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Documentation level

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Name

Varini, Felice

Dates of birth and death

* 6.3.1952 Locarno

Municipality of origin (CH)

Muralto (TI)

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Autore di interventi pittorici e installazioni fotografiche in situ

Fields of activity

pittura, fotografia, architettura, strutturazione dell' ambiente, pittura murale

Lexicon article

Raised in Locarno, Felice Varini took an apprenticeship as a window dresser, then moved to Geneva (1972–78) where he worked in the field of experimental theatre. Since 1978 he has lived in Paris. That same year he began a self-taught activity as a painter whose work is in direct rapport with its architectural context. In more than 330 works carried out between 1979 and 2013, Varini worked in a wide variety of locations: industrial settings, private housing, museums, urban spaces, schools and monumental complexes, even entire settlements (Vercorin in 2009 and Salon-de-Provence in 2013). During the second half of the 1980s, he also employed photography in his works. His first solo exhibition was held in Paris in 1981; since 1985 he has shown regularly in Europe (in Switzerland and France in particular), and since the 1990s and 2000s also in the USA, Latin America and Asia. In 1988 he represented Switzerland at the *Venice Biennale* (Church of San Stae) and in 1992 participated in the Swiss Pavilion in the Universal Exposition in Seville. In 2000 he was nominated for the Marcel Duchamp Prize. His first retrospective was given in 2013 at the Galerie HAB in Nantes.

Searching for new ways to interact with architectural space through the attributes of pictorial representation, at the end of the 1970s Varini began to develop a technique that embraced the environment as a whole (walls, flooring, ceiling, corridors, all types of details). His working procedure starts from the definition of a viewpoint situated at the height of his eyes, from which, with the aid of a back projector, he

projects a flat geometric figure or linear motif into his working space. He then traces the figure out with a pencil and then paints over it with acrylics (or covers it using adhesive tape) in red, blue, yellow, black or white. Although the image appears whole and formally coherent when seen from this viewpoint, from any other position the observer's gaze is met by an unexpected jumble of disjointed elements. The work is achieved through this discontinuity of perception, in the relationship between the various viewpoints and profusion of optical perceptions generated by the encounter between the painted image and the characteristics of the architectural context.

Whereas Varini's working method remains unvaried, the forms he represents – which are sometimes described in the title of the work – are manifold. Whether simple or complex polygons, circles and ellipses, linear progressions or sequences of repeated elements, Varini constantly develops both his abstract vocabulary and the ways to instate his painting in internal and external environments. In small settings he uses mirrors in which he converges the viewpoint (since 1990).

During the second half of the 1980s, he explored the theme of the viewpoint through the inclusion of photography in his work, by laying life-size shots of architectural details in black-and-white over the details themselves. All Varini's works are developed for a particular site but maintain their autonomy: described in a certificate, they can be recreated in a new setting congruent with the spatial premises of the original.

Varini's pictorial work in space follows in the tradition that, from the Constructivist and neoplastic avant-gardes, has evolved into the site-specific practice of Daniel Buren. Transcending a two-dimensional painting and static, frontal viewing, the support for Varini's works become the architectural space and physical environment. The fact that the viewer's perception of the work is not static calls into play our experience of reality in all its complexity, as it does our visual mechanisms and our relationship with space. Artists whose pictorial practice might be numbered among Varini's principal references are [Niele Toroni](#) and François Morellet.

Works: Basel, UBS Aeschenplatz; Geneva, Hôtel des Postes; Limoges, Centre Européen de la céramique; London, Victoria & Albert Museum; Lugano, Autosilo LAC, Collezione Città di Lugano; Lugano, Museo cantonale d'arte; Manno, UBS Lugano-Suglio; Parigi, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication; Paris, Musée national d'art moderne Centre Georges Pompidou; Paris, Société Foncière Lyonnaise; St. Gall, University; Vitry-sur-Seine, MAC/VAL Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne.

Maddalena Disch, 1998, updated 2014
Translation: Timothy Stroud

Selected bibliography

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- *Felice Varini, peintre-plasticien*. Régie: David Teboul. ARTE France, 2009 (L'art et la matière), 26 minutes
- *Felice Varini. Points de vue*. Textes de Fabiola López-Durán. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2004
- *Rectangle orange évidé par cinq disques via le passage*. Réalisation: Antoine De Roux. Production: Peugeot, Saguez, Double Elephant, 2003, 18 minutes
- *«Segni» di Felice Varini*. Realizzazione: Giovanni Varini. Produzione: Città di Bellinzona, 2002, 25 minuti
- Grazia Verzasconi: *Felice Varini: sguardo su un «lavoro in corso»*. [Dattiloscritto]. Memoria di licenza Università di Zurigo, 2000
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- *Felice Varini*. Réalisation: Christophe Loizillon. Production: Agat Films. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997, 21 minutes
- «Niele Toroni. Felice Varini». In: *Temporale. Rivista d'arte e di cultura*, IX, 1995, 36/37. A cura di Maddalena Disch. pp. 19-38
- *Felice Varini. 46 pièces à propos et suite*. Entretien de Jac Fol avec Felice Varini. Baden: Lars Müller, 1993
- *Felice Varini*. Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1994. [Introduction:] Angeline Scherf; [textes:] René Denizot, Bernard Fibicher. Paris, 1994
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- *Felice Varini*. Biennale di Venezia, Chiesa di San Stae, 26.6.1988-25.9.1988. [Testo:] Daniel Soutif. Berna: Ufficio federale della cultura, 1988 [erscheint zur Ausstellung in der Chiesa di San Stae anlässlich der 43. Biennale von Venedig]
- *Felice Varini*. Sion, Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, 1985. [Testes:] Bernard Fibicher. Sion: Musées cantonaux du Valais, 1985

Website

<http://www.varini.org>

Direct link

<http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4004324&lng=en>

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