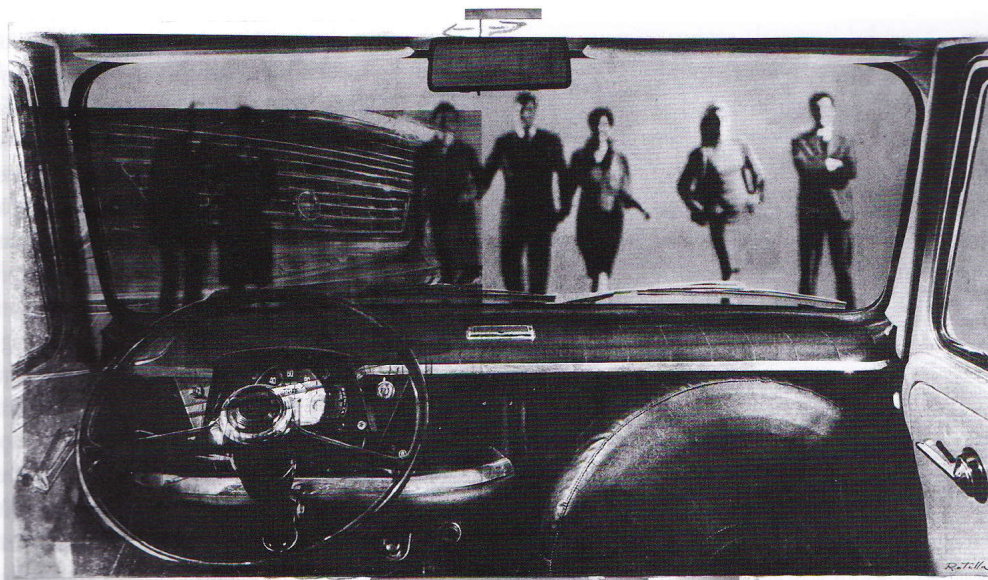


Mimmo Rotella
*Divertiamoci (Amuse
Ourselves)* 1966



And so Dahlgren's show manages to lead us back to those notions of collectivism that have so long been a part of liberal Scandinavian society. Perhaps it is coincidental, but these are ideas that Eno shares. Not only has he long railed against the idea of the individual genius (preferring his neologism 'scenius', a group of people working towards a common goal), but I once heard him give a talk in which he noted that he had been reading Scandinavian research which said that the things that most promote longevity are camping and group singing, because they have to be done communally, and we are by nature communal beings.

These ideas make sense, and do so also in Dahlgren's show. But how much of a smashed piñata does modernist autonomy feel to be at this point? How surprised anew, or even interested, is it possible to be at the contrary position, that life is messy and improvisatory and we need to muddle through it together? Dahlgren works in a number of different painterly and sculptural modes, but they are consistently colourful, abstract and worldly, and the superficial variety disguises something more reified.

There's pleasure in his compound aesthetic language here: the paintings' even, nested curves interfuse geometric abstraction with something that feels derived from the field of Scandi design; there's a modest bodily thrill in seeing laborious control unravel as the cables hit the floor and morph into a DIY-superstore burlesque of Jackson Pollock; the idea that the antithesis of something lies not outside it but within it is neat; and the work in general has a chromatic zing. For all this, Dahlgren's art nevertheless feels like he worked something out long ago and is now merely performing variations of it in public. Ironically, for something so wired, 'Third Uncle' lacks electricity. ■

MARTIN HERBERT is a writer and critic based in Berlin.

London Round-up

Ronchini Gallery • Robilant + Voena • Mazzoleni

'I wish it to be known,' wrote **Pier Paolo Calzolari** in a statement published in 1969, 'that I want expansion, democracy, madness, alchemy, insanity, rhythmic, horizontality.' This invocation of a lyrically conceived reality by one of the most elusive figures associated with Arte Povera helpfully stretches the common perception of that Italian phenomenon as primarily occupied with materials in the cultural interface of art and real life. From the outset, Calzolari has used a diverse range of media and actions – painting, sound, text, video, plants and creatures, *tableaux vivants*, lead, music scores and moss as well as the neon and refrigeration structures generating his favourite instruments, light and frost – as channels of experience where meaning is indeterminate and suspended. Consequently, he evades a signature style, and while his concerns often intersect with the revelatory and transformational relationship with matter found in his contemporaries Giuseppe Penone and Gilberto Zorio, Calzolari's autobiographically inspired work inhabits the poetic dimension of awakened sensibilities largely untainted by utilitarian allusions or shared associations. 'I don't want moments of awareness,' he asserted in the same statement, 'I wish to be elemental; I say that I want to commit deeds of passion.'

