

Serialità • edited by Nicol Maria Mocchi



by Enrico Maria Davoli

- Nicol Maria Mocchi (ed.), *Serialità. Repliche e varianti dal mondo antico al contemporaneo*, Mimesis, Milan 2025, pp. 218, € 20.

Repetition and variation are not in themselves sufficient attributes to give a work of art decorative connotations, but they are nevertheless an important starting point. From wallpapers to pop icons to advertising posters, it is now normal to recognize the decorative value, sometimes conscious and sometimes unintentional, of the mass-produced objects that crowd the contemporary imagination. This alone would be enough to recommend reading a collection of essays, recently published by Nicol Maria Mocchi, professor of contemporary art history at the Salerno University.

Serialità. Repliche e varianti dal mondo antico al contemporaneo brings together contributions from a dozen scholars with very different areas of expertise. The unifying feature is that each author, from his own perspective, explores the concepts of repetition and variation in the visual arts, highlighting their creative contributions and mutual interdependence. This approach proves fruitful both in chronologically closer contexts, when seriality becomes a founding characteristic of the civilization born of the industrial revolution, and in more remote ones, when it seems confined to a servile role, chained to the routine of copies, replicas, remakes, imitations, and fakes. The words listed above – similar but not synonymous,

related but not interchangeable – show how rich in surprises and pitfalls the territory explored in these pages is.

The volume opens with a focus on an anonymous, communal seriality, the antithesis of an authorial conception: Mauro Menichetti discusses this in relation to the trade in art objects in Greece and Rome, and Margherita Orsero in relation to the dissemination of devotional images in the Middle Ages. This is followed by in-depth analyses of the role that seriality and reproducibility played in the age of the historical avant-garde, between sophistication and subversion: Antonella Trotta deals with the Vanessa Bell-Duncan Grant juncture, Maria Passaro with Alexej von Jawlensky's landscape variations, and Carlotta Castellani with some episodes of collaboration between Malevich and Lissitzky. The essays by Caterina Caputo on Edoardo Paolozzi, Nicol Maria Mocchi on John Coplans, and Giuseppe di Natale on Felix Gonzalez-Torres focus on the second half of the 20th century and the increasingly pressing confrontation with the media. We then dwell on cases straddling craftsmanship and design: Vito Pinto offers an in-depth look at the ceramic tradition of Vietri sul Mare; Enrico Maria Davoli follows certain decorative patterns as they migrate and reconstitute themselves. Finally, Pietro Conte deals with contemporary seriality in a world of visions that are *ipso facto* also narratives, while Gianluca Poldi analyzes certain gray areas of restoration and connoisseurship, poised between true and false, authenticity and authenticability.

Before concluding, a few words about the subject of Mocchi's essay: photographer and art critic John Coplans. Curator of the pioneering exhibition *Serial Imagery*, held in Pasadena, Seattle, and Santa Barbara in 1968-69, Coplans proves to be the ideal starting point for discussing, without prejudice, a subject that was met with silence or even a certain embarrassment before movements such as Pop Art, Post-Painterly Abstraction, and Minimalism took it up as their banner. Coplans and *Serial Imagery* are a typical case in which contemporary art, and in particular that of the second half of the 20th century (thanks to scholars who are now patiently bringing its protagonists and events back to light), has a beneficial retroactive effect on the understanding of previous eras, paving the way for reinterpretations that enliven and update them.

Homepage: photo collage of some of the Rouen Cathedrals painted by Claude Monet between 1892 and 1894.

Below: the book cover.

SERIALITÀ

REPLICHE E VARIANTI DAL MONDO
ANTICO AL CONTEMPORANEO

A CURA DI NICOL MARIA MOCCHI