

# signals of imagination

Gillo Dorfles discusses the work of Eugenio Carmi

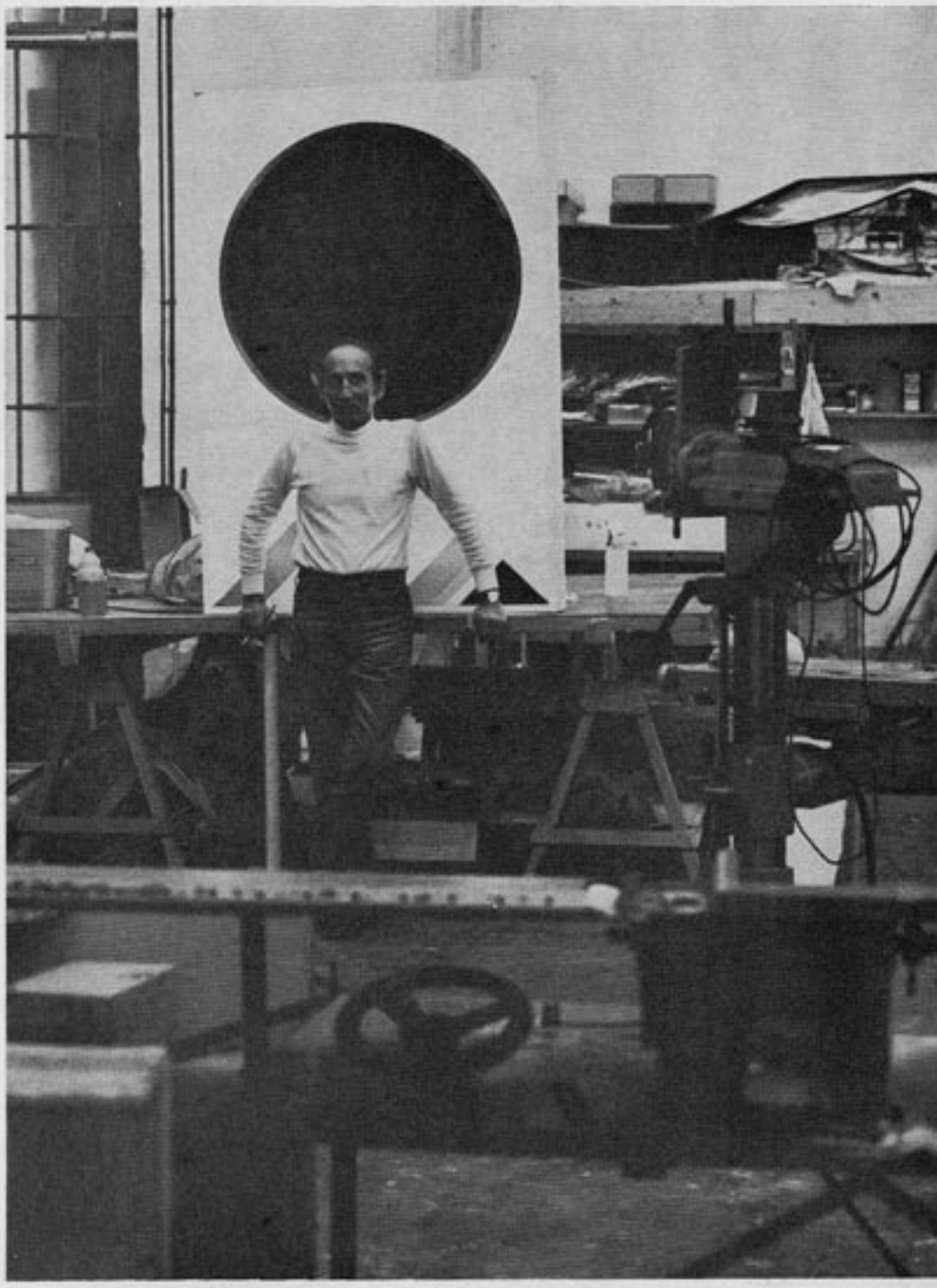
The most interesting and peculiar aspect of Carmi's work can perhaps be considered as that of his adhesion to the 'Spirit of Time of our day and age' (called the 'Zeitgeist' by the Germans).

