

Gabriele Salvaterra, *Warm minimalism*
in *Rolando Tessadri, Casa Gallo, 2013*

A simple square in front of the eyes. The dimensions are normal: the rhythm measured out by equidistant and parallel lines that organise the surface clearly without errors or flaws. Nothing is left to chance and there is no room for anything that has not been very carefully thought out. The process involved in creating these works is controlled and does not allow for cracks of randomness or invention at odds with the rules. The resulting orthogonal surface alludes to nothing else but itself and may appear mute or even off-putting.

If we consider Rolando Tessadri's works in these terms, it would seem that there is not much to say. There is so very little there. Everything is right before you and getting to grips with these paintings might almost be very simple. Everything is so very manifest that there is little room for a description of what is beyond the exterior surface. This difficulty is reminiscent of Jean François Lyotard's more well-known problem with regards Barnett Newman's paintings, in which "Everything is there; so much so that it is a problem for the commentator. What can one say that is not given? It is not difficult to describe, but the description is as flat as a paraphrase" 1. Clearly this purely literal interpretation of Newman's works is an extreme simplification, so much so that Lyotard himself, working from this starting point, goes on to underline how the work of this artist (often hailed as the joining link between abstract expressionism and minimalism, the sorter of gestural force in structured precision) is filled with countless romantic and spiritualistic ambitions that even touch on 19th century concepts such as the sublime.

With the aim of seeing these influences as adding greater contributions to the work, rather than spoiling its presumed purity, the same also applies for Tessadri in terms of specific features. The apparent post-minimalist neatness of his work conceals much more than a simple content-related void. The regular organisation of the surface bears a complexity and a *disorder* both of which are greater than their rigid formal organisation would suggest.

Other commentators 2 have highlighted signs of this complexity by pointing out how Tessadri's art makes use of theoretically cold technical means in order to obtain the opposite effect. Indeed, if the use of a grid ought to cancel out any connection with the narrative or with sensuality and pleasure (in favour of a cold, harsh subject) in this case the effect obtained is very different from the initial starting premise. The orthogonal criss-cross of lines is indefinite, slightly blurred, and it evokes both tactile and visual impressions. The linear intertwining seems woven with fibrous material and bears warm, soft, welcoming connotations that have more to do with a sense of touch than a sense of sight, which might be more traditionally linked to the grid.

This is because Tessadri's works do not entirely fall under the scope of the grid as this is defined by Rosalind Krauss 3, but (and their titles specifically point this out) under the scope of weaving and intertwining. This point in itself removes total abstraction given that, even though these pictures represent nothing in the traditional sense of the word, we *do* have a representative in the form of weaving and, from a certain angle, this allows us to interpret these works as hyperrealist illustrations of weaves and meshes.

This approach means that Tessadri's works develop along a fine line between abstraction and representation, which allows the artist to create a paradoxical referentiality in a decidedly abstract area. Something impure is therefore at work under the ascetic, tidy appearance of these pictures and Tessadri's grid seems to have more in common with the sensual, feminine world of Agnes Martin's

works or the works of corporeal artists such as Eva Hesse or Magdalena Abakanowicz than it has in common with the absolute rigour of highly intransigent abstraction.

This is warm minimalism in which the rules of traditional abstraction and 1960s minimalism are used and at the same time bent in order to accommodate a broader subject, which once again involves a search for a love of the pure luminous vibration of colour and the emotive, seductive power of pigment.

In addition to this sense-related level of interpretation, we can also detect a more analytical, meta-textual level in which the surfaces of Tessadri's works (precisely because of their illusory, referential quality) form a further area for analysis of the elements that make up the overall picture.⁴ The plot of the weave is painted onto the real weave of the canvas, using a language that borders on hyper-realism. The physical canvas therefore becomes a prop for the represented canvas whilst the artist's work turns into an illustration, an illusionistic photograph of the very tools that he is using in practice. In this kind of short circuit and paradoxical *mise en abyme*, in which the real canvas and the painted canvas come together on the one same material support, we can see a final analysis of the work, now forced into being a support for the representation of itself, in search of the meaning that over centuries has settled in that fine epidermis that we call surface, between plain and perspective box, between representation and presence.

1 LYOTARD JEAN-FRANÇOIS, *L'istante, Newman*, p. 51 in BARNETT NEWMAN (2010), *Il Sublime Adesso*, Abscondita, Milano, pp. 47-62.

2 GUADAGNINI WALTER, *Of handing down and other things*, in Igino Legnaghi. *Rolando Tessadri*, exhibition catalogue, Ars Now Seragiotto, Padua, 23 March - 15 May 2010, pp. 17-29.

BONOMI GIORGIO, *The emotional grids*, in various authors (2007), *09. Rolando Tessadri*, Nicolodi editore, Rovereto, pp. 12-15.

3 KRAUSS ROSALIND E., *Grids*, in KRAUSS ROSALIND E. (1986), *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths*, The MIT Press, Cambridge - London, pp. 10-22.

4 MENNA FILIBERTO (2001, I ed. 1975), *La linea analitica dell'arte moderna. Le figure e le icone*, Einaudi, Torino.