Confined to eight modest, wall-mounted works spanning 46 years and mostly using paper as a support, the show at Ronchini Gallery only gestures towards the analogies in material, space, time and emotion that work upon each other, often aggressively, in this artist's fully realised pieces. Nonetheless, this selection by David Anfam is valuable as an introduction to a major Italian artist who has rarely exhibited outside continental Europe – and never before on his own in the UK – and helps to justify

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a much needed large-scale confrontation in this country with his work. Two studies among those lent by the artist are related to *La Casa Ideale*, 1968. An indexical work from early in his career, it conveyed through a number of distinct set pieces an idea of a domestic environment in which everyday materials are transfigured, as if in a troubled dream, by a web of associations into multivalent objects of culture. Components drawn in outline on sheets of paper textured with salt and framed in lead in *Untitled (project for My bed as it should be)*, 1968, are found as actual objects in the work of that title from the same year, such as the line of enigmatic text and the moss-covered stick curved into a sensual suggestion of a body. Details alluding to people in other works combine organic and technical forms – spectacles offer vision through red petals for lenses, a model train shuttling back and forth suggests the passage of time and distance, and buttons imply clothing and, by being circular, infinity. Frost-white paper scorched by a lighted candle recalls the sting of ice burn and, elsewhere, the name Anne curves round crossed diagonals.

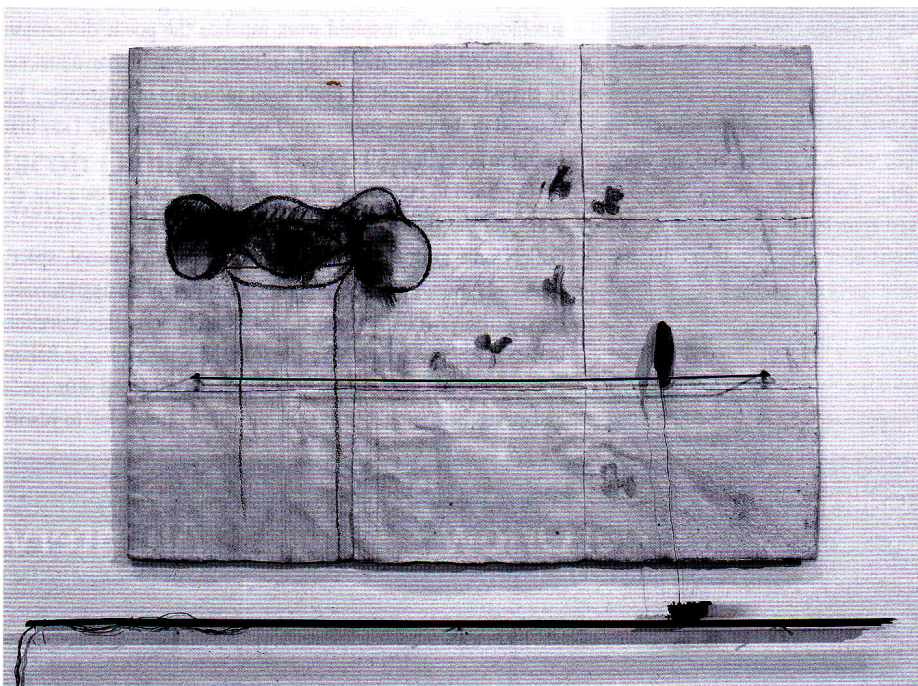
This exhibition coincides with presentations of two more proponents of Italy's vibrant postwar Avant Garde, a scene that remains little studied in the UK. **Mimmo Rotella's** work prefigured many Pop Art tropes after he began to strip film posters from Rome's walls in 1953 and rearrange the layered accretions into fissured visual fields of fragmented printed colour. A process of deconstruction ensued, distinct from the strategies followed by Wolf Vostell, Raymond Hains and the *affichistes* in Paris, which converted the results glued to canvas, wood and, occasionally, over pitch or metal into abstract evocations of the material and social flux of the city.

