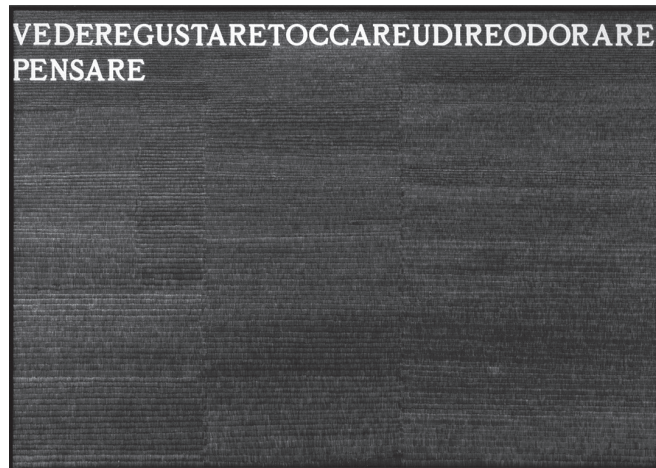


ITALIA. I sei sensi (The Six Senses)

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Alighiero Boetti. *I sei sensi*, 1978. © VEGAP, Barcelona, 2015

In effect there are five senses, and thought is the sixth.
It is humankind's most remarkable possession.

ALIGHIERO BOETTI

The exhibition *I sei sensi* (The Six Senses) stems from the Fundació Suñol's initiative to offer regular rereadings of the works of art in its collection, in this case pieces by Italian artists from the second avant-gardes.

Josep Suñol forged his past and present ties with contemporary Italian culture and creation on his many trips to Rome and other cities in Italy.

As early as the 1970s he was drawn to key works in the history of international art from the first avant-gardes, such as the oldest piece in the collection, Giacomo Balla's *Linee-forza del pugno di Boccioni II* (1915).

Through his direct contacts with artists and visits to art galleries and exhibitions, Josep Suñol began to develop an interest in acquiring more contemporary works. These pieces now give an excellent insight into Italian style and how artistic movements evolved during the 20th century.

This show takes its title from one of the series produced by Alighiero Boetti throughout the 1970s: *I sei sensi*. Boetti stressed the importance of reason (*pensare*) in his art work and saw thought as a sensitive being in art.

The exhibition follows a brief chronological structure, starting with Futurism as one of the first avant-gardes, followed by Informalism, conceptual art and the Italian Transavantgarde. Alongside Balla and Boetti, there is also work by Novelli, Longobardi, Consagra, Fontana, Staccioli, Perilli, Battaglia, Griffa and Spagnulo—a wide range of innovative formal approaches that represent the main trends in 20th-century art.

BALLA AND FUTURISM

The first room in this exhibition features two sculptures by **Giacomo Balla**. Together with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni in Milan, and later with Fortunato Depero in Rome, Balla was one of the driving forces in Futurism, an avant-garde movement that appeared in Italy shortly before the outbreak of the first world war that sought to break with tradition by pursuing new forms and styles.

Linee-forza del pugno di Boccioni II (1915) is the expression of this artistic movement, which strove to overthrow established ideas and exalted movement and speed. As its title suggests, this piece represents the punch of Balla's fellow Futurist Boccioni. Made exactly 100 years ago—first in cardboard and later in a series of nine copies in enamelled steel—its

innovative style, technique and form make it one of the most groundbreaking pieces in the Josep Suñol Collection. According to Balla's psychological reading of the colours, the *futuristic red* represented "violence, revolution, taut muscles, blood, nerves and brain".

Fiore futurista (1930) comes from one of Balla's lines of experimentation with unusual materials, new colour schemes and multiple geometric shapes closely tied to nature. It was designed to be exhibited in the open air, where the decontextualised workmanship would open up the mind to a new way of interpreting the universe, just as the Futurists had set out in their 1909 manifesto.

SPACE AND SHAPE

The Forma 1 group appeared in Italy in the late 1940s. Marxist in inspiration, it included artists such as **Pietro Consagra** and **Achille Perilli**, among others, who spurned figurative art and explored new artistic paths into abstraction and realism. The group split in 1951 and its members each went their separate ways, always in search of pure forms.

