

Gian Marco Casini Gallery

contacts

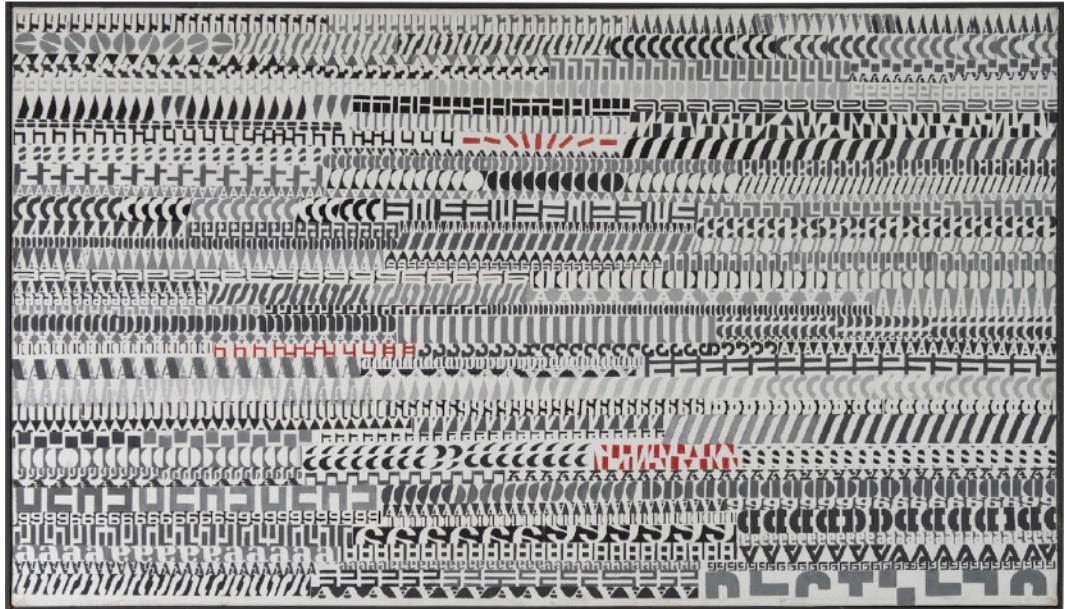
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Renato Spagnoli