Previous Rotella exhibitions in London, most notably at Ben Brown Fine Art in 2007, have concentrated on these lacerated collages in which figuration resurfaced in the late 1950s and the photo-based *reportages* canvases that followed. The value of Robilant + Voena's extensive show lies in its quality and range. By extending beyond the mid 1960s, the show portrays Rotella's pursuit of yoking artistic practice to contemporary reality by integrating the iconography of mass media content through frequent technical variations that were influential for a generation of Italian artists.

In the 'Artypo' series, 1966-, for instance, Rotella cropped superimposed images in printers' recycled colour runs into impromptu compositions. Reviving his 'reportage' series in *Seized*, 1979, he reproduced a single news photograph of a rifle and gun sight on canvas to reflect in bleak black and white on Italy's bloody *anni di piombo* (or 'years of lead', in reference to the bullets used in the era) of urban terrorism. His so-called 'blanks', 1980-81, commented ironically on art-world trends: by papering a single-colour sheet over advertising posters, he cancelled content just as Transvanguardia was celebrating it in painting. By the late 1980s, urban texture was derived equally from street forms of graffiti and its artistic diffusion by painters like Jean-Michel Basquiat. Rotella used *décollage* as a support for painting which, when glued to the zinc panels modelled on ubiquitous metal street hoardings, seemed emblematic of Italian public life.

As a prominent collaborator with *Azimut(h)*, the short-lived Milan publication and gallery initiated by Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni in 1959, **Agostino Bonalumi** was instrumental in bringing about a watershed for Italy's progressive artists when conceptual research into non-allusive three-dimensional abstraction supplanted informal painting as their primary focus. Bonalumi's origins were in painting but he trained as a technical draughtsman and these disciplines seemed to merge in the exquisitely engineered 'extroversions', 1959-, monochrome canvases coated in single bold tones of vinyl tempera. A systematic substructure of geometric, straight-edged or curved forms like folds, blisters or models of modernist cities then pushed the physical dimensions of the surface with orchestrated rhythms into protuberances in high relief. By emphasising a painting's dynamic physicality in terms of tensions between material, volume and space articulated by colour and light, Bonalumi was pursuing an idea of pure form. His practice was as much a theoretical as practical exploration of the space in which art is experienced, and his long career (he died in 2013) exemplified the role of an artist in contemporary society as overcoming the alienation of doing and thinking.

A barrier to experiencing these ideas is the sheer visual elegance of the work. The earliest wall-based picture-object in the exhibition



Pier Paolo Calzolari
Trenini (Toy Train)
1972

at Mazzoleni dates from 1968 when Bonalumi had simplified previously multifaceted surfaces into fluent overflowing volumes or sequential tensions. The show's generous spacing of individual canvases and the less familiar free standing sculptures in fibreglass and bronze highlights the convergence of constructive idioms in Bonalumi's aesthetic, memorably demonstrated in *Black*, 1969, an immense, curvaceous, tilted, prow-like shape in densely black resin. Yet an inevitable misapprehension arises that the work is in dialogue with the advanced values of product design, a distracting impression circumvented by a less refined and denser arrangement that would thrust sequential rhythmic patterns into the viewer's space. Perhaps for this reason, Bonalumi's room-sized environments represent the most concentrated application of his spatial concept, exemplified by his installation at the Venice Biennale in 1970 or by *Blue space*, 1967, shown by Robilant + Voena in 2013, Bonalumi's first British solo show for 53 years. ■

MARTIN HOLMAN is a writer based in London and Florence.

