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Ennesima. An Exhibition of Seven Exhibitions on Italian Art

November 26, 2015–March 6, 2016

Triennale of Milan , Viale Alemagna, 6 , 20121 Milan

Triennale di Milano presents Ennesima. An Exhibition of Seven Exhibitions on Italian Art, curated by Vincenzo de Bellis, with the artistic direction of Edoardo Bonaspetti, curator of Triennale Arte. Not “one” exhibition of Italian art but, literally, an “exhibition of exhibitions” that, via seven paths, tries to explore the last 50 years of contemporary art in Italy, collecting more than 120 works and over 70 artists, from the early sixties through to the present day, in a display extending over the whole first floor of the Milan Triennale.

The title is inspired by a work by Giulio Paolini, *Ennesima (appunti per la descrizione di sette tele datate 1973)*, the first version of which, dated 1973, is divided into seven paintings. This gives the number of exhibition projects included in de Bellis’s exhibition for La Triennale: seven independent exhibitions, in the form of notes or suggestions that explore different aspects, links, coincidences and discrepancies, as well as the exhibition grammar in the recent history of Italian art.

Seven working hypotheses through which we can read, reinterpret and tell Italian art also through the analysis of some of the possible exhibition formats: from the solo exhibition to the site-specific installation, through to the thematic group show and chronological group show, the group exhibition on artistic movement and the medium-based group exhibition and on to the archive exhibition.

The path of Ennesima starts therefore with the thematic group exhibition entitled *To Write an image*, focused on the analysis of the centrality of iconography in the Italian artistic production from the sixties through to the present day, to continue with the group exhibition on an artistic movement entitled *The image of writing: Group 70*, visual poetry and verbal-visual investigations and dedicated to Visual Poetry, and then with Alessandro Pessoli: *Sandrinus*, the whole before the parts, the artist’s first solo exhibition in an Italian public institution. Central hub of the path is the medium-based exhibition *The Performance Where Time Stands Still: Tableau Vivant between Reality and Representation*, hinging on performance, with the objective of presenting an analysis of its development by focusing on the tableau vivant sub-genre, followed by *A Choral Archive: The via Lazzaro Palazzi Space*, the Experience of Self-Management and *AVANBLOB*, the exhibition of documents that, 25 years later, pays homage to the activities of the artists working in Milan proposing a first attempt at historization. 2015: present time, indefinite mood, a generation-based exhibition ends the path, revolving around a selection of artists born between the mid-seventies and eighties. The whole project is finally studded with site-specific interventions at crucial points of the exhibition path, gathered under the title of *Here, Now and Elsewhere: Site-specific and Thereabouts*, that fit transversely in respect of the other six exhibitions.

Artists:

Vincenzo Accame, Vincenzo Agnetti, Alessandro Agudio, Mario Airò, Yuri Ancarani, Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Francesco Arena, Stefano Arienti, Massimo Bartolini, Gianfranco Baruchello, Vanessa Beecroft, Alighiero Boetti, Monica Bonvicini, Lupo Borgonovo, Ugo Carrega, Elisabetta Catalano, Maurizio Cattelan, Giuseppe Chiari, Francesco Clemente, Roberto Cuoghi, Danilo Correale, Gino De Dominicis, Patrizio Di Massimo, Luciano Fabro, Lara Favaretto, Vincenzo Ferrari, Linda Fregni Nagler, Giuseppe Gabellone, Alberto Garutti, Francesco Gennari, Paolo Gioli, Massimo Grimaldi, Adelita Husni-Bey, Emilio Isgrò, Jannis Kounellis, Ketty La Rocca, Via Lazzaro Palazzi Space (Mario Airò, Vincenzo Buonaguro, Matteo Donati, Stefano Dugnani, Giuseppina Mele, Chiyoko Miura, Liliana Moro, Andrea Rabbiosi, Bernhard Rüdiger, Antonello Ruggieri, Adriano Trovato, Massimo Uberti, Francesco Voltolina), Marcello Maloberti, Lucia Marcucci, Nicola Martini, Fabio Mauri, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Eugenio Miccini, Luca Monterastelli, Liliana Moro, Maurizio Nannucci, Alek O., Martino Oberto, Luigi Ontani, Luciano Ori, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Diego Perrone, Alessandro Pessoli, Lamberto Pignotti, Vettor Pisani, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Paola Pivi, Luigi Presicce, Carol Rama, Pietro Roccasalva, Andrea Romano, Gianni Emilio Simonetti, Rudolf Stingel, Santo Tolone, Franco Vaccari, Francesco Vezzoli, Luca Vitone

