

Windows onto the Third Millennium – Uemon Ikeda Exhibition

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With his presence at the celebrations of the 150th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and Japan, Uemon Ikeda has closed a forty-year cycle of Italian work. Along with four other very young artists, in 1977 he chose to work in Rome, at the Academy of Fine Arts, under the guidance of the masters of the Scuola Romana, such as Greco, Fazzini, Crocetti, and Mastroiani, and the artistic direction of Toti Scialoja. Among other things, this was a sign of the attention devoted by post-war Japan to their ancient ally of a temporary, tragic military enterprise.

Ikeda studied at the Roman Academy with Venanzo Crocetti, who had already established those contacts with Japan that will later bring about the foundation of a museum in Tokyo in his name. At the same time, Ikeda got on well in the Roman artistic milieu, which – according to the memoirs of Piero Dorazio recently published in the volume *Uemon Ikeda* by De Luca Editori d'Arte – used to see artists and architects mingle together.

While working as an interpreter for the Embassy of Japan in Italy, Ikeda began to construct his own Italian, syncopated language; a laconic speech, influenced by the phonetic similarities of the two languages, and close to poetry.

The paintings presented at Embrice Gallery and accompanied by a critical essay of Francesco Gallo Mazzeo constitute a sort of achievement of a ten-year work cycle. At the same time, they form the core of the later developments of his work. The *windows* of the past few years that we exhibit are the premise of a specific attention to space. This is a space *outside* the two dimensions of the canvases, on which he will work by way of site-specific installations in either natural landscapes (the lake of Bracciano, on a beach that hosts formative meetings with Simonetta Lux) or infrastructures (rivers, bridges, and cities – from the Giardino del Lago to the Campidoglio to MAXXI). Geometric painted surfaces with a blank centre: windows apparently overlooking the void. However, Ikeda has also been painting *clouds*: no longer rectangles but amoeboid, single-cell canvases made on purpose, with a mysterious presence of geometrical signs that allude to the structure of matter.

My proposal is to interpret these clouds as what is seen from the geometry of blind windows: qualities, but also uncertainties and terminal risks ushered in by the new millennium. Therefore, windows into our uncertain future.

Moreover, these works give us glimpses into Ikeda's next artistic season, because the artist is going home after forty years as the internationally known son of his motherland.

What will he bring along?

A new season, precisely. A wonderful series of watercolours in which the spatial experience recurs thanks to a special, thick, and soft paper.

Ikeda has been drawing with continuity, with a red pen, on small surfaces, non-architectural architectures that remind us of the impossible theorems of Escher or Piranesi's Carceri. He has composed prose-poetry that is neither prose nor poetry. Now, the painted surfaces of the slightly bent paper (nature) overlap with the tenuous geometric structure (architecture) surviving from his open-air installations.