



Felice Nittolo : Geographies From Now to Then

By Emanuela Fiori

*Holocaust -
Remembrance*
2010
diam 75 cm
vitreous paste, black
resin on terracotta

right
Mediterranean, Icon
2009
22 x 13 x 4 cm
bronze, gold, shells,
marble, glass paste

Going backwards, proceeding 'from now to then' is part of the development of art which creates the new by turning to the past. With this gesture we are enabled to read the breakdowns, fragmentations and experimentations, our eyes filled to overflowing with memories. To go or to think back is a great help in finding the roots and the reasons for doing in the present.

When I entered Felice Nittolo's studio for the first time I perused each and every work attentively. Before knowing their genesis and history, I let myself be captured by the colour and above all by the material; always a different material which, with the passing of time, assumes, (or in this case 'becomes') different consistencies and appearances.

Acrylic colour, wood, canvas, linoleum, gold leaf, mortar, terracotta, vitreous paste, paper, ink, aluminium, nails, mother-of-pearl and marble are present in various forms. United, split, dominant or dominated, these materials suggested a possible key to understanding them by relying on the thickness of their physical consistency, on their declension so to speak, first in tesserae, then in edges, in needles and finally in large flat fields. I saw a 'contemporary' mosaicist

use an 'ancient' mosaic technique with freedom, using light materials and returning to a more painterly mode in his latest innovative works, which we are presenting in this exhibition.

This is not a comprehensive show and does not wish to be; in fact it does not touch upon other expressive forms utilized by Nittolo such as contamination with words and his personalized *dripping*. The choice of works was guided by the duality of technique/materials on one hand and the formal relation between mosaic and contemporary art on the other.

Operating more like a painter than a mosaicist, Nittolo utilizes marble and ink on resin and wood; a surface without a drawing, irregular, resembles expressionist pictorial dynamics, abstract and 'informal'. These are works that I wish to link to the



above, left
Mediterraneo Series
 2002
 60 x 41 cm each
 monotype on paper, ink,
 gold leaf

right
Tracce Series
 300 x 150 cm et
 150 x 50 cm
 2017

below
Vestigia Series
 2011
 (200 x 100 cm) x 3
 imprints, gold leaf,
 acrylic on wood

right
Vestigia
 2008
 80 x 60 cm

Remembrances of 2017 in a circle without a solution of continuity, of which the latter represent the first and last link.

In this series, composed of different formats, the memory of mosaic in the unfinished mortar layer is superimposed on red acrylic paint or linoleum. Forms and non-forms follow one another, at times with figurative semblances: eyes wide open, drawn weaves and crosses, ready to accommodate non-existent inlays. They are evanescent ghosts of mosaic prototypes from Late Antiquity, alluded to by a few tesserae in gold leaf. The triptych *Profanations* of 2011, where mortar and tissue paper form thicknesses on green acrylic, is a response to the VI century mosaics from the Basilica of San Severo and to the sinopia with the peacocks, while the *Virgin Mary Praying*, painted only on green acrylic, repeats the ancient gesturing of Saint Apollinare.

Vestiges in black acrylic and gold leaf (created between 2005 and 2008) are, on the contrary, abstract and essential works that celebrate the absence of mosaic. The imprint of this technique is lyrically

evoked in the gold leaves used as geometric borders or in nearly imperceptible signs of light on the rough depth of the black acrylic. In this series, does this ingenious artist/experimenter evoke the crushed bitumen of Alberto Burri? Perhaps subconsciously, Nittolo celebrates the Umbrian artist with a pictorial style that surely impassions him in a personal way. The *Kabuto* series, created with metal, marble and copper, was created between 2003 and 2006. Named for the helmet worn by Samurai, they are a reworked version of the spheres in glass and earthenware covered in yellow and white gold tesserae created by Nittolo in Ravenna in the Nineties and onwards. This interesting contamination of the geometrically perfect solid sphere with Samurai armour was created in Japan during the work period for the installation of his show *The Sound of Silence* at the Kawagoe City Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. Ideally far from Ravenna, perhaps attracted by an Orient very different from the Italian one overlooking the Adriatic Sea, he turned to the use of paper for the double series *Mediterra-*



*Memories
Shoah
What Happened Shall
Never Happen Again
2010
vitreous paste and
black resin on terra-
cotta
diam 75 cm*



*Goto
2002
gold tesserae and
blown glass
14 x 9 x 10 cm*

nean in 2002. Decisive colours dominate: natural inks, red lacquer of Japanese prints, black and blue. The *Blade of Grass*, conceived in Seattle in these Monotypes, has become a stylistic element that still persists today, although in an altered formal guise and recreated in various materials.