*Vettor Pisani, *L’eroe da camera*. Tutte le parole dal silenzio di Duchamp al Rumore di Beuys (*The Hero chamber*. All the words from the silence of Duchamp to the Noise of Beuys), 1972. Collection Mimma Pisani. Courtesy Elisabetta Catalano Archive. Photo: Elisabetta Catalano.



I'll Be There Forever

The Sense of Classic

Curated by Cloe Piccoli

Palazzo Cusani

Via Brera, 15 – Milan

15th May – 4th June 2015

Free entry

I'll Be There Forever / The Sense of Classic will be held in the historic centre of Milan at the prestigious seventeenth-century Palazzo Cusani. The exhibition is conceived and organized by Acqua di Parma and curated by Cloe Piccoli, art critic and art director of Acqua di Parma Contemporary Art Projects.

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, the Municipality of Milan, and the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milan – the most prestigious and widely acknowledged academy for art in Italy – the exhibition aims to reveal the dialogue between classic and contemporary art in the work of some of the most interesting Italian artists of today: Rosa Barba, Massimo Bartolini, Simone Berti, Alberto Garutti, Armin Linke, Diego Perrone and Paola Pivi.

I'll Be There Forever / The Sense of Classic is the first contemporary art exhibition produced by Acqua di Parma, representing a further development of the company's significant commitment to art and culture.

The exhibition explores a theme of international relevance – the classic in contemporary art, and how artists approach this concept. The notion of the "Classic" in this instance is not a style or citation but an atmosphere, an inspiration, a fleeting and ephemeral element with a persistent presence.

I'll Be There Forever opens with *La Fusione della Campana* (2007), an imposing sculpture by Diego Perrone, acting as a reminder of how awareness of classical and historical themes is a constant in



the work of these artists. The exhibition continues with a sequence of new works commissioned by Acqua di Parma for this exhibition and space. In the courtyards, gardens and rooms punctuated with Baroque stuccoes and marquetry, the artists offer a multifaceted and complex view of the idea of the classic, re-interpreting ancient and contemporary, epochs and places and making use of different materials and technologies. Sculptures, environmental installations, films, paintings and photographs engage with the Renaissance, transfigure Giotto and Leonardo, refer to the cinema of Tarkovsky and Fellini, and rethink classical architecture from the Acropolis of Athens to the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento.

Cloe Piccoli remarks: "In *I'll Be There Forever*, the classic is not intended as a canon. It is not the concept of balance, grace and harmony. Not the idea of the Athenian democracy in the days of Phidias, not even that of man at the centre of the universe, of Piero della Francesca. Not Bramante, Andrea Palladio in Venice or Leon Battista Alberti at Santa Maria Novella. Or, at least, not only this. The idea of the classic in *I'll Be There Forever* is that of a process of intricate growth that puts different elements in relation to each other, forming a new dialogue that invents new forms and meanings. But it is also the idea of the classic as memory, belonging, sharing. As Italo Calvino wrote: 'We use the word Classics for those books that are treasured by those who have read and loved them [...]'. 'The classics are books that exert a peculiar influence, both when they refuse to be eradicated from the mind and when they conceal themselves in the folds of memory, camouflaging themselves as the collective or individual unconscious'."

To bring out the dual nature of this exhibition, the architectural studio Kuehn Malvezzi, one of the most renowned in Europe, has conceived an exhibition design that places the contemporary in dialogue with the Neoclassical character of the Palazzo Cusani.

