

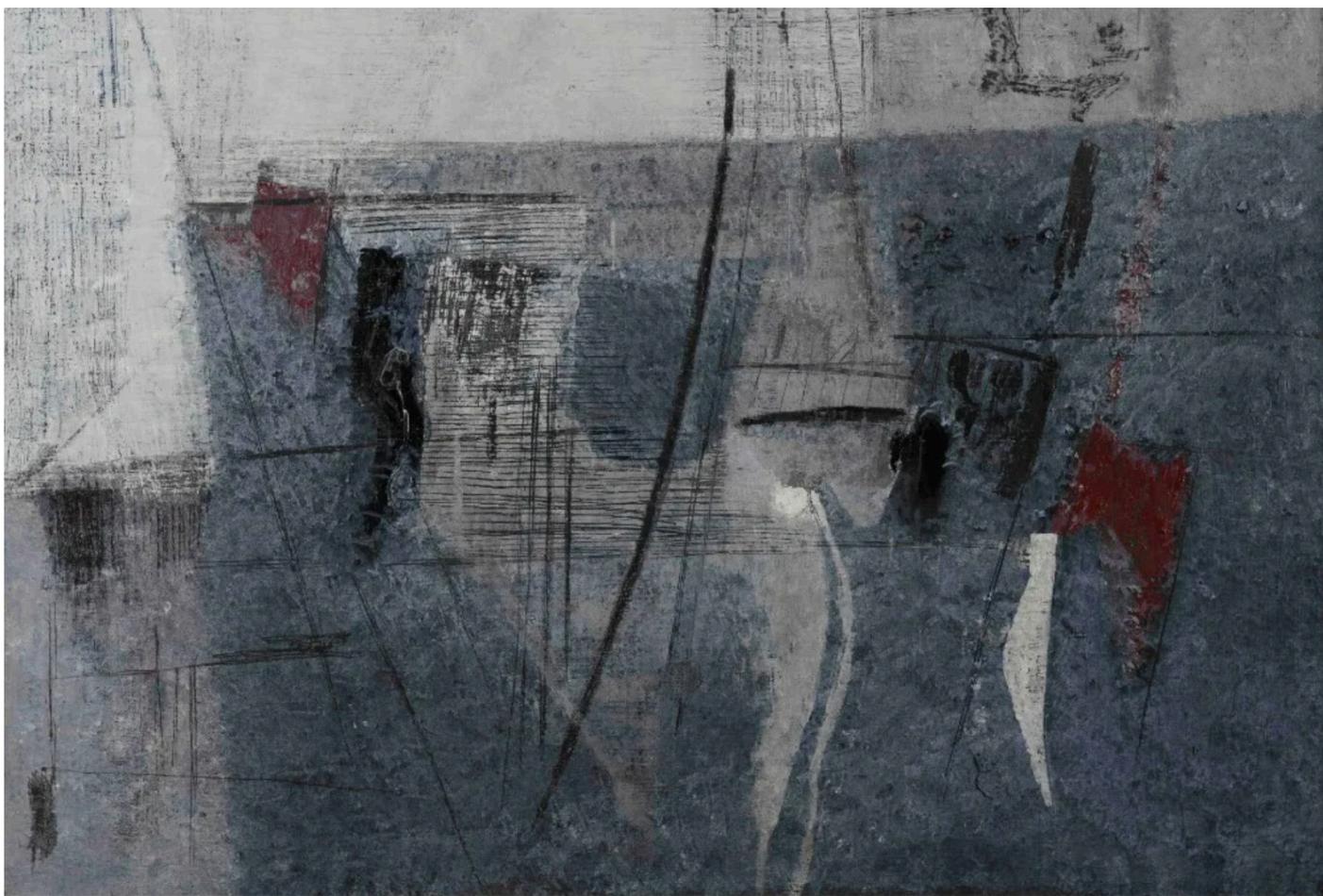
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Bice Lazzari. Notes for a Vision Metric