Carmi, in fact, has carried out a fusion which, at first sight, could seem difficult and risky: that of adopting methods, patterns, mechanics of constructivism together with concrete art and rendering them accessible to the contemporary mass media public. In this manner the artistic message becomes just another means of communication and it is able to expand and deeply penetrate even to a point which may remain out of reach of traditional paintings.

As explained above Carmi used certain methods and constructivistic patterns as it appears obvious from his latest works (canvas painted in pure sharp acrylic colours, precise and geometric shapes, absence of chiaroscuro, of 'impasto', absolute dual-dimension etc.) and also from many of his previous works where research was always based on the presence of basic fact: precision of colour, fundamental geometrical construction etc., (only in a previous phase, now long ago, did Carmi go through a period where some aspects of informal painting could be traced in his works). Carmi's art is therefore rigorous and devoid of figurative 'painterly' complacency.

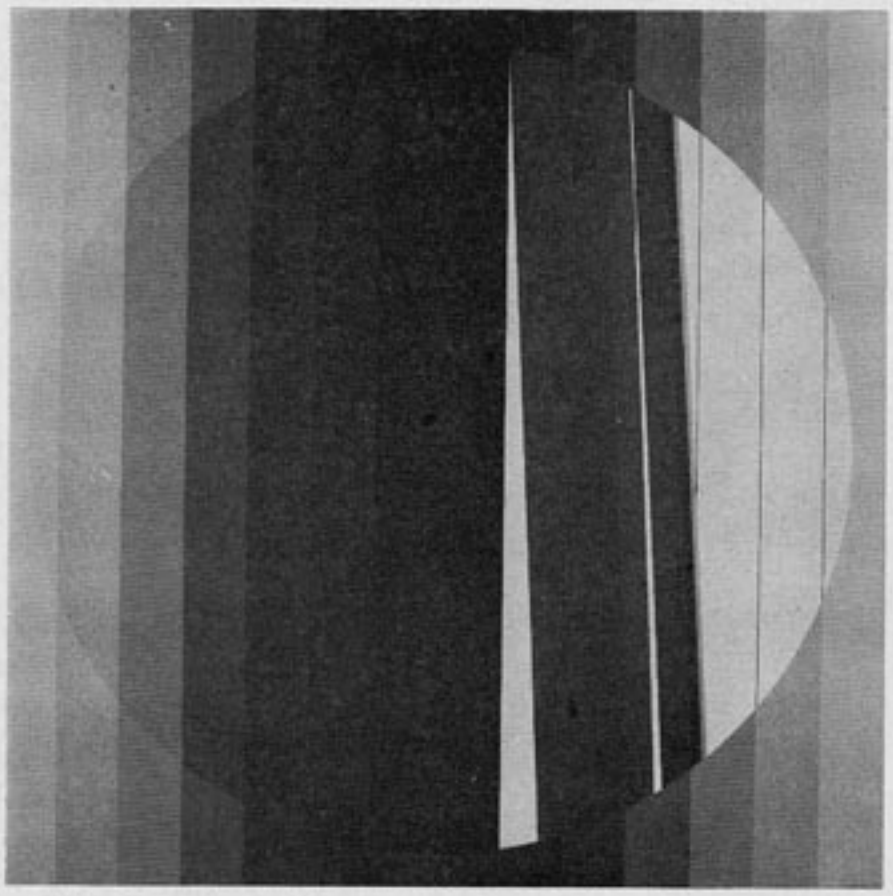
However, this rigorous art whose rigours derive also from long lasting sympathy of the artist for some masters of the a Swiss 'Konkrete Kunst' (such as Bill, Lohse, Groen) – is – in contrast with the Swiss or Dutch type – a gay festive art. Carmi was always aware of the importance of playing with colours and shapes, both when he used them for graphic purposes and when he employed them to plan what could be called a 'visual accompaniment to music'. I remember some of his famous bookjackets: some of his posters for 'industrial workers' which I maintain to be among his most original and effective achievements). One of these examples is the series of illustrations which accompany, as a visual comment, the Cathy Berberian Stripsody, a skit based on a comic strip. In that case the words or the monosyllables 'Gulp, Augh, Boom, etc., uttered by the singer, were inserted in the Carmi pictures emphasising the plastic and chromatic effects of the illustrations.