It has been created using fabrics produced by the long-established Venetian company Rubelli, confirming its dedication to the art world and consolidating its links with Acqua di Parma.

The art directors of Leftloft, which have fitted out the settings for major art events, such as the last Documenta in Kassel, have interpreted the concept of the exhibition with a simultaneously classic and contemporary design.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by Electa that will analyse the theme of the classic with essays by Cloe Piccoli, Alessandro Rabottini, Martin Herbert, Pier Paolo Tamburelli and Paola Nicolin, while a wide repertoire of images will offer a narration ranging from ancient to contemporary art, from cinema to architecture and from science to alchemy.

Young artists and curators from the Fine Arts Academy of Brera will be involved in an educational programme specially conceived for the exhibition.

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Wallpaper*

*THE STUFF THAT REFINES YOU

A sense of the classic: Acqua di Parma puts on first contemporary art show in Milan

ART/ 12 MAY 2015 /BY JJ MARTIN

Milan is known for its treasures being tucked away behind iron-clad doors. That's why a new exhibition sponsored by Acqua di Parma comes as a particularly refreshing satisfaction. Entitled 'I'll be There Forever: The Sense of Classic' and curated by art critic Cloe Piccoli, the show features seven site-specific installations by seven Italian artists on the piano nobile of Palazzo Cusani.

Currently occupied and managed by Italy's national army, the 17th-century former residence is just one of Milan's many iconic buildings, with their stuccoed ceiling and magnificent marquetry, of which the public rarely catches sight. Piccoli, who was tapped by Acqua di Parma, chose the building for its very specific baroque mood.

'When I thought about locations for this exhibit I immediately knew I didn't want a white box,' says Piccoli. 'I love the contrast between the artworks that are super contemporary and the context that is very antique.'

Piccoli cherry picked her seven favourite Italian artists - Rosa Barba, Massimo Bartolini, Simone Berti, Alberto Garutti, Armin Linke, Diego Perrone and Paola Pivi - and asked them to reconsider classicism.

'In Italy, wherever you go, there are classic references,' Piccoli observes. 'As an artist, you really can't get away from it. So I asked each artist "What do you think about classicism today?" Diego Perrone replied, "Please, let's not have a column show." And in fact, it's not.

Indeed, large-scale film screens, new paintings, slick photographs and conceptual installations all mingle with the palazzo's pastel frescoes, its ornate trimming and gilded mirrors, creating a new playground of grandeur. Architectural studio Kuhen Malvezzi conceived the exhibition's design, covering walls with fabrics produced by the Venetian company Rubelli.

As expected, much of the artworks' classicism is little more than a mere allusion. Diego Perrone employed the antique technique of sculpture but applied it to massive hunks of colored and stamped transparent glass. 'The pieces have the weight and volume of sculpture but at the same time they're very ambiguous,' Piccoli remarks.

Alberto Garutti's lamp, which hangs from a richly stuccoed ceiling, has its electrical current linked to a meteorological centre miles from Milan. Whenever a thunderstorm occurs anywhere in the country, the lamp illuminates itself. 'We're the first spectators of a cosmic event,' Piccoli enthuses. 'I love this!'

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frieze

Issue 168

Eyes and Ears

Diego Perrone's audio, visual world

'One Of These Days', the opening track on Pink Floyd's 1971 album *Meddle*, is an instrumental, save for a single sentence spoken by the drummer Nick Mason: 'One of these days I'm going to cut you into little pieces.' Mason's voice is distorted and slowed down to such a degree that it sounds like that of an evil cartoon character, and it's hard to understand what he says, though his menacing tone is clear enough. There is an iridescent, psychedelic colour photograph of a brownish thing against a turquoise background on *Meddle*'s cover (designed, as numerous other Floyd covers were, by Hipgnosis); only once you open the gatefold sleeve does it become apparent that this image is actually a close-up of an ear underwater, surrounded by circular ripples that look as if they've been caused by sonic vibrations. Discerning whether this ear is attached to a body or has been cut off is left to the viewer's imagination.



