

Hermann Nitsch

(Vienna, 1938)

Nitsch's work began with the modified concept of color, developed in painting from the postwar period, where color was not only a chromatic value, but also a material, a fluid onto which the gesture could be imprinted, using a brush or a spatula.

Inspired by this renewed body of color, Nitsch developed paintings created through the *Schüttbild* (splatter painting) method, applying a stream of color to a raw canvas, hung vertically. These works compositionally exploit the explosion of the scribble and the downward drips.

After these first experiments, the aspect of the action that determines the painting gradually takes on growing importance, culminating in his "Orgien Mysterien Theater." The color the artist uses is exclusively blood red. A much broader ritual unfolds around the canvas, one that aspires to the dimension of the total work, a gripping liturgy where painting, music, theater, and literature coexist.

The sometimes desperate violence of Viennese *Aktionismus* has led to deceptive interpretations of the O.M. Theater, which has been seen as the representation of a tragic bloodbath. But the cathartic value of Nitsch's theater comes out of the psychoanalytical concept of abreaction, which takes advantage of the capacity for psychological regeneration of the emotional discharges produced by long-repressed tensions.

For Nitsch, the O.M. Theater is the continuation of the tradition of ancient Dionysian rituals, which underwent their ultimate transmutation in the sacrificial body of the crucified Christ. For years the Theater has taken the form of a six-day popular festival at Prinzendorf Castle in Austria. It begins with painting actions, then moves on to the sacrifice of animals, presenting the various acts of a veritable sacred performance.

Nitsch has written that: "The goals the O.M. theatre and thus my painting strive for are as follows: 1) painting can develop into a painted liturgy, a liturgical path of meditation that calls for an affirmation of life; 2) through the O.M. Theatre, a pivotal resurrection festival must be created for our existence in the here and now; 3) every descent into the perverse, into what arouses disgust, takes place in the sense of a process that leads to the salvation and reawakening of the individual conscience." (*OMT*, Napoli, s.d., in exhibition brochure *Hermann Nitsch Pittura dell'Orgien Mysterien Theater*, Rivoli, Turin: Castello di Rivoli, 1987). (EV)