FRANCESCA VERGA · MARCH 19, 2026

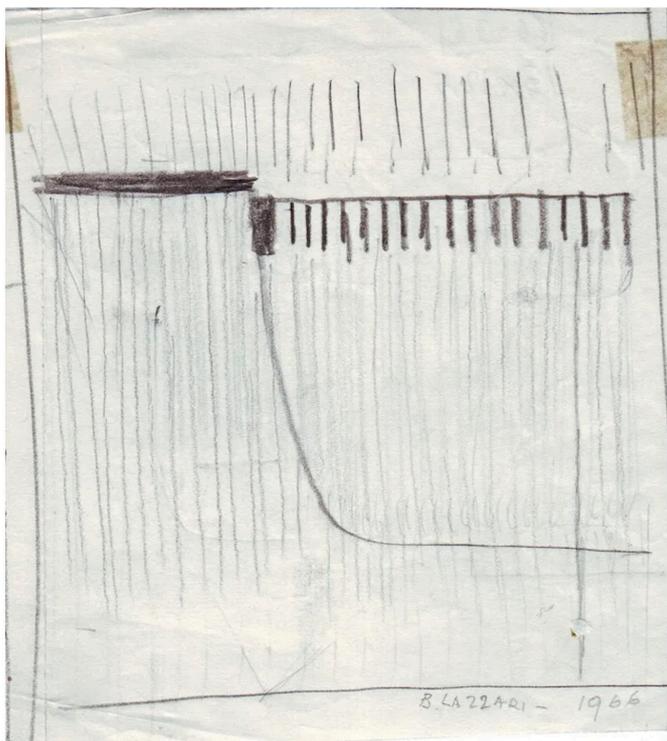


There's a hard-to-die prejudice: that "pure" abstraction is born pure, without friction. That the line arrives perfectly, like Minerva armed from the head. That it didn't need to learn its own weight, its own hesitation, and that it gave itself entirely, without those intermediate steps that precede every successful form. Yet one only needs to get really close to certain works by Bice Lazzari (Venice 1900 – Rome 1981) to understand that balance is a slow conquest, a discipline, sometimes a sacrifice. It is the result of a series of imperceptible adjustments, of trials that don't last, of lines that are drawn and then forgotten.

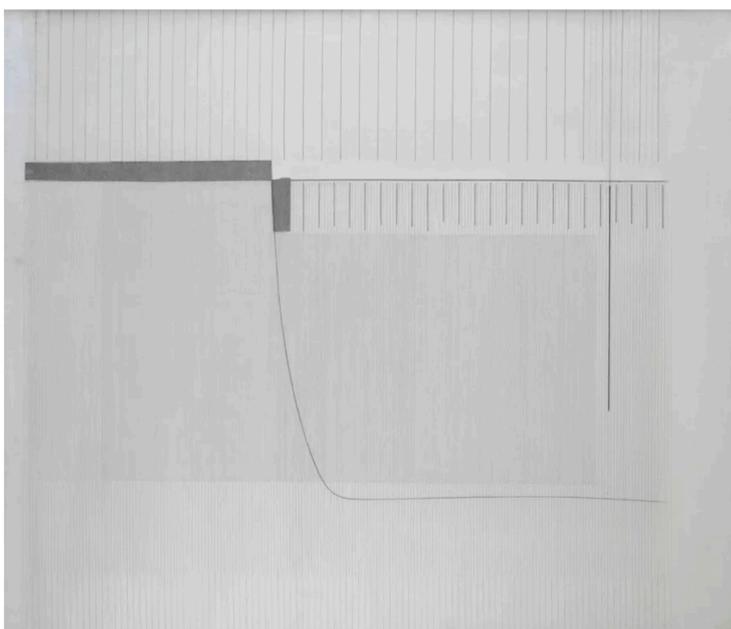
A figure who spans the lineage of Italian abstraction and "concrete" non-figuration without ever fully coinciding with it, Lazzari spans the entire span of the twentieth century, resisting easy alignment. Born figurative in the 1920s, with portraits, still lifes, and landscapes patiently entrusted to the recognizable, her painting then evolved into a more rarefied and fantastical figurative style, close in sensitivity to models like Campigli and Severini, before moving toward applied and decorative art: an ambiguous territory, perhaps functional to life, then considered minor, but which for her became a long education in the essential.

