

Alan Charlton

STUDIO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA PINO CASAGRANDE

Maintaining a remarkable degree of consistency in his twenty-year career, the English painter Alan Charlton has dedicated himself to creating an autonomous visual language derived from a rigorous structural grid. His recent installation, which dominated this gallery's sizable space with six sets of abstract paintings on four walls, was again based on systems of combination and variation.

Charlton often paints square canvases dark gray in a completely anonymous fashion. Here, four of these paintings—arranged vertically on a wall, one above the other—served as a basic set from which emerged the geometric variations comprising the rest of the show. In the other five compositions, the squares were divided both vertically and horizontally, forming rectangular elements, also painted a uniform gray, that were arranged on the gallery walls according to alternating rhythms or along various axes. These variations on the basic set were invariably planned and executed in a purely graphic and geometric fashion, without revealing any hint of expression.

The combinatory mechanism that generated this body of work suggested a language subjected to purely logical breakdown, much as in a Chomskian linguistic analysis; the structure that served as a matrix remained deeply hidden beneath the work's various syntactical configurations. What was particularly interesting about the show (though it was not immediately noticeable), was that the composition that served as the basic set upon which the transformations were based was installed in an absolutely non-privileged position. Since one was obliged to move around the space in order to find the "logical beginning" of the combinatory solutions, these literal, Minimalist, self-referential forms proposed a kind of semantics of action. It was precisely here, in the realm of action, that Charlton's formalized pictorial language regained the meaning it had expelled through its purely syntactical organization.

—Massimo Carboni

Translated from the Italian by Marguerite Shore.