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Sotto Voce, Dominique Lévy Gallery, London

The second show at Dominique Lévy's new London space will map the progression of the abstract white relief geographically and through time, with a focus on the 1930s to 1970s. Alongside the earliest unfolding of figuration by Henri Laurens produced in Paris to the harmonious constructions of the Brazilian Sergio Camargo, the exhibition will feature works by Jean Arp, Ben Nicholson, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani, Agostino Bonalumi, Fausto Melotti, Günther Uecker, Luis Tomasello, Mira Schendel, and Sol LeWitt, amongst others.

While the white palette may give the works a soft voice, their messages are loud and clear, whether they may be a cry of hope, an attempt at nothingness, an expression of aesthetic idealism, or a surge towards transcendence. This subtle yet forceful dialogue was carried out internationally through the language of the white relief by

artists at the forefront of their respective movements, ranging from Surrealism to the Zero Group, Spatialism to Minimalism, and Conceptual Art to Constructivism.

Highlights include Arp's *Composition Schématique* from 1943, which relate to his earliest reliefs which were developed at the height of Dadaism during the 1910s, before the artist went on to create his first monochromatic white-on-white reliefs in the 1920s. Arp's later piece holds sharp contrast with his earlier Surrealist reliefs, with its geometric composition filled with angularity – caused by Arp's grief-stricken state after the death of his wife, which slowed down his activities.

With *White Relief*, 1936, Ben Nicholson also stands out as an innovator of the abstract white relief; inspired by European movements like Abstraction-Création, Bauhaus and De Stijl, as well as his British contemporaries, Nicholson's reliefs are a geometric foil to the organic shapes created by Arp, whom Nicholson befriended in France.

Two pieces by Manzoni Achrome are a clear focus: a kaolin and canvas from 1958, and a 1962-1963 work made from expanded polystyrene balls. Manzoni's first "achromes" were created through combining wet kaolin and canvas, which folds and creases as it crystallises, the final appearance was thus determined solely by the internal energies of the materials, completely independent of the artist's hand. From these, Manzoni's exploration into these forms of new media detracts his achromes from conventional paintings and reveals his ideas of intense reduction, eliminating any sense of composition or symbolism.

While European artists embraced this movement, their art historical progress was making a mark across the Atlantic and so the exhibition includes works created in South America, placed in context with their European counterparts.

Sotto Voce, 10 February – 18 April, Dominique Lévy Gallery, Old Bond Street, Mayfair, London W1S 4PZ. For more information visit www.dominique-levy.com

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Credits

1. Camargo Madiera, *Pintada No. 288*, 1970. © Galeria Raquel Arnaud – Estate of Sergio Camargo.