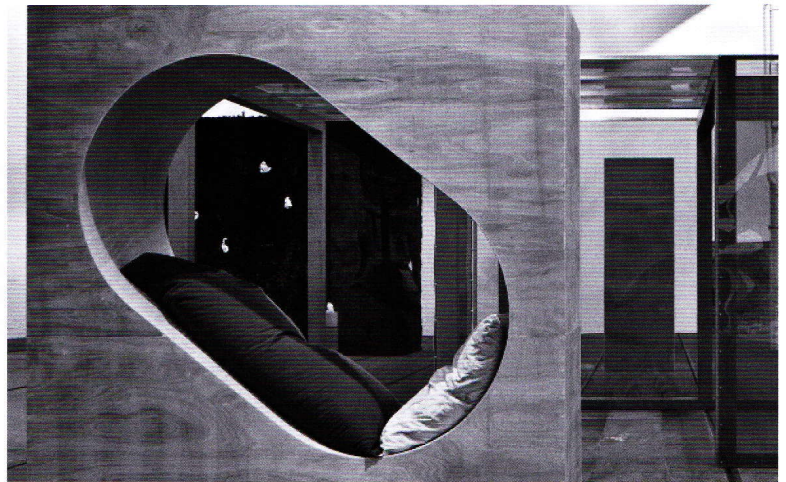
Glasgow and Edinburgh Round-up

Tramway • Kendall Koppe • Mary Mary • Collective

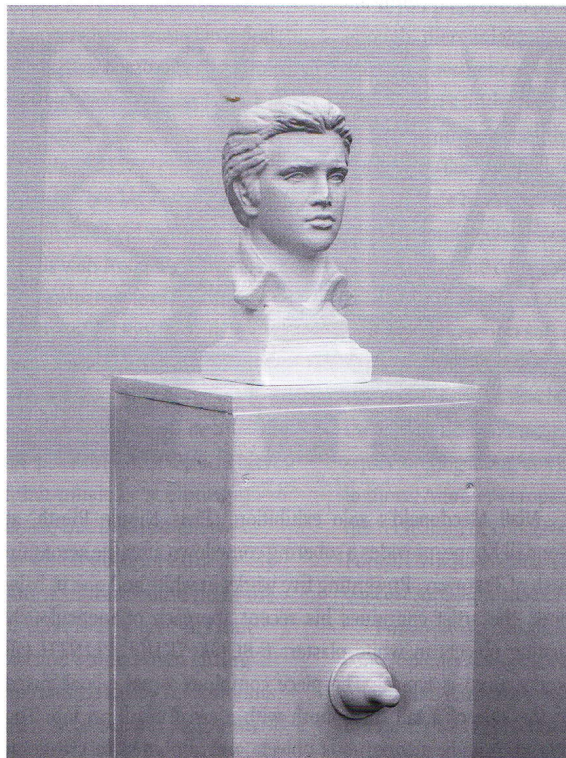
I go to Scotland quite a bit and it always rains. Winter or summer, what starts off as drizzle soon becomes a downpour. **Laura Aldridge's** solo exhibition 'California wow!' at Tramway offers a visual dose of Vitamin D amid the unrelenting grey clouds. The Glasgow-based artist packs the cavernous main gallery with an impressive assemblage of sculptures, collages and photographs. The shag-pile carpet and bold chromatic hues hint at West Coast design, and the artist's time as an exchange student at CalArts in California has had a lasting influence.

The installation immerses the viewer, threatening to overwhelm the senses; it feels like walking around Habitat having drunk too much coffee or, as the artist Tom O'Sullivan suggested to me, being in IKEA on acid. In the middle of the gallery, *Seemingly (viewing)*, 2015, made in collaboration with Iain Macleod, presents a large pavilion clad in neon Perspex. Dissolving boundaries between inside and out, the work simultaneously frames the spectator as both viewer and performer. Here, the act of looking becomes heightened with the pink filter providing a further lustre to the installation.

Taken collectively, Aldridge's work offers a direct sensuality. The pervasive use of fabric evokes bed sheets, towelling and T-shirts – items that conceal and clean the body. Clay is often folded and kneaded, suggesting orifices and genitalia. One can draw parallels with Lynda Benglis (*Interview AM384*) and Ken Price's biomorphic sculptures or Eric Bainbridge's conflation of modernist and mass-market aesthetics. Titles are particularly important to Aldridge and their stream-of-consciousness format can take up sentences. Reading the floor plan is a dizzying



Laura Aldridge
installation view



Niall Macdonald
Elvis Nipple Plinth 2015

experience and, like a high-budget hip-hop album, the artist's extended network of collaborators is duly acknowledged.

'You've always understood that a body is a place for pleasure.' This phrase is taken from *Taking back our bodies (refund please)*, 2014, a digital print on silk composed of messages from a conversation between the artist and Joe Scotland. It strikes a different note to the majority of work on display in 'California wow!'. The artist explicates her position, which is that visual hedonism is claimed as liberating. If, as David Batchelor has argued, western art has been chromo-phobic, then the artist's California-confections offer a resolute alterity. Pleasure, for Aldridge, is a political responsibility.

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