

GIANPAOLO LAZZARO

Gianpaolo Lazzaro (Padua, 4 February 1911 – Milan, 20 December 1977) was an Italian painter active in the Italian avant-garde from the 1930s to the 1970s. His paintings are signed simply with the name Gianpaolo.

After completing his studies at the Brera Academy in Milan, aged just 16, in 1927, he accompanied Francesco Dal Pozzo to Siam (now Thailand), where he had been invited to teach drawing at the Royal Academy of Bangkok. The young artist held his first exhibition there, which was favourably received by the local press (Bangkok Daily Mail, 8 September 1928).

He spent a year in Siam, absorbing its atmosphere into his work, before returning to Padua. At age 18, he exhibited at the XVII Venice Biennale. In 1931 he moved to Milan. In 1934 he won the billboard competition for second Venice International Film Festival.

In 1935 he fought in Italian East Africa (Somalia, Abyssinia). He survived the colonial war and returned to Milan in 1937 (traces of those African deserts would remain in his painting). These were formative years for him: he worked with Sironi, became friends with Lucio Fontana and contributed to *Natura* magazine, where he met Munari.

In 1940 he was called up to the Armed Forces. A year later he married a 16-year-old girl, Bruna Gualazzi, who remained with him all his life. When his term of leave for marriage expired, he left for the Russian campaign. In 1944 he was involved in the Resistance in Liguria. His wife had just given birth to a child, Claudio, but she sometimes accompanied him on his missions. In 1945 Gianpaolo returned to Milan, where he organised, at the Italo-American Press Club, the First contemporary modern art exhibition, together with Carrà, Campigli, De Chirico, De Pisis, Manzù, Migneco, Morandi and Sassu.

From 1946 to 1956 he gained a reputation as a trailblazer with a consistent series of works featuring spatial appearances, lunar landscapes, suspended bodies and cosmic attractions. Enrico Somaré wrote of him in 1947: "He paints ghosts of things he sees in dreams." In the same year, Sergio Solmi commented, "Gianpaolo, who was forced to abandon art for the unfortunate affairs of war, has now returned with renewed passion. His is an ideal of dreamy and poetic painting. Gianpaolo aspires to live in an ideal and incorruptible place – a golden age, a blessed island, suspended outside of time – in an atmosphere of calm meditation."

This impression is shared by Orio Vergani: "There was a time when painting such as that by Gianpaolo would have been considered as bordering on elegy."

In 1949, the collector, publisher and art dealer Carlo Cardazzo organised a personal exhibition of his work at the Galleria del Naviglio.

In 1954, Dino Buzzati, who recognised himself in Gianpaolo's creative world, dedicated a story to him, entitled: "A short dialogue between the painter Gianpaolo and an old hermit he met in the Kalahari desert." This was the year in which Rai started broadcasting television programmes. On the occasion of an exhibition by Gianpaolo at the Montenapoleone Gallery, the eight o'clock news

featured a set in which Buzzati and Gianpaolo moved through an artificial fog among shapes that evoked the artist's paintings.

Gianpaolo could have capitalised on this popularity by repeating his work to serve the market, but instead he changed register: "Perhaps he lacked the instinct for success, or perhaps he was too well brought-up. Perhaps he was too refined," commented Mario Perazzi in the *Corriere d'Informazione* (4 January 1978). The fact is that, just when everyone was asking him for the "lunar landscapes" from the exhibition sponsored by Buzzati, Gianpaolo abandoned his "calm" universe and solid pictorial technique, with its classical structure, to venture into the whirlwinds of the informal.

Starting in 1957 he produced paintings that he called "Cosmocronache", superimposing, on the painted elements, legible printed paper cut-outs, fragments of life and social problems, trying to blend the world of everyday reality with the magic of fantastical creation. According to Franco Russoli, these were "Compositions in which daily news becomes an apparition, a diary of customary wonders"

However, his experimentation, like that of the vital Milanese art movement of the 1950s and '60s, was not always understood. This led him to enthusiastically accept Buzzati's invitation in 1956 to write a series of informative articles for the *Domenica del Corriere* on the topic "The purposes of modern art", which continued for several years. One of these (10 June 1962) took note of the fact that Italian critics completely overlooked the most innovative Italian artist, Piero Manzoni, who died a year later. Gianpaolo established a dialogue with Enrico Castellani, Manzoni's friend and collaborator, and with the most important artists of that period, but did not associate himself with any manifesto, continuing his solo creative journey.

In 1967, a collective exhibition was organised in Padua, his birthplace, in which he exhibited with the three old friends: Roberto Crippa, Gianni Dova and Lucio Fontana.

In the 1970s he began to paint on narrow vertical canvases: "They seemed like windows to me," wrote Perazzi, "openings onto all that exists, outside (and inside) of us."

He held his last exhibition in 1977, at the Galleria Zunino in Milan. In the presentation for it, Gillo Dorfles wrote: "Back in the years of what we could call his metaphysical commitment, in paintings where metaphorical still lifes floated around the hulk of an ideal shipwreck, or later, at the height of his informal period, when he narrowed his pictorial schemes to a few chromatic modules, or even in his "cosmocronache" series, Gianpaolo worked to keep his artistic world outside of the prescribed canons, discarding both a facile anecdotal realism and an equally facile geometric abstractism. Today, finally, in his latest exhibition of strips - these subtle glimmers of colour painted with intense tonal layers that alternate in parallel bands - the artist has reached the moment of extreme purification of his means of expression."