, renounced painting and is keen to avoid his project being confused with a ready-made.

Whereas these years see the establishment of the Buren system, culminating in 1967 with the definition of his "visual tool", for Giacometti they correspond with what are now known as the "final works". He died in January 1966 at the height of his international recognition: the Grand Prize for sculpture at the 1962 Venice Biennale; the opening of three retrospectives, in London (Tate Gallery), New York (MoMA) and Humlebaek (Louisiana Museum in Denmark) in 1965, the year in which he received the *grand prix national des Arts*, awarded by the French Ministry for Cultural Affairs. His last sculpted works are mostly bronze busts, in particular those of his wife, Annette, or the film-maker Elie Lotar. What is striking about them is the imminent disappearance of the face, which seems to have been cut off or eaten away, and the striving for captured and encysted movement in the torso-base.

A catalogue, edited by kamel mennour, will be available.

Daniel Buren & Alberto Giacometti «Œuvres contemporaines: 1964-1966» is on show at galerie kamel mennour Tuesdays to Saturdays, 9am to 7pm.

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The window of time chosen for the exhibition brings to life the reciprocally opposing processes in which these works are engaged, evoking what Thomas S. Kuhn, author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, defines as a "paradigm shift". There is no suggestion that these two figures brought about such a shift on their own, but, over the course of those two years, their works can be seen as emblematic of the passage from modern to contemporary art and towards a new geopolitical movement in art. As it happens, providing the backdrop to the Buren-Giacometti juxtaposition in the years 1964-65 is the École de Paris, about which the two artists held radically different positions. An effective lobby and label for the promotion of Giacometti's works, this Parisian "showcase" also dragged him into its own decline following the systematic attacks on it from parts of the American scene from the 1950s onwards. The awarding of the Venice painting prize to Robert Rauschenberg in 1964 effectively sounded the death knell for the École de Paris¹. As for Buren, he was already criticising its academicism and its extreme left-wing views even before the creation of the association with Mosset, Parmentier et Toroni in 1967 - formed, essentially, to counter the École de Paris. Furthermore, he was amongst the first French artists to make inroads into the American art scene, even if the radicalism of his work was not always well received.

As for the paradigm shift in aesthetics, by taking reality as his departure point - or the imprint of it, based on memory or the senses - Giacometti reinvents the concept of resemblance, anticipating what Gilles Deleuze described, with reference to Bacon's painting, as like the "logics of sensation". If the sculptor's work begins with relentless and indefatigable hands producing unique pieces, it nevertheless owes its existence, through series the world over, to casts. It is thus a question of reconciling the technical reproducibility of the work with its aura. The expressivity, if not the theatricality of certain busts on show in this exhibition, is perhaps rooted in this problematic. Thus Giacometti makes the transition to a world that has other preoccupations besides that of aura, signalling the end of the modernist, whereas Buren rapidly positions himself as an artist at the cutting-edge. He adopts a critical attitude towards painting, art and institutions. From 1967 onwards, he is one of the first artists to create a street intervention with his "*affichages sauvages*", using his visual tool to spread beyond the limits of the exhibition and the museum wherever possible.

More than a jumbled snapshot of emblematic works, the exhibition *Daniel Buren & Alberto Giacometti, Oeuvres contemporaines 1964-1966*, offers us a simultaneous experience of the works and of their artistic context. It seeks not just a proximity to them, but also to give their juxtaposition, as it were, a *cultural perspective*. A history of art on a macro scale, where one might map out the simultaneities, the occurrences and reoccurrences, the points of convergence, is yet to be written. For example, what would the display of Matisse's paper cut-outs (1949) alongside Pollocks first *drippings* (1946) look like and what ideas might it provoke? The dialogue between such differing and emblematic works by Daniel Buren and Alberto Giacometti also raises the question of their topicality today, of the relevance or irrelevance of one or the other, and of each for the other.

Marie-Cécile Burnichon, April 2010
Translation : James Curwen

¹ Of the 16 Grand Prizes awarded at the Venice Biennale for painting and sculpture between 1948 and 1962, it could claim 12: Braque, Matisse, Zadkine, Dufy, Calder, Max Ernst, Arp, Villon, Fautrier, Hartung, Manessier and Giacometti.