

The Colourless Surfaces



# Piero Manzoni *Archive*

## **Piero Manzoni's Achromes**

At the beginning the *Achrome* is a simply white textured surface covered with rough gesso or impregnated with liquid kaolin.

The *Achrome* is an empty space without lines or colours, devoid of any sign that might imply a meaning or a reminiscence of the artist's work on the materials of art. The canvas, once imbued with liquid kaolin and glue, was left to dry. The raw material was transformed into a work of art by itself, throughout a self-sufficient process.

While in Fontana's and Pollock's works the gesture of the artist participates to the corporeality of the artwork, Manzoni arrested and blocked the creative power of its own participation. The *Achrome* expresses itself as a pure signifier.

Therefore the *Achrome* avoids the risk of repetitivity.

It is not the work that is repetitive, but the gesture of the artist, who executes something "already seen".

The "Colourless surfaces" ("Superfici achrome", as they were termed for the first time in 1959) are a "total space", a tautological area repeatable to infinity, and infinitely unresolved.

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*Achrome 1957.*  
*Gesso on canvas (130 x 97 cm.)*

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*Achrome, 1960.*  
*Kaolin on canvas (130.5 x 97.6 cm.)*

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By 1958 the canvas had been criss-crossed or marked with grooves, bulges and wrinkles which make reference only to themselves.

Later the *Achromes* had assumed the identity of a squarely divided stitched surface (the grid displayed the fragmented nature of the work), until the artist arrived finally at the artificial *Achromes*, made of "alternative" materials: cotton padding, polystyrene, acrylic resin, fluffy fibreglass, kaolin and bread rolls.

In these works Manzoni chose his material for its capacity for its visual self-determination, reducing to nothing the transformation process.

Manzoni's continuous search for new ways and materials for his *Achromes* held on to the "tautological closure" that inspired his first works.

The *Achromes* of a later series are imbued with phosphorescent colours and soaked in cobalt chloride, causing them to change colour with the passage of time. The hue varies from blue to pink with atmospheric changes and glows in the dark, showing the self-sufficient re-generative power of the elements.

*Stefano Cappelli*



*Achrome 1961-62. Eggs, acrylic resin.  
(17.5 x 18.5 x 3.1 cm.)*

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*Achrome, 1961. Stitched canvas,  
cobalt chloride  
(93.4 x 74.4 cm.)*

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*Achrome 1961-62. Bread rolls, kaolin  
on canvas (31 x 31 cm.)*

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## Credits

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## Bibliography

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Cover: Piero Manzoni, *Achrome*, 1962,  
Fibreglass on board (31 x 34 cm.)

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