Untitled, 2014, glass casting, 87 × 73 × 12 cm.
All images courtesy the artist, Massimo De Carlo, London, and Casey Kaplan, New York

A self-confessed teenage fan of Pink Floyd, Diego Perrone has always been fascinated by our inborn capacity to apprehend sound, and the ways in which it can be distorted and contorted. Perrone's approach to making art – from video and digital animation to painting and cast sculpture – is defined more by how a work is perceived visually than aurally. And yet, during a recent conversation, he claimed never to have thought about this emphasis on the auditory dimension of his work. This is surprising given the abundance of acoustic reverberations in his practice, which now spans two decades. When *Meddle* came out, Michael Watts, reviewing it for the music journal *Melody Maker*, described it as 'a soundtrack to a non-existent movie'; inversely, it is tempting to describe Perrone's works as visual evocations of imaginary soundtracks. Like film scores, they are made to conjure a set of immediate emotional responses: tension, fear, suspense, unease and wonder, filling the void that separates the object from its beholder with aural ghosts. It is precisely this sensitive space that the artist seems most interested in shaping. The word 'sensation', after all, derives from *sentire*, a Latin verb still used in the artist's native Italian to describe the perception of both emotions and physical sensations, including hearing.

As organs isolated from the rest of the body, ears have been a recurrent, eerie subject in Perrone's work since 1995, when he sculpted his first translucent, life-size pair from horn (Untitled). A decade later, he created two large sculptures in polystyrene and plaster (Untitled, 2005), reproducing the ear's entire structure, from the cartilage of the outer shell, or pinna, to the inner cochlea, in which sound is converted into the electrical impulses that are then transmitted to the brain by the auditory nerve. In recent years, Perrone has been working on a series of experimental glass castings of ears (Untitled, 2011–ongoing), the hooked and beaked inner conduits of which seem to erupt in silent screams, as well as to crystallize the process of auditory perception. The visual appeal of these works – all unique pieces in candy pinks, light greens, icy whites and muddy browns – is enhanced by the artist's use of a combination of the ancient technique of lost-wax casting and new, high-tech versions of traditional glass-paste techniques (developed in collaboration with Vetroricerca Glas & Modern in Bozen/Bolzano, Italy), so that the old and the new merge in uncanny ways.



Angela and Alfonso, 2002, video still

Perrone's most recent exhibition, 'Void-Cinema-Congress-Death', at Massimo De Carlo in London, opened with a small, framed, red-biro drawing of a person's ear – filling the silhouette of one of Alexander McQueen's lobster-claw-shaped 'Armadillo' stilettos – installed in the middle of the gallery's large, street-facing window (Untitled, 2013). Inside, two large pieces in cast glass (both Untitled, 2014) featured the same shape, each with a gargantuan ear protruding from its centre, with the long, thin stiletto 'heel' standing in for the auditory tube. Made using solid rather than blown glass, these two sculptures have a hard, mineral texture. A red dragon screen-printed onto the otherwise black floor lent the installation a dark undertone. Downstairs, Perrone coupled a series of biro drawings of heads with a new body of handmade, bas-relief works in sheet iron, white synthetic gypsum and black PVC (all Untitled, 2014) depicting empty cinema chairs protruding from the walls like bulky ghosts. The artist describes these chairs as the epitome of inexpressive design: cheap, mass-produced items that are usually seen in their hundreds or even thousands, but which people mostly don't acknowledge. 'I was thinking of Muzak, which doesn't require any effort to be listened to,' says the artist, and 'of Brian Eno's Music for Airports (1978). The idea of a constant, ambient sound that wraps itself around you and invades your space'.

Easy Listening is not a genre one would normally associate with Perrone. The mp3 he selected for his participation in the audio section of 'After Nature', a group show at New York's New Museum in 2008, was a reading of H.P. Lovecraft's novel *The Beast in the Cave* (1905), the story of which unfolds in a pitch-dark cave, amid terrifyingly unplaceable echoes. For a 2010 solo exhibition at the Brodbeck Foundation in Catania, not only did Perrone create *Pendio piovoso frusta la lingua* (Rainy slope whips the tongue, 2010) – a sculpture that attempts to embody the roar of a landslide and the physical impact of fear on the body – but to accompany it he asked electro musician Tommaso Previdi to create a drone akin to that of a natural disaster, and amplified it through a 30-metre-long tubular structure, so that the entire gallery space vibrated threateningly.

