

## The Printing of Gesture: Art amid the Traces

*Once again I confess that working interests me  
infinitely more than the product of work.*

Paul Valéry

Among the almost perfect geometry of coloured grids, traces of so many marks are repeated, marked out in modules on the fragile surfaces of Japanese paper. They also appear on small plaster blocks placed on the horizontality of the ground, which encourage the interchanging of each piece while always maintaining the format of the group. The production of Maria Lucia Cattani is not concerned with the traditional static and ritual contemplation, on the contrary it is centred upon action, as much within the process of its origination as its reception by the public. Once it is proposed as art, it invites us to reflect upon the various ways in which it can be understood; upon its limits, the archaeology of its sources, upon the relationships between the block and the copy, the meticulous signs of the gesture of engraving, the many caprices of the technique and of making.

All the interfaces of the process of the artist's work are set up in the blocks which become templates full of colour to be printed repeatedly on the surfaces: like flickering flames on the flat support or on the quadrilangular solids, these chromatic modules depict various zones of light and shade, in nuances which successively alternate through saturation of the pigments. She builds tonal scales from one colour to another (from blue to green, almost to white); on another surface she inverts them. It is a continuous movement of vice-versa, since the idea is not resolved in one individual work - in another, what was blue becomes green, magenta becomes yellow, white, ochre, in an endless interchange. The same thing applies in relation to the traces of the artist's gesture; in a similar process of inversion, the marks of the incisions in the block become drawings in white on one hand, and in

colour in each coloured space on the other. All her enquiry can be found in this continuous reversing and inverting of tones and incisions. The almost mathematical repetition of space is contrasted with an almost spontaneous movement in the manual act of engraving. There is a co-existence of impulsive gesture and planned incision, positive and negative, original and reproduction, pigment and totality, process and final result.

By means of these counterpoints, the artistic production of Maria Lucia Cattani reveals many of the essential aspects of art. Firstly, and in passing, we see the artist go beyond some of the characteristics of the techniques of reproduction present in traditional and contemporary art. In this way the technical process frees the hand from more direct actions, from participation in making; thus the work ceases to carry the individual marks of the activity of the artist; it brings the initial idea and its final product to the fore. But Maria Lucia does not dispense with her hand in her work. She employs its traces, transformed into vestiges of rapid gestures, and in differing natures of marks; they are indirect gestures with interventions, caused by the mediation of the quick technique of rubber stamp printing. The result causes specific aesthetic effects which vary according to the receptivity of the spectator. They can reflect on ideas and sensations of the ebb and flow of images, of cadence, caused by the repetitive arrangement of units, lightness or density across the selection of colours, a suggestion of passages, amongst other things. However, these aesthetic stimuli are imponderables in the field of art. They take the form of art when they operate symbolically; they are important when they make reference to something – here, to circumstances related to the origin of the work, to the role of technical inventiveness in the artistic act, to the process of production itself; they are important when they suggest an existence in the social field. The artist, distanced from reality because she does not represent it, approaches it through means of technical intervention, which involves, above all, her own body, in the repetitive gesture which

crystallises itself in the jumbled matrices of marks and imagery. Her artistic activity, born within the technical process of the work, acquires a function which goes beyond the final result itself. Because it is constantly repeated, it appears always unfinished, and so always current. The artist does not make identical reproductions. Each block generates a series of works which are always original; on the other hand every work contains the gestation of another in a continuous chain. Each block creates a multiple work which becomes unique in its infinite growth. In this context we are led to question where the limits of her art lie: is it completed in each unit, or on each support? Or is it unfinished, and because of this, endless? Technical-aesthetic-artistic production, the work of Maria Lucia also symbolically establishes proposals of enquiry upon the meanings of art and its place in the world; this is her essential stance as a political person: promoting experiences and questions.

According to Tàpies, the artist has, in his hands, the power to transform the idea of reality. Maria Lucia Cattani transforms it, in changing the idea of printmaking; in transforming the relationships between technique and art, between process and finished product. She transforms, in unveiling the infinite inventive possibilities of an almost obsessive repetition of coloured squares. She transforms, in producing an art which doesn't close its readings, since it always proposes others. She transforms by refusing the obvious, suggesting rather than affirming. It is, before all else, work which, when we are near, silences questions to give room for its own voice and reveal its true quality precisely in the multiple horizons which take form within it.

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January de 2000

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