Ambiente 68

1964

Continuo 5



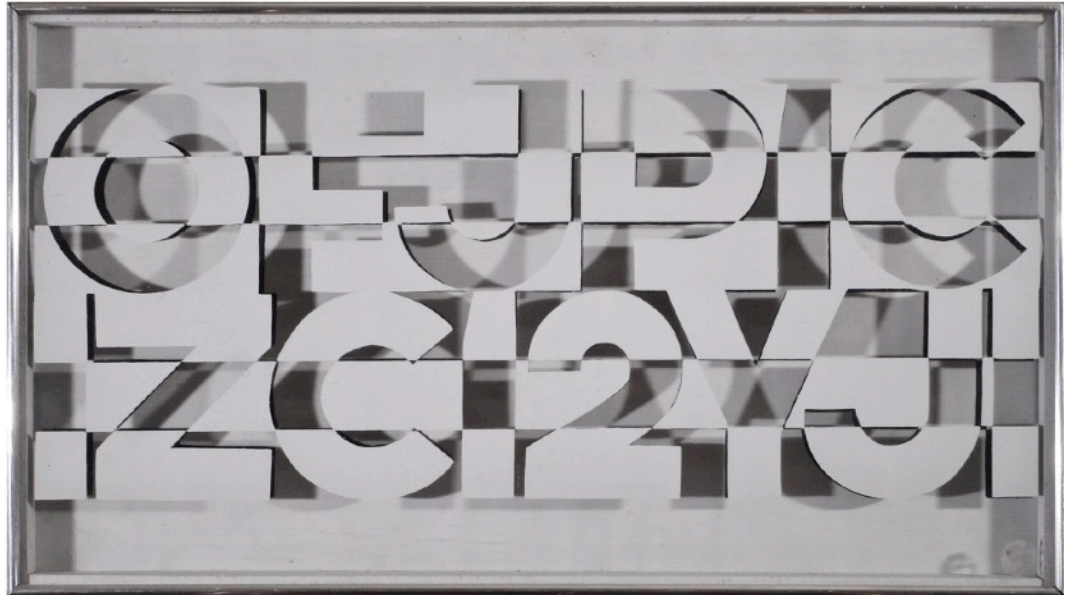
1965

Probabilità n.4



1967

3D15



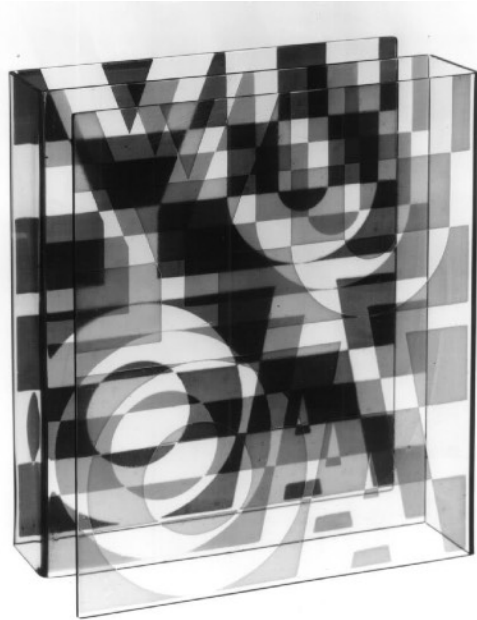
1968

Fiumalbo



1968

Multiplo 68



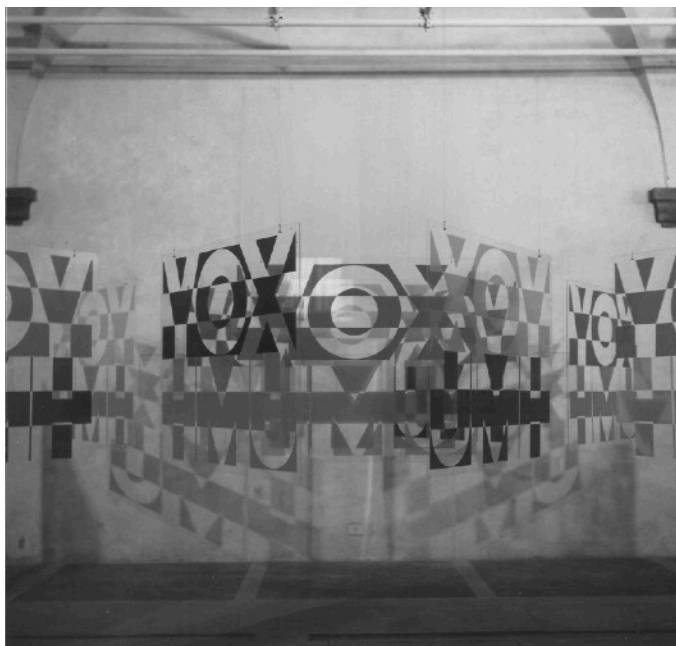
1968

Studio



1968

Ambiente 68



2022

Ambiente 68 @Gian Marco Casini





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**Sept
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**RENATO SPAGNOLI
Ambiente 68**

**GIAN MARCO CASINI GALLERY
Via Montebello 5, Livorno**

The exhibit presents a single work, "Ambiente 68" from 1968, which consists of twelve sheets of transparent plastic material, 105x120 cm each, arranged in such a way as to achieve both parallel and non-parallel surfaces, creating a sort of "hut/labyrinth". The letters Y O X I M U, "drawn/modelled" with coloured tape on the methacrylate surface, are cut through in negative-positive by horizontal bands and give off an image of particularly effective accumulation, forming other images that shift based on the spectator's point of view. The letters transform into ideogrammatic symbols, suggesting the creation of new characters for a "trans-linguistic" alphabet.



Renato Spagnoli. AMBIENTE 68

“A secret question hovers over us, a sense of disappointment, a broken promise we were given as children about what our adult world was supposed to be like. I am referring not to the standard false promises that children are always given, but to a particular generational promise one that was never quite articulated as a promise but rather as a set of assumptions about what our adult world would be like. Where, in short, are the flying cars?”¹

This question opens a text written by David Graeber, anthropologist and anarchist, in 2012, titled *Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit*. Graeber was eight years old when the crew of the Apollo landed on the moon, was a reader of science fiction, and imagined, with the passing of the year 2000 in his thirty-ninth year of life, he would live in a world full of wonders. And thus, inspired by his disappointment in not finding “force fields, tractor beams, teleportation pods,... colonies on Mars²...” in the 21st century, he begins to search for the reasons behind the failed promise of technological progress. In connection to this, he attempts to explain capitalist industry’s failure to zero out the profit rate, predicted by Marx and Engels, which was meant to coincide with the full automation of the factories of the future.

I found some perfect parallels with the Manifesto of the Atoma Group presented by Renato Spagnoli, and three other artists, as part of the Anarchist Federation of Livorno in 1963. In particular: “The Atoma Group was formed, guided by a shared and sincere need, to open up, with a dynamic urge, to the cultural assimilation of the newest theories in those disciplines that, to become logical of history, hypothecate the future, in the sense that there will be no cultural and social evolution that does not depend on the technical-industrial clarification of the same. We refer to Biochemistry and Cybernetics; and especially to the relationships that are envisaged within psychopathy research connected to Information Theory³.”

