

## **Bruno Munari. Exact fantasy**

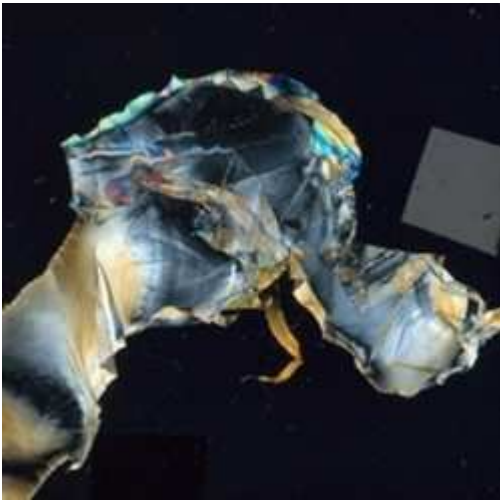
by Miroslava Hajek

[APM Edition 2008, translated by Clara Carpanini]

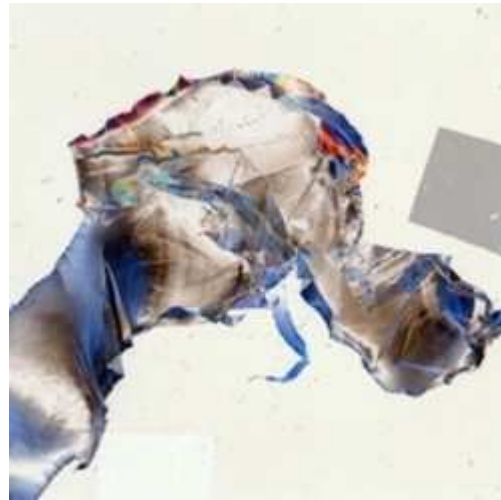
*Fantasy enables to think something that was not there before, without limit, establishing connections between known things in order to create something new. [Bruno Munari, Fantasia, Laterza, Bari 1977]*

So Bruno Munari defined fantasy, a concept that also fits perfectly his artistic research of which we find evidence in the educational book that he dedicated to this subject.

Ludovico Ragghianti was the first to realize the deep consistency and continuity of Munari's works. Where many people were confused and puzzled by the extraordinary creativity of this artist, Ragghianti succeeded in identifying some important features of his poetic and philosophy. He explained Munari's research and his method to face and solve aesthetic problems with the goethian term of *exact fantasy* even if he admitted to know his work only partially.



*polarized light projections  
bruno munari 1953*



*a different image of the same composition  
obtained through the rotation of a polarized  
lens, bruno munari 1953*

On the occasion of this exhibition we chose to present the light environments: Direct Projections and Polarized Light Projections. Two kind of works developed in space that anticipated the following light installations. They are made of different materials assembled in the shape of common slides that, once projected, become monumental. The idea of projecting these works comes in consequence of Munari's previous experiments started with the exploration of shade in the cycle called Useless Machines and retrieved in Concave-Convex in 1947. This object is made of a bent square of metal net. Hung in a dark room and illuminated by a spotlight, the object vibrates with optical effects but its shadow, filling the surrounding area and creating parallel effects, becomes so important to trigger an emotional reaction in the audience, a reaction that the object itself would not have been able to convey.

As Munari was more and more fascinated by the play of light and shadow, his logical step to the following research culminated just in 1950 with the slides for Direct Projections. They are realized with various techniques, collage and painting above all. The materials are different, coloured cellophanes, leaves, burnt plastic, onion peels, woolen thread, nets, etc. The originals remain hidden in the projector so we can only see the enlarged image which becomes a huge fresco painted with light.

In these works Munari explores the dematerialization process and its transposition, absolutely new in dimension and importance. In 1950 Munari tries to move these images using varifocal slides that

affect perception according to the depth of focus. He also introduces the movement to project these slides in sequence as if they were frames of a movie. However the real movement appears only in 1953 as Munari inserts the slides between two Polaroid Filters. Rotating the filter fixed before the projector, the polarized light goes through the materials in the frame and decomposes into the colours of the spectrum changing continuously the work.



*direct projections, bruno munari 1950*



*direct projections, bruno munari 1950*

*My aim is to get images whose changes in colour occur naturally and not according to somebody's will. The technical solution consists of using polarized filters and introducing colourless materials, with variable stratifications, between two filters. These stratifications and thicknesses determine and define the coloured areas while the rotation of a filter enables the colours to change on a complete chromatic cycle... [Frank Popper, Origins and development of kinetic art, Studio Vista, London 1968]*

Consequently the filter rotation creates an illusory movement and Munari, aware of being the first in art history to carry out this research, tries to improve it at its best. The neutralization of the kaleidoscopic effect in projections is solved by letting the audience into the environments causing continuous interferences and unpredictable mutations in the work.

According to Munari it is not only a matter of involving the viewers to arouse their interest in art because he is well aware of the risk that such a play can slip out of his control. In Continuous Structure there is perhaps the greatest interaction between the artist and the viewer as the audience is not only a means to introduce movement into the work but becomes a real co-author.

In the Projections Munari explores again his recurrent subjects, first of all the movement connected to perception of space and time, activating not only the sight but also the other senses from different perspectives and starting always from the essential. He plays with contrasts and paradoxes as if they were opposite sides of the same problem. Another key idea is the evocation of a three-dimensional space starting from the flat surface to create perceptual ambiguity.

In all Munari's works the relation with technology is crucial. Unlike the Futurists he tries to consider the technological evolution without idolizing or fetishizing it, as a means to expand artistic expression for example with the subtle irony of the title Useless Machines. On this topic he publishes an entire series of manifestoes in 1952 such as: "Machine-art", "Mechanism", "Organic art", "Disintegrism", "Total art".

*The use of materials, that take shape in space and make visible something unknown, could even involve just a ray of light. It all is related to polarized light and to those things that represent moments of transformation for an image which existed before and then will not be there anymore but at the time can communicate something. But most importantly I think we must consider the transition from a three-dimensional shape, through a metamorphosis, as if it were fluid, to another one so there is not a well-defined shape but a moment of passage and this is only recognizable through the movement and through making it not through the object in itself. Consequently the*

*object becomes a means to create this situation* [Conversation with Bruno Munari, exhibition catalogue Bruno Munari. Instalace, Galerie Klatovy/Klenova, 1997]



*direct projections, bruno munari 1950*



*direct projections, bruno munari 1950*

Even if he conceived a new way to be artist, Munari never denied his reference to the classic aesthetics in dialogue with the past art using precise harmonic and mathematical relations. The issue is old but the aesthetic and philosophical concept behind his work is new, capable to gain understanding of existence and to cause changes in history.

The idea of art confined to painting and sculpture only did not suit Munari then he demolished the romantic vision of the artist as a demiurge and decided to remain in the background as if he were a medieval artist. Perhaps because of his demythologizing attitude he is better known as a designer and pedagogue than as an artist.

According to Munari art is mainly about visual communication that is to say about the relationship with those audience members traditionally excluded from art fruition. Following the rise in educational level but lacking of suitable cultural education, a great gap, an abyss originates between art and people. An exclusion that spreads a deep sense of hostility towards art. Munari is aware of this gap and tries to go over it through the interaction between audience and work. Moreover he realizes that fantasy and creativity are harshly opposed by prejudices and stereotypes so he explores a painless way to remove them.

[Miroslava Hajek 2008]