Abstraction, pictorially free, matures during and after this period, and is based on what, with particular lucidity, the musicologist Luigi Rognoni recognized as the essential “emotional rigor” (in *Ascoltando i quadri di Bice Lazzari*, 1981). A sonic rigor, more than visual. Musical: made of intervals, repetitions, necessary pauses. It is inevitable to remember that Lazzari had an uncompromising musical education (primarily the violin studied in her youth), which precedes and informs all her painting. In 1951, biographical sources record a decisive broadening of her Roman acquaintances: poets and artists, including Burri, Colla, Scialoja and the sculptor Lorenzo Guerrini. From this time are the works: *Composizione* (1952), *Viola – Ritmo* (1952), *Le linee* (1953), *Divertimento n. 1* (1954), *Divertimento n. 3* (1955). This is not a stance; The 1950s were more of a time of testing: painting measured its balance, tested its lines, and listened to the rhythm without yet establishing it. It engaged with the Roman scene, with the Spatialists and with Informalism, especially in the late 1950s, but without allowing itself to be absorbed. Its associations reoriented themselves as parallel trajectories, affinities of measure rather than language: Santomaso, Tancredi, and the reconnection with Afro.

It is with this passage in mind that we look at Lazzari’s work today, also in light of the recent Milanese exhibition at Palazzo Citterio, curated by Renato Miracco in collaboration with the Bice Lazzari Archive, which clearly conveyed the continuity and coherence of a path often interpreted in leaps and bounds.



Bice Lazzari, *Untitled*, 1966. Pencil on paper.



Bice Lazzari, *Size 103*, 1967. Tempera and pencil on canvas.

Courtesy of the Bice Lazzari Archive

In the 1960s and 1970s, this tension found a formal necessity. It is on this crux that I focused my attention; with these years in mind, I delved into Lazzari's archive. It's clear that here his painting shifts toward an increasingly linear, essential, rhythmic lexicon; not by stylistic choice, but by necessity. The dot and the line become elements of a new score: dense lines, predominantly horizontal or vertical, rarely oblique, that construct measures. The surface lightens, the sign becomes thinner. Balance is the whole of a whole made of micrograms. As in Paul Klee's proportionate repetition, the line does not delimit: it verifies. Each return is a minimal variation, each sign a duration.

There's no point in turning everything into an analogy. Anyone who understands the discipline of musical practice also understands the gentle cruelty of repetition. And repetition is the true theme of Lazzari's mature painting. These are the years of his most insistent, reiterated, sometimes obsessive works, in which his experimentation with the sign seeks continuity rather than solutions.

Lazzari doesn't use a ruler as one might expect from a painter of measurement. She doesn't mechanize the line. She traces underneath with a pencil; the final line is always drawn freehand. Precision comes not from the tool, but from practice. Repetition isn't seriality: it's practice. Discipline without mysticism. This rigor, however, doesn't originate in the painting, or rather: it doesn't originate only in the painting. There are notebooks, diaries, and loose sheets of paper now preserved in the archive, in which Bice Lazzari jots down notes, tries, makes mistakes, and starts over. Not marginal materials, not leftovers: a place of true practice. The Archive preserves not only her works, but also poems, letters, early works, and direct evidence of her interests. It is there that rigor is trained.

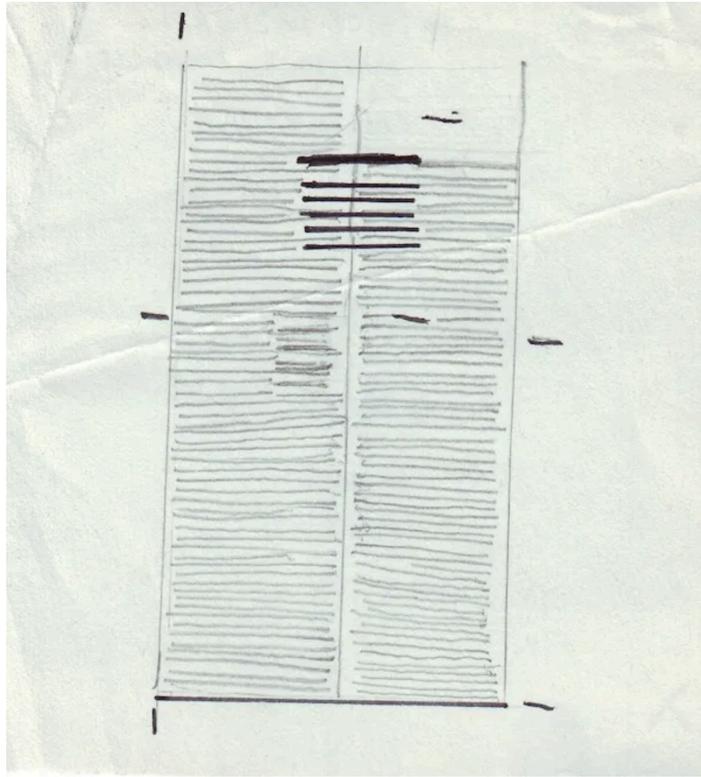
Leafing through these sketches, mostly on small sheets of paper, one realizes that here the line is not yet responsible for anything: it can accelerate, be interrupted, be repeated ad exhaustion or abandoned without regret. It can remain sketched. Micro-schemes, notes, modulation experiments appear; isolated words that do not explain but orient; sequences of signs that do not want to become images. And, alongside all this, poems: not as lyrical commentary, but as another form of exercise, a writing that shares with the sign the same economy and the same confidence in the pause.

