

# MARK BORGHI

NEW YORK | BRIDGEHAMPTON | SAG HARBOR

Gastone Novelli (1925 - 1968)

A.5, 1963

Mixed media on canvas

19 3/4 x 23 3/4 inches (50 x 60 cm)

Signed and dated on reverse

Ex-collection:

The Artist

Private collection until the present

Literature:

Gastone Novelli. 1925-1968. Catalogo generale della pittura e della scultura (2011) number 1963.20 (331)



*To paint is also to express by signs that which one cannot or does not know how to express with actions. This can be a reason to continue, even though the department stores all over the world are already full of things to look at. There is another reason to continue, because one achieves a primary result, a primary function, if you wish, that of art as "revolutionary" research.*

— Gastone Novelli

Gastone Novelli was born in Vienna on August 1, 1925. He received his classical education in Rome, where he had moved with his family, and became involved in the Resistance in 1943. He was arrested and then freed the following year. In 1945 he moved to Florence and earned a degree in political science. After the war he started painting and producing graphic works that were greatly influenced by the Neo-Constructivist theories of Max Bill, who he had met while staying in Zurich in 1947. In 1950, he moved to Brazil and devoted himself to the applied arts, teaching, and research into Geometrical Abstraction. In 1951 and 1953 he participated in the São Paulo Biennial. In December 1954 he went back to Rome and met Achille Perilli and Corrado Cagli; the following year he exhibited at the Galleria La Cassapanca and Studio B24.

In 1957 he took several trips to Paris and met the Surrealists Tristan Tzara, André Masson, Man Ray, and Hans Arp. He exhibited at Galleria La Salita in Rome and was clearly influenced by Art Informel. The same year, he created the magazine *L'esperienza moderna* with Perilli and started collaborating with poets and writers. Novelli was introduced to contemporary trends in American art by Cy Twombly, Willem de Kooning, and Robert Rauschenberg, who were active in Rome at the time. In 1959 he exhibited in the Galleria l'Ariete in Milan and participated in many groups shows in Italy and abroad. In 1960 he had a solo exhibition at the Galleria La Tartaruga in Rome and took part in the show *Crackat* at the Galleria Il Canale in Venice. The following year he returned to Paris once again, where he met Beckett, Simon, Bataille, and Klossowski and had a private show at the Galerie du Fleuve.

In 1962 his work was shown at the Alan Gallery in New York and he spent some time travelling in Greece. Two years later a major exhibition of his work was presented at the Kunstverein of Friezeburg; he won the Premio Gollin at the Venice Biennale and created the magazine *Grammatica* with Manganelli, Giuliani, and Perilli. His first political work was produced in 1966, amid a climate of much protest and civil unrest. The following year he moved to Venice and published the comic book *I viaggi di Breck*. When invited to participate in the Venice Biennale in 1968, he refused to show his work and, as a form of protest, exhibited it face down against the walls. He died in Milan on December 22 of the same year.

According to Kynaston McShine, the former Curator of Painting and Sculpture at Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and director who put together his 1972 MOMA exhibition, "Although Novelli was deeply involved in the complex human, social and political problems of our time, he strived to avoid a too literal reflection of these problems in his art.... By combining graffiti-like imagery with the informal gesture, Novelli created paintings that have the quality of a personal diary, yet through his sensitivity and vitality he was able to transform this individual idiom into a more universal expression." (Press Release, MOMA Nov. 11, 1972) In this work A.5, 1963 the artist experiments with his own painting language, referencing his own symbolic notations as well as alluding to landscape in this mixed media work. Painting and drawing work together in the composition; the drawing methods are typical of Novelli's work from this period in time.