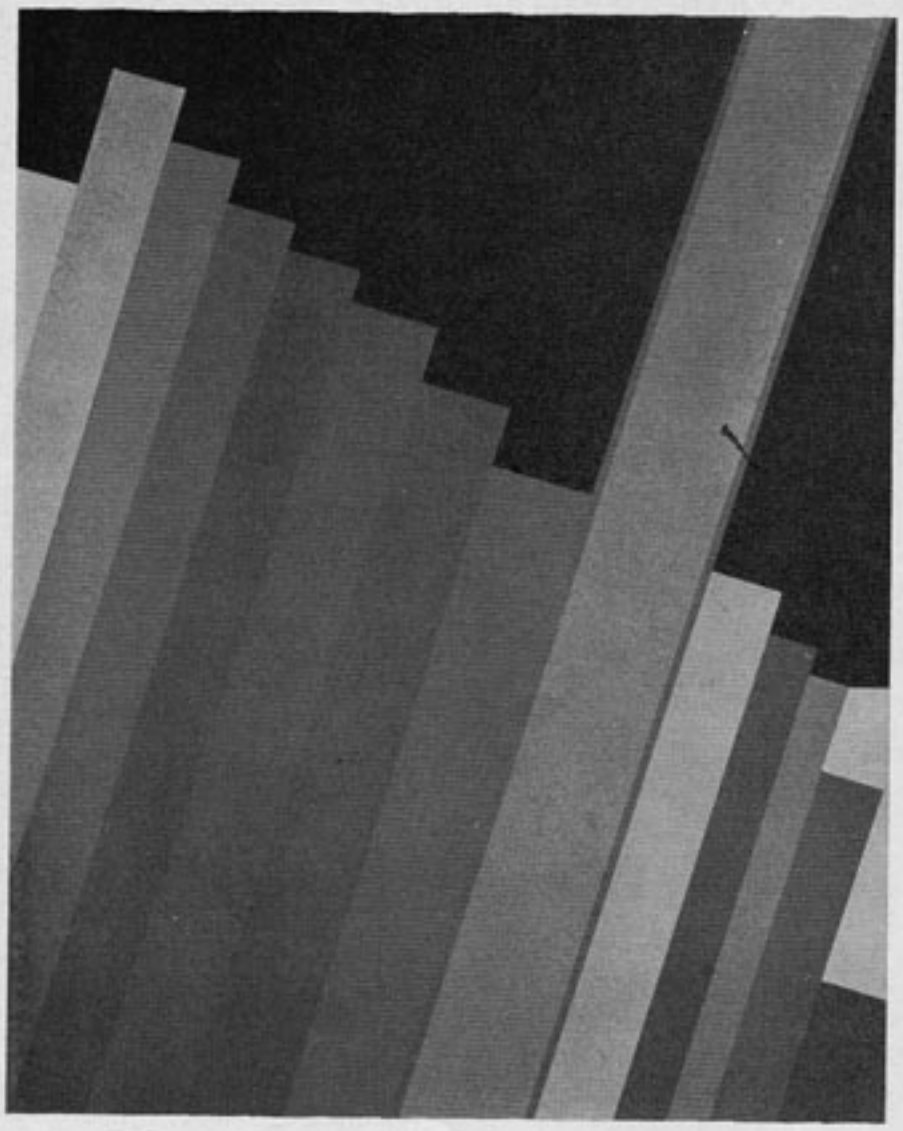
They were, thus, an example, unique in its kind, of abstract painting based upon exact phonetic and verbal components. The letters of the interjections were linked with the shapes and colours of the picture almost as it happens with concrete and visual poetry. Also more recently, Carmi has adopted a similar system for his 'imaginary signals': (large opalescent white plexiglas discs on which appears his usual colours and shapes lit up from within (illuminated from the inside). He chose an elementary shape onto which he has placed his strikingly coloured geometric patterns and used them to create luminous signals similar to common road signs. In these he is able to combine the constructivist syntax with a different and unusual element which could be defined as 'pop' art bringing us into the field of mass media.



