

AGOSTINO BONALUMI - BIOGRAPHY

1935-1945

Agostino Bonalumi was born to Abele Bonalumi and Gemma Pelucchi on 10 July 1935 in Vimercate, Brianza, a highly industrialized area to the north of Milan. His father, a pastry chef, was a left wing activist who opposed the political regime and was a secret member of the Italian Communist Party. This meant that he was often forced to move from town to town in the area, sometimes working for himself and sometimes for famous pastry shops in the area. Agostino was the eldest boy (he had an elder sister Rosa and two younger brothers, Teodoro and Pierenrico). Abele struggled to support the family, so Agostino assisted his father at work while also attending compulsory schooling. He developed a love of painting very early on. Indeed, he has stated in numerous interviews that drawing and painting helped him to learn about the world from a very young age.

1946-1957

At the end of the war, having finished compulsory schooling, Agostino started attending a vocational training school, although he was unable to finish his studies. His love of painting existed alongside his need to work. When he was not working he painted and sought out opportunities to exhibit his works (in 1948, when he was just 13 years old, one of his works featured in the Premio Nazionale Città di Vimercate). He had his first solo show at the Galleria Totti in Milan in 1957, marking the start of his gravitation towards this city.

1958-1959

In Milan, within the artistic environment that developed around the Brera district, he got to know Enrico Baj, one of the founders of the so-called Nuclear Movement. Baj introduced him to Piero Manzoni, who had links with the group at the time, while a chance encounter at a restaurant with Enrico Castellani led to the birth of a close-knit partnership, which saw the three young artists (Bonalumi was the youngest) start exhibiting their works together as if they were a group, both in Italy (Galleria Pater, Galleria del Prisma, Galleria Appia Antica) and abroad (Galerie Kasper, Lausanne). The partnership came to a sudden end due to personal reasons, just before the publication of the first issue of Azimuth magazine (December 1959). Although he remained close to the other two for a few years, Bonalumi worked as a solo artist from that point onwards, with no ties to any groups or movements. It was during this period that his later "style" first developed, with a series of works - started in late 1959 - featuring an extroflexed canvas.

1960-1964

While he was rapidly gaining a reputation as an emerging young talent in Italian art thanks to a series of far-reaching exhibitions (group shows in Berne, Chicago, Antwerp, Lausanne, London and Basel, and two solo shows, one in Rotterdam in the middle of 1959 and one in London), he met Giuliana Oliva at work (he could not yet afford to give up his main job) and married her in 1961. It was at this point that he decided to devote himself entirely to art, despite the concern expressed by his family. However, his wife supported his decision from the start. His firstborn son Fabrizio arrived in 1962. His method of working gradually established itself in 1962 and 1963, while 1964 saw him sign his first contract with Arturo Schwarz for the exhibition at his gallery, which opened in February 1965.

1965-1970

His first cycle of works reached "maturity" during this period and featured in a series of exhibitions at some of Italy's most important galleries, as well as international events (including Zero avantgarde, Weiss auf Weiss, IX Bienal de São Paulo) and the 33'a Venice Biennale in 1966. In 1967, during Lo spazio dell'immagine exhibition in Foligno, he created his first environmental work, Blu abitabile, which was followed by a small series of other environmental works (such as the piece for the museum in Dortmund), culminating in the large work for his solo section at the 35" Venice Biennale in 1970. In October 1967, brought about as a result of his participation in the Biennale of the previous year, he held a major solo show at Alfredo Bonino's gallery in New York, moving to the city for a few months. Meanwhile, from 1996 onwards he signed an exclusive deal with Renato Cardazzo at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan, who acted as his agent until 1973. Privately he always sought to fill the gaps in his education, developing an interest in and studying philosophy - with a particular focus on phenomenology -, art theory and poetry. His second son Pierenrico was born in 1967.

1971-1989

Early on in the decade he began to develop his new "grid" cycle, which he would continue until 1989. It was during this period that he became a Consolidated figure within the art establishment that was now distracted by other trends (such as Arte Povera in the 1970s and Transavantgarde expressionism in the 1980s). He produced a series of environmental "projects", beginning in 1975 with written theoretical reflections on his work and the general situation, as well as writing his first poems, which were first published in 1986 (followed by another seven collections) and also working on alternative projects, such as the set designs for two contemporary ballets (in 1970 and 1972). In 1976 Luca Palazzoli from the Galleria Blu in Milan signed an exclusivity agreement with him, which remained in place until 1997, Meanwhile, in 1988 he developed symptoms of the cancer that would eventually kill him. However, he underwent a successful operation that delayed the end for many years.

1990-2004

Having completed the "grid" cycle, he developed a much freer model, based on a Steel tube structure that enabled him to produce almost gestural extroflexions. He reworked the sculptures he had produced from 1965 onwards and modified them, introducing the use of cast bronze, as well as his usual fibreglass and PVC. A series of exhibitions in newer Italian galleries, such as Fumagalli in Bergamo and Niccoli in Parma (as well as the Galleria Blu), marked the slow rediscovery of his work, culminating in his first major anthological exhibition at the Institut Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt in 2003. He received the President of the Republic Award at the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, in 2002. A second operation in 2000 marked the return of his cancer. His first granddaughter, Matilde, was born to Pierenrico in 2003.

2005 – 2013

Bonalumi used the Steel tube technique to create his last cycle of works, based on the module concept and on a more geometric design than the previous cycle. He continued his sculptures while "living with" the disease, which began to take over his life. He underwent another two operations in 2005 and 2011. After the first of these operations he decided to move his studio, which had been in Milan since the 1970s, to Desio, where he now lived. His Milan studio

became the headquarters of the Archivio Bonalumi, managed by his son Fabrizio. His second grandchild Alessandro, Matilde's younger brother, was born in 2007. He began working with other galleries during this period, including Mazzoleni in Turin and Robilant+Voena in London, which, together with changing tastes that were more open to the art of the 1960s, helped to make him internationally famous, leading to exhibitions in Brussels, Singapore, Moscow and New York. Bonalumi collapsed during a routine hospital visit and died on 18 September 2013 in Monza, meaning that he never got to see his major solo show at Robilant+Voena in London, which opened on 4 October.