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Diving into a sea of pixel waves: Chevalier’s art in Milan

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Taking apart a work of art like a puzzle, walking on its path of lights and colors, modifying it at your own will with a simple gesture: it seems a game, instead it is reality. It is the augmented reality, the one that exploits the cyberpowers allows to create endless virtual worlds.

Someone calls it generative art, someone else interactive, and there are those who call it computer art. Simply, it is a dive, a dip in a sea of fluorescent pixels, kaleidoscopic, dispersed on the floor according to a moving and fluid track, and that surround those who enter it according to the same principle of the circles in the water. These are the Pixel Waves of Miguel Chevalier, on display from today until 28 August, at the UniCredit Pavilion in Milan (Ge Aulenti Square, MM Garibaldi).

The artist

In the early 1980s, computers were increasingly present in the media and began to talk about the company’s contemporary information laboratories. In the early 1980s, the artists had always used the tools of their time. In the early 1980s, computers were increasingly present in the media and began to talk about the company’s contemporary information. Determined in my approach to creating purely digital works, I managed to conquer the confidence of engineers at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research), through which I had access to the optical center during the nights (from midnight to 6 in the morning), to the big computers".

But at that time only the United States was avant-garde in the IT industry: “In 1983, I was able to continue my research activity at the Pratt Institute in New York and the School of Visual Arts that had just created a digital department. I was able to finally access the first drawing software on the computer.

Miguel Chevalier is an experimenter, an artist who has studied Fine Arts and who then embarked on the search for a new spatiality and the cancellation of borders. Not by chance Lucio Fontana and Yves Klein are references to him, those who have gone beyond painting, beyond the dimension of the painting, to open themselves to a potentially infinite space.
And it is this research of the infinite, or rather, of the infinite possibilities of expression provided by the digital medium, which led Chevalier to explore the virtual world and spread it among the public thanks to an art that intends to be generative and participative, in which the public is subject to an active interaction.

Chevalier noted how in the history of art artists were first and foremost artists of their time (and the famous phrase All Art Has Been Contemporary by Maurizio Nannucci comes to mind). “Art reflects the society in which we are living”, he says. From futurists, who interpreted the changes of industrial society, first of all the new perception of speed and movement, to Pop Art and New Realism (Mimmo Rotella, César, have seen consumption. Ours, according to the artist, is the society of information,

technology, systems and flows of communication, and through digital art artists can create exciting works and open themselves to new generations. “Today we live in a society of information and technology of information.

Experienced Manipulator of the virtual instrument, Chevalier from the late 1980s to today has transformed numerous public spaces around the world, including the Chapel of King’s College in Cambridge (2015), the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Casablanca (2014) and Castel del Monte in Andria in Puglia (2014) are not that some recent examples of how digital has represented an innovative and interactive mode of enjoyment and enhancement: “Thanks to digital art I have been able to revisit these places”. For example, for Casablanca the artist was inspired by the decorative motifs of Islamic art and Le mille and one night, while for Castel del Monte he revisited the tradition of mosaic, which, the artist notes, “can be seen as a prefiguration of the pixel”.

The exhibition
In the case of the exhibition Onde Pixel – The Sguardo di... Miguel Chevalier, the artist compared not only with the architectural structure designed by Michele De Lucchi (we will see later as) but first with the artistic heritage of UniCredit, through the rereading and quotation of some works mediated by the digital instrument.

The first part of the exhibition is the real exhibition, consisting of the dialogue between the works of art chosen within the collection of the banking group and the works of Miguel Chevalier, arranged according to three thematic sections: nature/artifice, pixel op’art, flows and networks.

Photographs, three-dimensional sculptures, filmed on LCD screens and canvas works are set up in such a way as to create a direct visual comparison between the two groups of works, allowing to recognize the game of formal references and quotes. Suggestive, for example, is the dialogue on the ancient entertained by portraits of Mimmo Jodice, belonging to the Herculaneum series (1986) and the Mediterranean (1993), and the computer reworks of the face of Giano by Miguel Chevalier; or the comparison of the optical language of a lithography of 1971 by Victor Vasarely with Pixels Op’Art (2011), a tapestry in wool, silk and bamboo Still, the undulatory movement that unites a White Surface of 1990 by Enrico Castellani and the work Pixels Wave 2 (2016) of ours.

The second part of the exhibition is developed as an extension of the works displayed in the first, whose motifs are interpreted and translated through luminous textures, serpentine shapes and fluo colors in the installation Onde Pixel. This is a multimedia carpet consisting of the floor projection of a series of sixty patterns alternating each minute, altering the perception of space. Other reasons, however, draw inspiration from a symbolic reading of what is the digital universe, that of binary codes and computers (e.g. @, on/off, etc.).

The installation is not only a combination of lights and colors, but also of music composed by Jacopo Baboni Schilingi, who like Miguel Chevalier, has always been open to a type of multidisciplinary experimentation that combines sounds, images, architecture and interaction with the public. The rhythm is marked by the alternation of “fixed” sounds and sounds that arise from the interaction of visitors with the projections, always taking advantage of the sensors that along the track localize the presence of the visitor and start the deconstruction and redefinition of the installation.

Pixel lives on the interaction of the public, the only one that can give it a form every time new, different and never equal to itself: «This interactivity is also a ludic dimension, which stimulates the public to further explore their own gestures and their postures to better interact with my works.

Domenico Quaranta, in the introductory text to the catalog, defines the visitor as “perturbante force”, which intervenes as an “invisible force field” that modifies the flows of pixels and sounds.

A work, therefore, with four hands, strong of the fusion of the two languages, the visual one and the sound one, that according to Jacopo Baboni Schilingi give rise to true richness, since "the wealth is born with the mix, the fusion and the integration of cultures, knowledge and forms of art coming from different borders".

The installation also has a very close connection with the architecture that hosts it, as always in Chevalier’s projects: “The UniCredit Pavilion is a contemporary architecture, which shares with my other installations the notion of immersive space for images and music.

The curvilinear forms and modular structures of the UniCredit Pavilion also recall “a great ship with which one wants to navigate”. And the metaphor of navigation also returns in the title: Pixel Waves, in fact, in reference to the wavering movement of projections that seem to give life to a virtual sea with uncontrollable movements. Even the music makes fluctuations, accompanies the visitor's movement and after its passage calms in the quiet, while the tableau reappears in its initial state.

“The exhibition proposes a dialogue between some of my creations and a privileged choice for the collection of UniCredit – explains the French artist – We chose works with the curator Serena Massimi and her super équipe, and the collaborators who manage the collection Padiglione UniCredit”. “The strength of this exhibition is the involvement of people, their physical and emotional participation in art”, concludes Serena Massimi, Head of UniCredit Pavilion, Events & Art Management.