

## **MICHAEL VENEZIA**

### ***Compilations***

curated by Davide Silvioli

*Opening Saturday 1 April 2023 – 11:30 A.M.*

Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto

**1 April – 31 May 2023**

Michael Venezia is one of the most productive and still active painters amongst the artists involved within the American Minimalism movement, along such painters as Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, and Donald Judd, lifetime friends and work colleagues in New York since the 1960s.

His work is based on experimentations in which painting is reduced to its basic principles of colour and bidimensionality, where the physical act of painting has been substituted by spray pistols as early as 1966, and on the objective emphasis of the painting action through the use of bars and blocks of wood upon which colour is applied, a process started in the mid-1980s. Such works, which can be assembled like modular installations, make up the main theme of the solo exhibition titled *Compilations* and hosted at Palazzo Collicola, which also happens to be Venezia's first solo exhibition in an Italian public institution. The 15 "compositions" exhibited here were in fact created in Italy.

The exhibition represents a proper homage to an artist whose links to our country are family related (his ancestors, although born in the US, came from Naples and Sciacca), personal (Michael lives near Trevi for part of the year), but also because even in Umbria, prompted by the sight of a block of oak, he had the idea, inspired by Giotto's and Cimabue's frescos, of turning similar blocks into the material that mostly defines his work: long parallelepipedal wooden modules of standard and variable length, covered by superimposed layers of colour, arranged next to each other to form chromatic stripes. After the series "Twills" (diagonal weavings), made as early as 1965, followed by "Stripes" and "Sprays" (spray paint), "Blocks" stands as Venezia's ultimate quest: the artist imagines his compositions to represent words devoid of a narrative or meanings that are not related to the structure of colour itself, the latter embodied on painted shelves and tridimensional volumes that give colour its substance through their objective existence. These works, without denying their own conceptual value, manage to tie it with chromatic impressions and lyrical clues, and leave the viewer complete freedom to re-assemble a story made of silent and inner images, as if these were abstract icons or horizontal landscapes.

*The show has been made in collaboration with Alessandra Bonomo Gallery.*

## Biographical Note

Michael Venezia was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1935, and graduated at the New York Art Students League in 1954; he still lives and works in New York but spends part of the year in his studio house in Trevi.

After living and working in London between 1966 and 1967, in 1971 his works were included in the MoMA collection in New York, where at the time he was working with colleagues and friends including Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman and Sol LeWitt, the main interpreters of Minimal Art in the 1960s. After his first solo exhibitions in 1966, Venezia started to use spray pistols, thus limiting his output more and more to narrow and long painted bars, a pattern which he still widely favours, and which defines his “tridimensional” painting. In 1977, Venezia began his partnership with the Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, where solo exhibitions were held both in the New York branch in 1977 and 1979, and in the Rome branch in 1992, as well as collective exhibitions like *The Spirit of Drawings* in 1993. The 1980s see Venezia committing his efforts towards several anthological exhibitions in public institutions at the Detroit Institute of the Arts in 1980, the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of New York in 1981, the Dia Center for the Arts - Dan Flavin Art Institute of Long Island in 1983, and the Hartnett Art Gallery of the University of Rochester in 1986. In 1992, Venezia was invited to the first collective exhibition *Slow Art: Painting in New York Now* at the P.S. 1 on Long Island, New York, then in 1998 to a combined exhibition with Dan Flavin and Donald Judd at the Galerie Rolf Ricke in Koln. In the 1990s, Venezia was the main artist of several anthological exhibitions in Germany, amongst them Wuppertal in 1994, the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster, the Museum Moderner Kunst in Otterndorf in 1997, and finally in Switzerland at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur in 1996. In the noughties, Venezia’s work was shown at numerous solo and collective exhibitions at the Galleria Häusler Contemporary in Zurich, Munich and Lustenau, and the Galerie Greta Meert in Brussels. His works can be found, apart from the MoMA in New York, at the LeWitt Collection, the Australian National Gallery of Canberra, the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, the Kunsthaus in Zurich, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Detroit Institute of the Arts and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, as well as many other museums in Germany and Switzerland.