Da dies irae (1978) is a composition of 10 pieces on cardboard that Perilli created for the choral work of the same name performed that year in the Opera House in Rome. This work of geometric abstraction linked him to the performing arts and showcased his multifaceted nature: Perilli worked with sculpture, painting, design, ceramics and artwork. He also drew upon these skills when he worked with Gastone Novelli to publish *L'esperienza moderna* magazine, which had a transcendental impact on the second avant-gardes.

In this space there is also a small piece with a concrete base supporting an iron triangle by sculptor **Mauro Staccioli**, acclaimed for his large-scale public works—physical marks in urban spaces—as well as his major interventions in the landscape, which led to the concept of *scultura-segno*, which closely links space and work through the very essence of form.

In his work **Concetto spaziale. Pillola** (1967), **Lucio Fontana** embodies his spatial search by taking an everyday object from society at the time—the contraceptive pill—and slashing it with one of his *tagli*, letting the spectator cross the plane of apparent reality to question the metaphysical space inside.

Giuseppe Spagnolo, who was one of Fontana's assistants in Milan in 1959, worked right from the start on the physical and material side to sculpture. These concepts led him to create horizontal sculpture, formally very close to American Minimalism. The piece **Nerofumo** (1978) conveys his formal searches and the play of reliefs, which also reveals the artist's interest in the performative aspect of art.

NEW FIGURATIONS: GESTURE

One of the trends that burst onto the international art scene in the late 1970s was the return to figuration, which once again espoused painting as a technique, championed gesture and free lines as symbols of renewed expression and advocated subjects reflecting a need to reconnect with the roots of the past.

One of its Italian forerunners was **Gastone Novelli**. Imprisoned and sentenced to death as a member of the resistance against the Germans in 1943, at the age of 19, he was freed in 1944 and embarked upon an artistic career under the guidance of Max Bill. His work uses symbols, letters, segments, cryptographs and hieroglyphs. In **Più inutile** (1958) he expresses the need to regain freedom in painting and he intersperses his brushstrokes with seemingly suspended phrases, almost as if they'd been written on a board or a wall and partially wiped off by the passing of time, with clear references to the urban reality of graffiti.

In the same room there are also two pieces by **Nino Longobardi**, a late arrival to the Italian Transavantgarde, a movement that arose after years of dominance of conceptual art and staunchly rejected any commitment to its own present. These works reveal a return to primitive subjects, linked to everyday passions and formed materially as a hybrid between drawing and painting, utterly disdaining colour in favour of a wide scale of greys. Combined with matter, it reveals the essential nature of form over content.

CONCEPT: PENSARE

In the late 1970s, a series of artists began to experiment extensively with the language of painting. The *pittura-pittura* (or *pittura analitica*) movement included artists such as Giorgio Griffa and Carlo Battaglia. This trend had already emerged under different guises in other European countries, such as Supports/Surfaces (France, 1966) and Grupo Trama (Barcelona, 1973–1978).

In his two pieces from 1978, **Giorgio Griffa** evinces his interest in primary signs, where reduction, the order of elements and colour are the driving force behind his aesthetics, linked to the Minimalist movement. The parallel lines across the canvas leave it forever unfinished, in a space of planned vagueness.

One of the key figures on this conceptual side is **Alighiero Boetti**. Although his early work was closely linked to arte povera, he is currently acclaimed for creations that speak of the passing of time and personal experience through bare, simple language forged with artisans from other countries, where games and fate play a central role. Good examples are the embroidery **Mille novecento settantotto** (1978) and the work that gives its name to the show, **I sei sensi** (1978), made in blue ballpoint pen—a piece that deftly captures his *état d'esprit*, a conviction that artistic creation must slowly evolve thanks to our ability to think and to put in order the world around us.

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Fundació Suñol

Passeig de Gràcia 98 | 08008 Barcelona | T 93 496 10 32 | info@fundaciosunol.org | www.fundaciosunol.org

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