



## **Alberto Biasi and the Art of Inebriating the Eye**

**Interview with Italian artist, Alberto Biasi. At the GR Gallery in Manhattan on show three of his series**

He gets his inspiration from the fire and the rain, h creates movement out of stillness, and he finally feels understood. At the opening of Alberto Biasi – A Dynamic Meditation, we interviewed the Italian artist who founded the Gruppo N and who now claims: “Mine is not kinetic art, rather dynamic”



by Vincenza Di Maggio - 5 aprile 2016

As a young boy growing up in Padua, Alberto Biasi was mesmerized by the ripple effect rain drops have on water. The movement is wondrously captured in works such as his *Piove con il sereno* (1999), currently on view in the exhibition titled *Alberto Biasi – A Dynamic Meditation* at the GR Gallery on the Bowery, in Manhattan. From March 31st to May 22nd, the exhibition will feature works from three of his series: *Rilievi Ottico-Dinamici*, *Torsioni*, and *Assemblaggi*.

In 1959 Biasi, along with a group of experimental artists, founded the groundbreaking Gruppo N. In their manifesto they declared themselves “experimental draftsmen.” They aimed to break free of traditional artistic practice and developed a new artistic language that combined painting, sculpture, architecture, and industrial production. Rather than focus on the individual artist’s efforts, they were interested in an art form that was the result of a group effort. In fact, they would sign their work not with the individual names of the artists, but with the name of the group.

The group disbanded in 1967, but over the past 50 years Biasi has continued to experiment with optical illusions. Using traditional materials such as paint, and non-traditional materials such as PVC strips, he creates dynamic two-dimensional and three-dimensional works that have a dizzying effect on the viewers’ senses. The works are stationary, yet colorful geometric shapes move in circular motions, swirling and vibrating before the viewer’s eyes.

In a conversation with La VOCE Biasi reveals the reasons for which his work hasn’t been appreciated until recently, why he prefers not using the word “kinetic” to describe his work, and how nature has inspired his oeuvre.



### **How do you think the Italian art scene has changed in the past fifty years?**

“Clearly, the audience has changed completely. It is very different. The youth of today sees things differently compared to the youth of yesterday. In front of a work they imagine things that their fathers never imagined. To give you an example, when one looked at one of my works in the fifties his eyes became inebriated and he couldn’t see.

*The artist “playing” with the installation of his works at the GR Gallery in Manhattan.*

Maybe someone has called [my work] “optical” because of that, because it made you feel like you were drunk. Your eyes felt this way for one simple reason. People were only used to seeing figurative art. Imagine the representation of a landscape, which depended on the construction of figures in the foreground and background. A picture was considered successful in so far as it had depth. People approached my type of work trying to find more levels within it, but these works are constructed in such a way that if you stare at two fingers aligned, one after the other, you will see two in the background. This made people feel drunk.

They felt sort of dizzy, and that bothered many. In my art you will see a work that shows drops of water that aren't really there. Another work makes you see shapes that expand and shrink. This is not reality but a purely mental construction that you make of the work. In this sense it has changed a lot. Technology, electronic devices, computers, all these things have changed the way we see and hear. It has been understood that reality is not that which we see in photographs, and it has been understood that this kind of artistic research allows the viewer to see things that in the past, were not seen before. Now people appreciate [my work], there was a time when they did not appreciate it at all”.

### **Is the innovation in your work that they appreciate?**

“Witnessing movement in something static, no one imagined that it would ever be possible. Instead of “optical-kinetic”, I call my works “optical-dynamic.” Because it’s like the dynamo of a bicycle, that little device that makes the wheel spin, producing electric energy. In reality the electric energy is not in the dynamo, but is a product of it, and is the result of the combination of a rotating magnet within the wires. This creates electricity. In my work, the final product is the result of the blending of the images in the background and the images in the foreground. And then, when you move in front of the images, you interact with them and create the illusion of movement.”

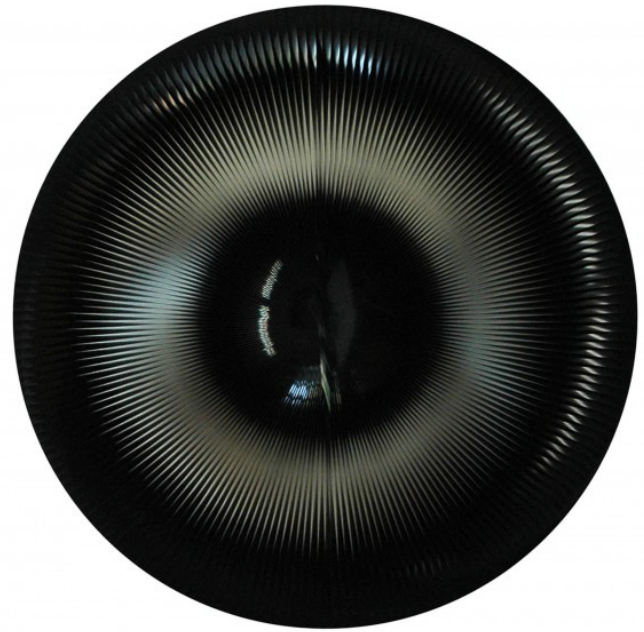
### **Do you think that talking about “kinetic art” still has significance today?**

