

Mono-ha and Arte Povera at Punta della Dogana, Venice

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Courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

Foreground: Kishio Suga, "Gap of the Entrance to the Space" (1979/2012) Stone, zinc plate .

Installation view at Punta della Dogana, 2013. ph: © Palazzo Grassi, ORCH orsenigo_chemollo

Tadao Ando's sensitive refurbishment of Punta della Dogana, which opened in 2009, emphasizes the textural and tonal contrasts between individual works and the surrounding architecture without overwhelming them. The irregular undulations of the brick walls, stark concrete floor, and burnished wooden ceiling beams serve as complementary elements that extract new visual resonances from these minimal works — a daring juxtaposition that befits the premise of the exhibition itself, which is to bring these two formerly disparate movements from different ends of the world into an unexpectedly striking dialogue with each other.

Although the exhibition encompasses a wide range of media — from a sprawling multi-channel video installation littered with furniture by Trecartin and **Lizzy Fitch**, a scintillating neon installation by **Loris Gréaud**, paintings by **Mark Grotjahn** and **Marlene Dumas**, for instance — the absolute highlight is the long courtyard-like space on the ground floor that has been devoted to a carefully configured mini-exhibition of key works by artists associated with the Italian Arte Povera and Japanese Mono-ha movements. Taking centerstage in the middle of the floor is **Kishio Suga's** "Gap of the Entrance to the Space" (1979/2012), an arrangement of tin panels, natural rocks, and cut stones that echoes the rigorous geometry of Japanese rock gardens while simultaneously recalling the lessons of Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and other Minimalist artists.

BLOUIN ARTINFO sat down with Bourgeois and Govan shortly after the exhibition opened to discuss the significance of this exhibition in the light of other recent attempts to re-contextualize key avant-garde movements of the 1960s, and the struggle to establish some sense of "international contemporaneity" across artistic tendencies that have largely been understood as national traditions.

This exhibition is made of exclusively of works from Pinault's collection. Did he already have something akin to this presentation in mind when he was collecting them?

Govan: I don't think he had this exhibition in mind when he started collecting these works. But when we sat down and explored the collection, the idea of connecting the 60s to the present was one of the first directions we considered. Mono-ha of course was important because of how it dramatically changed the dialogue in the contemporary world.

VENICE — Held to coincide with the opening of this year's Venice Biennale, **François Pinault's** Punta della Dogana opened "Prima Materia" on May 30. This new exhibition curated by **Caroline Bourgeois** and **Michael Govan** draws from his extensive collection of postwar and contemporary art, and features a selection of leading artists including **Adel Abdessemed**, **Roni Horn**, **Llyn Foulkes**, **Theaster Gates**, **Thomas Schütte**, **Ryan Trecartin**, as well as the leading figures of the Italian Arte Povera and Japanese Mono-ha movements.



Mono-ha is very much about the relationships between objects and the materials they are made from. With this exhibition, you've introduced an additional dimension to this Japanese movement that juxtaposes these works with an important Italian movement in a new way.

Govan: It was important for us to have a proper text, so that audiences would get a solid perspective on the larger social and artistic background that drove us to make this juxtaposition. For the catalogue's keynote essay, we got **Lee Ufan** and **Germano Celant**, the two spokespeople for the respective movements on either side, to reconsider the time. Lee and Celant had known of each other, of course, but weren't really in a dialogue at the time. In this essay, they discuss the whole issue of materiality, as it was understood by the respective artists. Lee also talks about the "trickery" of Pop and Op Art, as opposed to the "truth-to-materials" that both Arte Povera and Mono-ha tried to explore. In a way, these movements were a sort of protest or reaction against the utopian quality of fabrication and industrial manufacturing that exploded in the 1960s.

The other thing we should remember about bringing these two art movements together in the same exhibition forty years later is that these works are not permanent objects. They can be recreated at a later time. Whereas Modern art was very much based on the idea of a finalized work, Arte Povera is about concept-as-work, while Mono-ha has the capacity to evolve and change — and so does Arte Povera, actually, if you think of Mario Merz's fruit tables, for instance. There are other resonances that we later discovered — I was just talking to **Nobuo Sekine** this morning, and he reminded me that he and **Shusaku Arakawa**, who is also in this show, had represented Japan at the 1970 Venice Biennale.

Looking back at the 60s from the distance of today, what sort of parallels emerged when you were putting together this exhibition?

Bourgeois: What's clear is that the circumstances of the time stretch across regions and continents. These movements were in dialogue with a time that reaches across both Mono-ha and Arte Povera. **Giuseppe Penone**, for instance, participated in the important 1970 Tokyo Biennale commissioned by **Yusuke Nakahara** and curated by **Toshiaki Minemura**, for example, and was impressed with the reaction of the Japanese to his work. Even then, there was this shock of discovering something analogous, contemporary, but also wild, compared to European tendencies.

Even though the presentation of the works in the large Arte Povera and Mono-ha gallery might suggest otherwise, this particular showcase is not just formal similarities or affinities between materials. Rather, it's the idea of echoes across works, and question of how your thinking can be opened up through these juxtaposition. The two "triangles" by **Koji Enokura** and **Giulio Paolini** at the far end of this gallery, for instance, are a good example of how deeper conceptual concerns outweigh the superficial formal affinities. The Paolini is a painting, a perfectly equilateral canvas based on a sort of Platonic idea of Greek geometry, and a displacement of the idea of painting. The Enokura piece is made of leather, and has a rupture or tear in it, which makes it violent. I really hope the public doesn't interpret the show in that sort of superficial way!

Will there be similar presentations that highlight the connections between these two movements in the near future?

Bourgeois: In fact, there is also a show that is currently on view at the [Rachofsky House](#) in Dallas called "Parallel Views: Italian and Japanese Art from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s," which emphasizes the contemporaneity and parallels between Arte Povera, Gutai, and Mono-ha. There's a lot of interest at the moment in revivalist approaches to this period — these movements haven't been understood in connection with each other in both the US and Europe, so it's an interesting time.

"Prima Materia" opened at the Punta della Dogana on May 30, and runs until December 31, 2014.

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