Perrone's private horror-film collection is notoriously wide-ranging: from Tobe Hooper's classic slasher *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) to David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), and from Shinya Tsukamoto's epic *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989) to Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom* (1994). One of the artist's personal favourites is *Profondo Rosso* (Deep Red, 1975), Dario Argento's cult movie shot in Turin, which has an atmospheric soundtrack by the Italian prog-rock band Goblin, who were a substitute for Pink Floyd after Argento was unable to persuade them to participate. (The film's feast of screaming mouths, gory killings and Technicolor blood-dripping scenes come courtesy of the special-effects skills of Carlo Rambaldi, who went on to create E.T. in 1982 for Steven Spielberg.) Perrone paid his dues to abjection early on with the short video *Angela and Alfonso* (2002), in which the screaming female protagonist voluntarily and inexplicably submits herself to her boyfriend's attempts to slice off one of her ears – a professionally orchestrated bloody mess. An even earlier piece, *I Verdi Giorni* (*The Green Days*, 2000) is a short colour animation of a group of kids punching and harassing each other, laughing and shouting – a sort of half-playful, half-painful self-portrait. (The distorted voices were those of Perrone himself with Massimiliano Buvoli, Alessandro Ceresoli and Patrick Tuttofuoco – all artists he had studied with at the Brera Art Academy in Milan.) Usually screened with the soundtrack blaring, *I Verdi Giorni* is impossible to ignore. When reviewing it in 2002, while it was on show at Casey Kaplan, *The New York Times* critic Roberta Smith noted that it 'gives unbroken tension and screaming close-ups a comic edge'.

As fond of Jim Shaw as he is of the Slacker generation, Perrone appropriates 'high' and 'low' art-historical icons and techniques with a degree of anarchical freedom. And, despite the perennial critical reading of contemporary Italian art as stemming from Arte Povera and Conceptualism, he found his roots elsewhere, in a broad range of historical references, from Umberto Boccioni to Mario Sironi, and with a distinct perspective on Italian identity. In *Totò nudo* (Totò Naked, 2005), he transformed Totò – an actor who became such an icon of Italian postwar comedy that Pier Paolo Pasolini cast him repeatedly in order to 'de-codify' him, as the director once explained in a famous interview – into a 3D digital animation undressing in a forest at twilight. Gradually, Totò's clothes fall on the snow-covered ground until his ageing body is full-frontally naked: vulnerable and embarrassed, he is nonetheless now freed from his habitual Chaplinesque costume.



Untitled, 2012, glass casting, 17 × 35 × 29 cm

Perrone is also at ease with older masters. For *Idiot's Mask* (Adolfo Wildt) (2013), he used airbrush on pvc to reproduce a series of snapshots he had taken with his mobile phone (light reflections and glitches included) of a marble bust by Adolfo Wildt, the Art Nouveau father of Italian Modernist sculpture. For the Venice Biennale in 2013, curated by Massimiliano Gioni (who also selected Perrone for his Italian Pavilion, La Zona, ten years earlier), he presented a twin set of sculptures, exhibited side by side on metallic poles, entitled *Vittoria* (Adolfo Wildt) (2013). Again, the work was inspired by a Wildt marble sculpture: *La Vittoria* (Victory, 1918–19), an odd winged head with an open mouth, as if singing, which was created for the Palazzo Berri Meregalli in Milan. Perrone reproduced the historic work in two different ways: firstly, as a lost-wax casting made with a mix of resin and fibreglass, producing a very porous surface, yet a fluid and seamless overall outline; secondly, as a hand-sculpted form comprising welded blocks of industrial pvc, an 'old school' plastic with the same weight as marble and with a similarly polished, rock-like surface. Produced at different paces, using diverse but equally labour-intensive methods of construction, both works caused evident distortions to the original shape. But, as with music, so with art: like all good cover versions, Perrone's *Vittoria* pieces are unique in their own right, obtained by morphing the past into a present 'version'. I love to think of them as 'scream queens', demanding attention against the white noise of visual indifference.

