

Nanda Vigo

(Milan, 1936–2020)

Nanda Vigo's experience in art began in 1959 when she returned to Milan to open her own studio, following her degree from the Polytechnic of Lausanne and a somewhat unsatisfactory period of work in the United States. It was the lively cultural environment of Brera that provided her with her most precious contacts, from Lucio Fontana – her guiding light – to the younger Manzoni and Castellani. She met and collaborated with the most interesting figures of her age: the artists of the European ZERO group, of which she constituted the main reference in Italy, and most of all Gio Ponti, with whom she put her name to the project of the *Casa sotto la foglia* in the province of Vicenza. And yet within only a short time she managed to develop an original and independent research project which she would remain faithful to throughout her life. It was from her rejection of the excessive specialisation of work in architecture – badly suited to her creative spirit and her inclination to create dialogue between disciplines – that her best works would come about, hand in hand with her design products, throughout the 1980s.

Vigo's art always leans towards experimentation with light, triggered in her mind as a child on seeing the rationalist architecture of Giuseppe Terragni. The reverberations on the glass blocks in the façade of the Casa del Fascio in Como in particular would root the belief in her that pure light is the determinant element of form, in its crossing voids and transparencies so as to vibrate together with the atmosphere. Along with her early architecture projects, at the start of the 1960s she developed a number of systems to demonstrate her thought in plastic terms: she would call them *Cronotopi*, from the bringing together of two Greek words that stand for time and space. They are glass plates with different patterns and degrees of transparency, mounted onto metal frames that let through indirect natural light and present the viewer with uncertain and changing visual impressions. Vigo's preference for glass, steel, mirrors, neon, Perspex and new industrial materials would remain unchanged even when her 'Chronotopes' changed scale, opening up to the environmental dimension.

In 1967, the first immersive and inhabitable spaces were produced, ones that would envelop the audience in the totality of the work, dematerialised wrappings in which to carry out a complete experience of luminous phenomenon from within. Fontana would say of them that they are "neither painting nor sculpture nor architecture, but the result of a range of different research projects in a state of progressive evolution." The lines of investigation followed over the years to come would remain in keeping with these works. What marked their evolution was most of all the introduction of the mirror, variably declined in the form of the pyramid, with which Vigo built her "stimulators of space," capable of absorbing and restoring not only the image of the body of the viewer, but entire fragments of the world around him/her. In other projects, the choice would fall to coloured neon: the result would be subtle blurred vibrations which, coupled with the symbolism of cosmic signs, translate the artist's progressive interest in the most immaterial and invisible tensions of the world.

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