The five shield-like discs with resin on a terracotta backing, displayed in the Arms and Armour section, are dedicated to the *Holocaust* (2004 and 2010) and the *Shoah* (2010). The massacre seems to be evoked in the nails and wedges of red vitreous paste covering them. In the fifth disc named *Peace* (1993), gold leaf, rich in hope, emerges in place of smalti.

Felice Nittolo's versatility does not exclude the art of glass, represented by the *Goto*: two beautiful examples of *Goto* glasses, Murano blown glass with mosaic, both from 2002.

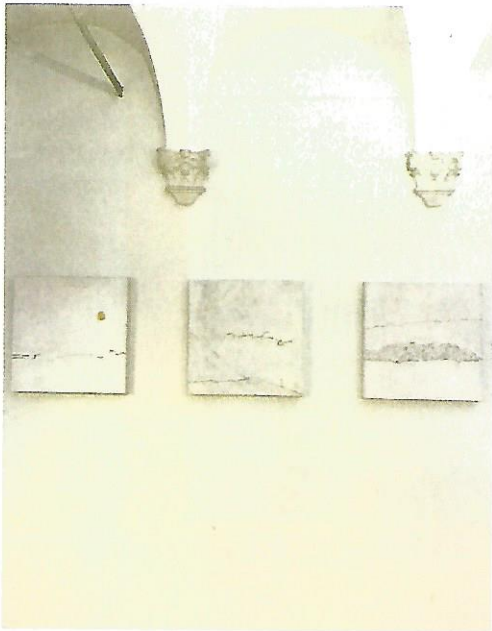
The title dedicates these glasses to the barbarian Goths, but the origins of such refined productions

are far from Ravenna and bear witness to Nittolo's experience in Seattle in 1993 at the *Pilchuck Glass School*. Here he came into contact with artistic glass, which he then applied to mosaic.

Reaching the end of the layout of the exhibition, in front of the work *A-rhythmism* (1985), perhaps we are able to answer the question we posed initially. Does fidelity to mosaic technique as a dominant means of expression persist in Felice Nittolo? Or is his technical awareness of the mosaic language, though declared with flair and panache, only one of the possible roads that his spirit as a painter, (or better, as a multisided artist) can translate into contemporary art? The answer will be suggested by the geography of places and techniques, in a path constructed pass after pass, work after work, comparison after comparison from the present to the past. ■



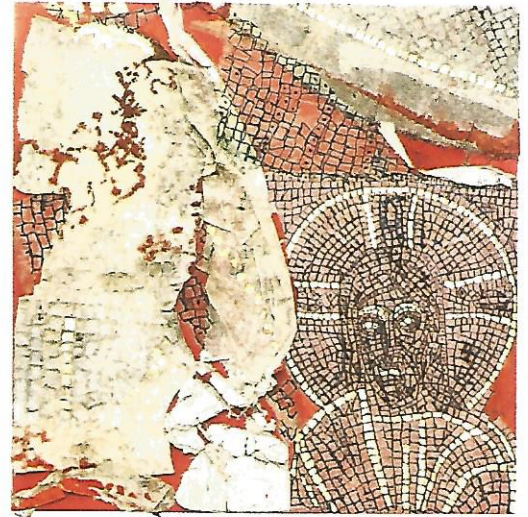
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Vestigia
2004
30 x 30 x 5 cm one



Memorie,
2017
305 x 150 cm
imprints, gold leaf, linoleum, red acrylic



below, from left to right
Madonna orante
2011
100 x 100 cm
imprints, tissue paper,
gold leaf, green acrylic
on wood

A-Ritmismo
1985
315 x 216 cm
ink, glass, incisions, mor-
tar on wood

Kabuto
2006
diam 32 x h 57 cm
metal, marble, copper,
mother-of-pearl