

Yves Klein

(Nice, 1928 — Paris, 1962)

“By virtue of color, I experience a feeling of complete identification with the space, I am truly free.” (Passoni, A., ed., *Yves Klein*, exhibition catalogue, Turin: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, 1970). Klein created numerous monochrome paintings until he came to concentrate on a single color, a particular blue. He wanted to obtain a saturated and luminous hue, without any alteration, which would be extra-dimensional and able to represent all the primary elements of the universe, in particular the opposition of water and fire. “Blue is beyond any dimension, unlike other colors.” (Ibid., p. 31). He felt that the color had to inhabit real space outside and beyond the canvas. Klein looked for a solvent that could affix the pure pigment in powder form to the support, and he patented the ultramarine color with the name International Klein Blue. His research into material demonstrates an interest in alchemical processes and the specific scientific, philosophical, and religious disciplines that influenced his artistic production.

Beginning in 1959 he moved from the monochrome to a trilogy of colors consisting of blue, gold, and magenta. These three hues possess a strong symbolic charge that allows the work to be an echo of the immaterial, to make the invisible visible. The artistic product is closely linked to reality and to nature, but at the same time it is endowed with the spirituality necessary for intuiting the evanescent and immortal realm of the beyond.

In consonance with the Nouveau Réalisme movement, of which Klein was one of the founders in 1960, he developed a new form of appropriation of contemporary reality, resulting in three-dimensional works. *Portrait Relief of Arman* and *Portrait Relief of Claude Pascal* belong to this turning point and moment of completeness in his artistic path. The latter work is part of the CRT Collection. Both portraits of his friends and comrades evoke images of three-dimensional religious icons: from representations of Christ, saints, and martyrs to funerary monuments derived from classical and Roman art. The portrait busts of the painter Arman and the composer Claude Pascal, made from bronze covered in blue pigment, indiscriminately bring out the characteristics and defects of the human body, from facial features to genitals. But the terrestrial dimension is liberated in the splendor of the gold against which the figures stand out, and with which Klein alludes to the alchemical transmutation of matter and the attainment of the infinite and eternity. (EV)