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Pittura Analitica: 1970s at Mazzoleni Art

The spotlight shines on
another corner of Italian
postwar art



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CATHERINE MILNER

A new exhibition at London's **Mazzoleni Gallery** highlights *pittura analitica* – a style of minimal painting that was popular in Italy during the 1970s. Closely related to American, German and French painters of the time, it was also born out of a reaction to the Italian *arte povera* movement that made works out of soil, rags, twigs, wood, wool and newspapers, but rarely paint. It was the **process of painting** that obsessed the artists in this rather high-minded group, and *Pittura Analitica: 1970s* is the first UK exhibition devoted to the genre.

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For those who like minimalist painting but have missed out on the bonanza in buying Italian postwar art over the past 10 years, then this show, with pieces priced between £16,000 and £80,000, might be an interesting place to jump in on the action (pictures by earlier Italian postwar figures like Alberto Burri now sell for millions – or in the case of Lucio Fontana, tens of millions).

The *pittura analitica* artists painted on cement and bandages and used slate, thread and flannels to make works that were extraordinarily ahead of their time in composition and aesthetic. Chief among the pieces in this show are those by Gianfranco Zappettini, such as *Superficie Analitica n. 243*, 1973 (€45,000), Giorgio Griffa's *Linee Orizzontali*, 1975 (€75,000, second picture) and Paolo Cotani's *Benda*, 1975 (price on application).

“These artists were too avant garde in the 1970s – even now you could classify them either as modern or contemporary,” says Luigi Mazzoleni, director of the London gallery, one of three major Italian art spaces to have opened in London in the past five years.

The vibrant colour saturation of Claudio Verna's *A 106*, 1971-72 (€37,000) and the green, purple and golden bars of Elio Marchegiani's *Grammatura di Colore – Supporto Lavagna*, 1974 (price on application, first picture) play with line to achieve works almost musical in their rhythm. Paolo Masi's *Tessitura*, 1974 (price on application) is, like many of these works, reminiscent of those by American artists of roughly the same era, in particular Agnes Martin or Robert Ryman, and requires nothing of you, except to gaze.

Mariolina Bassetti, head of modern and contemporary art at Christie's Italy, says that total annual sales in postwar Italian art have soared from £4.5m in 2001 to £43m last year. “Compared with international art of a similar standard, Italian artists from this period are a very cheap deal; Griffa is an amazing artist. They have only been known to the Italian public until now, but they are beginning to create a lot of interest internationally.”

May 18-July 23 at Mazzoleni London, 27 Albemarle Street, London W1 (020-7495 8805; www.mazzoleniart.com).