In 1970, not long after the Apollo’s moon landing, Renato, who had been interested in new technologies and the magnificent developments to come since early in his career, believed that literature had already envisioned what would be seen in the near future, but on one condition, that is, “if humankind is not denied its own ideas, its freedom to fantasize⁴.” Here again there is an echoing Graeber’s ideas, an English university professor. For Graeber, Scientific Research had slowed in part due to the “corporatization” of University Departments, so that it was no longer possible to conduct research motivated by pure curiosity, and academic bureaucracy takes up most of an instructor’s time, and he writes, “In my own university, for instance, we have more administrators than faculty members, and the faculty members, too, are expected to spend at least as much time on administration as on teaching and research combined. The same is true, more or less, at universities worldwide.⁵”

Continuing, he cites the astrophysicist Jonathan Katz: “You will spend your time writing proposals rather than doing research. Worse, because your proposals are judged by your competitors, you cannot follow your curiosity, but must spend your effort and talents on anticipating and deflecting criticism rather than on solving the important scientific problems. . . . It is proverbial that original ideas are the kiss of death for a proposal, because they have not yet been proved to work⁶.”

Not only technology and science, but language as well. In all (or almost all) science fiction novels and stories, there are no linguistic barriers. One may have imagined either *a single galactic language* or a *simultaneous translator*. The Manifesto of the Atoma Group states: “The outcomes of the disciplines mentioned above [Biochemistry, Cybernetics, Psychopathology] will help to determine the possibility of accessing a cosmic dimension of language (a-spatial/a-temporal) developed by devising trans-

linguistic systems of communication, focusing on the preverbal capacities of thought, as the most synthetic and creative moments. What we hope to emphasize is that no language places preverbal, trans-logical and aconceptual faculties at the foundation of its informational capabilities like artistic language. Hence the legitimacy of aspiring to a hyper-communicative system of language (interindividual immediate communication) that can be extended to the entire human race⁷.”

In Spagnoli’s works from the 1960s, like *Ambiente 68*, he “maintains his ideogrammatic symbols, transposes them into a new space, expands them to become objects and acquire dimension. His discourse, from being syntactic, tight and rhythmic, becomes spatial and plastic. Images become hallucinatory and broken, they move and flow with a new, more vivid dialectic insistence⁸.” Thus, using the letters Y O X I M U, Spagnoli is alluding to a “trans-linguistic” alphabet.

The optical-perceptual research of the 1950s and 60s, typical in Optical Art, provided a chance for science fiction cinema to create scenes of the future world. In the science fiction film *La decima vittima* (1965) by Elio Petri, based on a short story by Robert Sheckley, *The Seventh Victim*, works by the *N Group* (*Gruppo N*) were used for interior scenery to create the film’s backdrops.

The hut (or tent) layout, archetype of the home in modern architecture, that Renato Spagnoli depicts with transparent methacrylate sheets in *Ambiente 68* suggest a new way of building, already present in science fiction literature. On the planet *Trantor*, the inhabitants imagined by Isaac Asimov for the *Foundation series* live in cities “enclosed” under glass domes to be safe from the weather and live peacefully with man-made air conditioning. Evgenij Ivanovič Zamjatin, in his view of the future featured in the dystopian novel *We* (1921), imagines, in a society that has outlawed free will and where the private intimacy of citizens disappears, houses with walls made entirely of transparent glass.

In Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation series*, the planet *Terminus*, still unexplored, is colonized by humans (only by its most brilliant minds) for the sole purpose of creating a *Encyclopedia Galactica* there that collects and conserves all the knowledge from millennia of human history. A scientific refuge beyond politics and the economy, serving all of humankind, to preserve knowledge and develop new fantastic discoveries.

Where, in short, is the planet *Terminus*?

Gian Marco Casini

Livorno, August 27th

ita-eng transl. by Rachel Moland

¹ David Graeber, *Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit*, 2012, <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/of-flying-cars-and-the-declining-rate-of-profit>

² ibidem

³ eng. transl. Rachel Moland, GRUPPO ATOMA, 1964, ed. Galleria Numero, Firenze.

⁴ Renato Spagnoli, 1970, ed. Galleria Giraldi, Livorno

⁵ op. cit.

⁶ ibidem

⁷ op. cit.

⁸ eng. transl. Rachel Moland, Lara-Vinca Masini, 1966, Gruppo Atoma





Renato Spagnoli

with Ambiente 68