One of his (many) preparatory drawings dates back to 1966, now collected in a notebook preserved in the archive. They are rapid lines, just as the idea must have been rapid. In these sheets, the composition seems to emerge from scraps: quick strokes to imagine the overall effect, to "see" before seeing. It's as if the painting needed a very basic, almost unwatchable, pre-image before it can become inevitable. The sketch is the work while it still authorizes itself not to be itself. The finished work of 1967, white tempera and pencil on canvas, transforms that speed into calm, that intuition into conduct.

In notebooks, the painting isn't prepared: the attention necessary for the painting to one day happen is prepared. The discipline that emerges from these pages has nothing ascetic about it. The line is tested like a step: to see if it can support the weight of the body. When it doesn't, it seems to let go. Sometimes a dry note remains: work destroyed. No theatricality. Just the recording of a necessity that has ceased to be. Here, archival writing takes on the form of a minimal obituary. And it delivers a paradox: the Archive exists to preserve, but it also holds the evidence of disappearance.

Some sketches function as matrices. From one sheet of paper, multiple paintings emerge, as if Lazzari had identified a generating module, a rhythmic seed capable of producing variations without ever truly repeating itself. Not a servile preparation, but a generating device. Theme and variation: not a musical metaphor but a mental structure.

The works of these years function not as poetic metaphors, but as methodological declarations: the line is not an outline, it is time. The sketch, then, should not be read as a servile "preparation," but as a generative device, an elementary score capable of multiple performances. Not music translated into image, but musical thought as a mental structure: theme and variation. What the notebooks say is that, for Lazzari, painting is not a matter of image, but of method. First comes the thought of the line, then its exercise; finally its appearance. The sign is not a revelation: it is the result of training. For this reason, the notebooks are not an accoutrement, but works in the form of perpetual drafts: the place where painting allows itself to be imperfect and, precisely for this reason, becomes necessary. And yet: very few have truly read them, and almost no one has considered them for what they are: not a sentimental appendix but a workshop. Here, the line is already present as a rhythmic idea, as a cadence, not as geometry. Thus, abstraction is not born pure. The line is a restless animal: it tests, gets injured, begins again. Lazzari shows a concreteness that seems immediate only because it has already absorbed all its own mediation. Notebooks, sketches, tests, destroyed works, lines drawn and erased: everything that precedes is expelled from the final work. Not because it hasn't happened, but because it has already done its work. The painting, then, is not immediate: it is the visible residue of a mediation already consummated.



Bice Lazzari, *Untitled*, 1976. Pencil and marker on paper



Bice Lazzari, *White Sequence – Acrylic No. 4*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas.

Courtesy of the Bice Lazzari Archive

What appears simple is so not by origin but by exhaustion. Everything that could have preceded the line has already happened elsewhere, in a time the work feels no need to declare. The surface is the place of its final stillness. This is why the impression of immediacy is a delusion. The concrete, here, does not coincide with what is seen, but with what has resisted. And what seems immediate never is: it is only what remains when thought has ceased to make itself heard. Perhaps this, ultimately, is the meaning of Bice Lazzari's notebooks: a metric of vision. A measure made of pauses, of gaps, of repetitions. The line while it does not yet know it is a line. Painting in the moment it chooses not to be painting, in order to become it. "Notes for a Metrics of Vision" would therefore be a title to be taken seriously, because in the metrics, in the pause, in the scansion, there is everything that Lazzari defended throughout his life: the possibility that the minimum, if held with severity, becomes infinite.