above right:
Eugenio Carmi with luminous sculpture **Instabilita-grande cerchio nero** 1971

opposite:
Eugenio Carmi **Electric Imaginary Signal 19** 1970
plexiglass and fluorescent light multiple in an edition of 200





top to bottom:

Eugenio Carmi **Fecondazione Imaginaria** 1972 acrylic on canvas 100×100 cm Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris

Eugenio Carmi **Contraddizione 2** 1970 mixed media on canvas 100×130 cm Museum of Modern Art, Lodz

opposite:

Eugenio Carmi **Fine** 1971 tempera and acrylic on canvas 110×150 cm

Carmi is aware of the present necessity to produce a type of art which is not an end in itself, confined to be exhibited in avantgarde galleries destined to remain more often than not, out of touch with the general public. He realises that it is necessary to create works which can be accepted also by the majority and possibly, be suitable for serial and multiple reproduction.

With regard to this, it is interesting to point out how his capacity to integrate various artistic methods and activity has recently brought him to an operation which could also seem ambiguous, if it were not above all 'amusing': that of projecting some of his images in colour-slides onto female nudes. The results were pictures, photographed then reproduced on silkscreen in a limited number of copies, from which prints of shaded and bright colours were obtained. (These were different from his usual engravings where the colour is always clean and precise). In the silk screen the shapes, strictly geometrical, appear distorted and out of focus because of their juxtaposition on a female body whose curves and protuberances they clothe. These pictures which the artist has named 'cromo synclasmi' can appear ambiguous because their composition is visualised and programmed only in part by the artist, whilst encountering the fixed image of a naturalistic and therefore arbitrary figure.

Among Carmi's latest works it is worth mentioning the recent series of silk screens for the editions 'Segnapassi', for the Parisien editions 'De La Tontue' and all the last production of acrylic paintings. The shapes used by the artist are still based on elementary patterns onto which are placed squares, circles, triangles and circles combined into which groups of rectangular transversal and longitudinal segments etc. are inserted, and so on.

Often these geometric forms have a directional function: namely, the group of signs indicate a moving away, a weight, a moving forward, a staying above. It happens in these works the same as that which occurred in the safety posters produced by Carmi some time ago for the workers of the steel industry, only without any utilitarian aim.

This type of semantic of an abstract design is rather unusual and was never consciously experimented with either by the constructivist artists of the past or by the more recent followers of concrete art.

It is at this point that Carmi acquires new means of expression which are no longer limited to the skilful or precious approach of the coloured segments, but aims at pointing a direction through the bare signs of his own personal idiom. In this idiom the signs are still part of a personal code which the observer will be able to decipher only on the basis of spontaneous and instinctive associations with the above colours and shapes.

It is just this kind of semantics, independent from naturalistic events and mysterious symbols, which is the least perishable especially when it represents the *personal code* of an artist and when it can easily be transformed into a *universal code* for the general public.

Eugenio Carmi is currently exhibiting at the Salon des Realités Nouvelles in Paris.

