

FRANCO SUMMA – BIOGRAPHY

The artist and academic Franco Summa (Pescara, 7 July 1938 - Pescara, 25 January 2020) is considered a notable exponent of Italian contemporary art.

Classically trained, he graduated in Aesthetics with Giulio Carlo Argan, but it is in Abruzzo, where he returned after his studies, that he decided to engage his creative and informative energies in the field of urban art. Since the second half of the 1960s, his art finds a specific scope in urban spaces, thus creating numerous environmental works, both temporary and permanent. Among these, a collective action entitled No, promoted in 1974 in Pescara in Piazza della Rinascita against the abolition of the divorce law, and the work A rainbow down the road, created in the same year at the Church of Sant'Agostino in Città Sant'Angelo (Pe), which becomes the reason for a legal dispute by some Catholic associations. The echo of the strong controversy reached the critic Enrico Crispolti, who invited him to the Venice Biennale for the 1976 and 1978 editions and reserved the cover of his 1977 Visual Arts and Social Participation for him.

Having thus fully entered the Italian and international cultural debate, Summa became friends with Pierre Restany and the representatives of the Radical Architects of Milan. In these years Summa developed and defined its expressive language by creating some of the most interesting interventions and actions in the urban space of the entire story of Art in the Social, a current of research that Enrico Crispolti supported and encouraged. "And the Summa propositions, in the sense of participatory imaginative solicitations in perspectives of archetypal memorial recovery, with a growing awareness of urban implication, urged me to consider his well-established work in the panorama of different modes of provocative-participant urban intervention". Symbolic use of shapes and color, together with a participatory conception of art are the main features of his artistic career, up to the first two decades of the 21st century.

Urban space is intended as a place of historical memory and collective identity, resulting from a participatory process aimed at beauty and living in harmony. The work of art that fits into the urban space must necessarily dialogue with the existing and, above all, must be shared by the citizens. Citizens, other artists and students became Summa's privileged interlocutors in the design of urban spaces.

The Eighties and the related artistic system, towards which Summa is very critical, saw his temporary departure from national exhibitions, but not his departure from artistic activity. He continued to maintain a fervent teaching, publishing, design and planning of urban interventions. Architecture (1981), Martyr (1981) Railway Rainbow (1988) testify to the constant desire for social commitment.

His work, characterized by the use of bright colors and simple shapes, is oriented to the redefinition of urban environments through a series of chromatic and verbal-visual interventions. This trend is followed by the Gate to sea, a temporary work located on Pescara seafront; consisting of a set of four rectangular portals that form a four-faced arch about eleven meters high, the installation symbolizes the possibility of peaceful coexistence between peoples through a chromatism that alternates 56 different colors.

In 2019, the artist founded the Summa Foundation in Pescara and donated his house to the community: an artist's residence, which became Summa House Museum and recognized of cultural interest by the Superintendence of Archeology, Landscape and Fine Arts of the Provinces of Chieti and Pescara.

Franco Summa's legacy is above all an ideological and cultural legacy, of human values and beauty. Piazza Caduti del Mare, inaugurated in 2020, a few months after his death, a choral work in concert with students and inhabitants of the Borgo Sud district of Pescara, is a testimony.