“This art is called “kinetic art,” but it is incorrect to call it so. Kinetic art is art that actually moves. It is moved by an engine or anything else that would set it in motion. There was one very good Italian scholar, Giulio Carlo Argan, who has written extensively on the history of art. He called this gestaltic art. In German the word gestalt means perception. This is a perceptive phenomenon. The apparatus that comes into play [when looking at this kind of art] is not just the eye, but the brain. The brain creates a movement where there isn't really a movement. [This kind of art] inspires the imagination, but it is not kinetic art.”



**Since your founding of the Gruppo N in 1959, would you say that your conception of art has changed?**

“In the 1960s many young Europeans began to conceive of art as a perfectly normal profession, one that wasn’t out of the norm. You didn’t need to be a genius, you just needed to have a certain attitude and be a normal person. If the artist worked well, he became an artist, otherwise nothing. The group was born to support this conception of art. But the concept never took root. Pop Art brought back the notion of the artist as a person who was above the ordinary. In this sense I would say that we didn’t win.

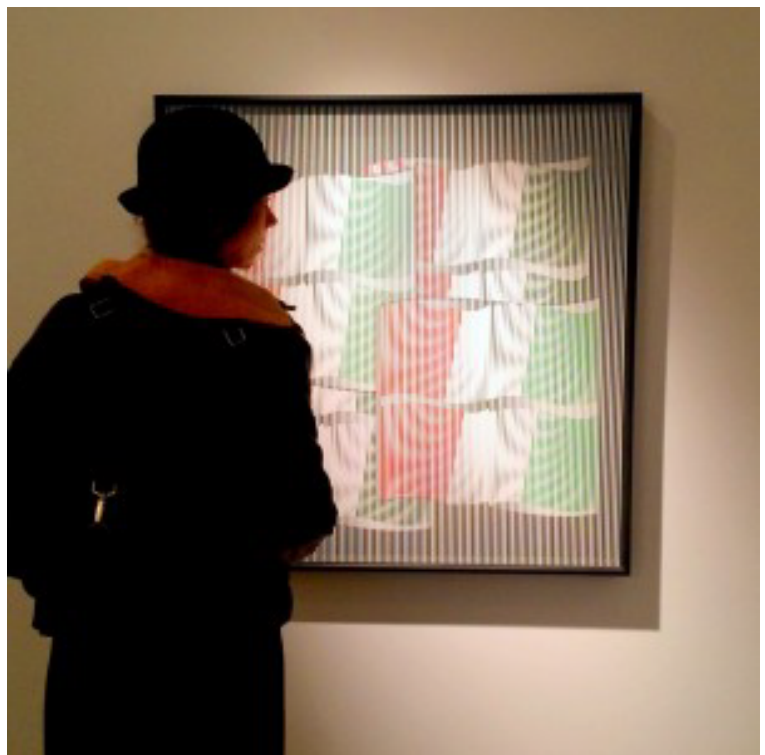


*Alberto Biasi, Dinamica Circolare, 1965.*

This happened in 1974 when Pop Art took over the Venice Biennale. Leo Castelli, who was the supporter of Pop Art, managed to impose, at a global level, this idea of the ingenuity of the artist. That’s why my art, which is an art of research, has struggled. Only in recent years has it been appreciated.”

**What is people’s reaction to your work nowadays?**

“At the end of the 20th century, I remember a museum director told me that he had done an exhibition of the Gruppo N and the German Gruppo Zero. He said that young people who saw the [works in the exhibition] were convinced that they were made at that time and not fifty years prior. It still happens today. Many young people who see these things think they are reactions of today. While it’s true that they were made today, they are modifications of works that were made in the Seventies.”



*La mostra Alberto Biasi A Dynamic Meditation all GR Gallery*

**Your work is very organic. Where did your interest in capturing the pulsations of nature come from?**

“It is true. My works are founded on the observation of reality. I have always loved fire. I can’t tell you how it makes me feel, but when I watch it I remain enchanted for hours. It’s the same with the rain. When I was a young boy I’d lay for hours watching the drops that fell in puddles. They would make those bubbles that expand and widen. My works by chance came from these natural phenomena, these observations. There is one work in the exhibition that steals your shadow. When you lean against the wall for a few seconds and then walk away, the work steals your shadow. It’s a phenomenon related to phosphorescence that reacts to the black light. It’s a gimmick, but it allowed me to show that many times, the work is not made by the artist, but by the viewer. I call it the non opera, because it’s created by those who are in the work. *Dopo di che, lascia che sia la tua fantasia a fare tutto*”.