- Barbara Casavecchia

Casavecchia is a writer and curator based in Milan, Italy. She is a contributing editor of Frieze.

Diego Perrone is based in Milan, Italy. In 2014, he exhibited at Massimo De Carlo, London, UK, and participated in group exhibitions at Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy, and Museo man, Nuoro, Italy. In 2013, his sculptures were included in The Encyclopaedic Palace, 55th Venice Biennale, Italy, and he had solo shows at Museion Project Room, Bolzano, Italy, and Casey Kaplan, New York, USA. His collaborative project with Christian Frosi is included in the group show 'The Yellow Side of Sociality' at BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium (until 18 January 2015).



Diego Perrone

Heads

BY CECILIA CANZIANI

From the selection of photographs that Andrea Büttner sent me for my previous article, I have excluded those that concern an aspect of her work that is most closely related to sculpture. Although I had not realized immediately, as it always turns out, by the time I'd finished writing I wanted to start again, focusing exactly on what I had neglected. Maybe that's why, when it came to choosing a new artist, I thought of Diego Perrone: for his interest in traditional mediums, or better for the craftsmanship quality that they retain, which in different ways and for completely different reasons both these artist address, and because I had been left with a longing to write on solid mass—a writing which revolves around an object in space and comes to terms with its weight.

In fact, in retrospect—that is, from a position that allows one to see everything more clearly, as if every choice was the result of a deliberate act and not a build-up of lucky and fortuitous accidents—a possible thread between the diverse poetics of artists, of which I have written in these very pages, could be a direct or indirect comparison with sculpture. Another thread could be in wanting to challenge oneself, through the written word, with a work that cannot be concluded by one's gaze. One writes about art, I think, for a need to respond with matter to the matter of the works that continue to challenge us.

At the offer to play *Show and Tell*, this time the artist responded with a variation. He sent me photographs of his work one at a time, following my comments. Otherwise, he says, it will look like one of those interviews where they send you all the questions together, so that it really is not an interview.

Fig. 01

Half-hidden behind the translucent mass of a sculpture, we catch a glimpse of two men's bodies, with gloved hands and bare arms: they are most likely installing the work, but when I received this picture I thought they were finishing it off. Roland Barthes would say that the punctum of this photograph is not so much the object at the center of the image— the sculpture that is its subject—but those hands in the foreground that seem to say that the sculpture retains—or so it seems to me—its originally being *techne*, i.e. the ability to produce things through knowing matter, and the application—and invention—of rules, which allow for an addressing and solving the problems that materials bring about. It is a knowledge that is put together through test and error and by comparison. And so, up to the beginning of the last century, each treatise was the answer to the previous one, and Wildt replied to Hildebrand, as if to confirm that art is always, after all, research, and therefore it is the result of a collective work, a knowledge that must be shared. Thus, in apparently showing less of the total (the exhibition of which this sculpture is part of consisted of two glass works installed on pedestals made of black metal, the drawing of a carp on the floor, placed between the two objects, and a wall panel made with dark polyurethane, which looks like the armor of an animal that we cannot see), this picture instead reveals much of the poetics of Diego Perrone. This photograph, I imagine intentionally chosen among the many in which the work was perhaps either more in focus, isolated, or in the context of the exhibition in which it was presented, seems to me to tell us that in the genesis of a work the artist is never alone. It also tells us that art is an occupation that leads us to share problems that are not entirely abstract or which may be so at the beginning or at the end, but that in the middle there is a time in which one has to deal with the construction of form.

Untitled is a glass paste sculpture. It has the appearance of a cameo from the Augustan age, but its crafting is rather different: while sardonyx is cut, Untitled was instead made with the lost-wax casting technique, which is usually employed in casting in bronze sculpture—thus, in this work the two aspects of sculpture seem to coexist: direct and indirect, carving and moulding.

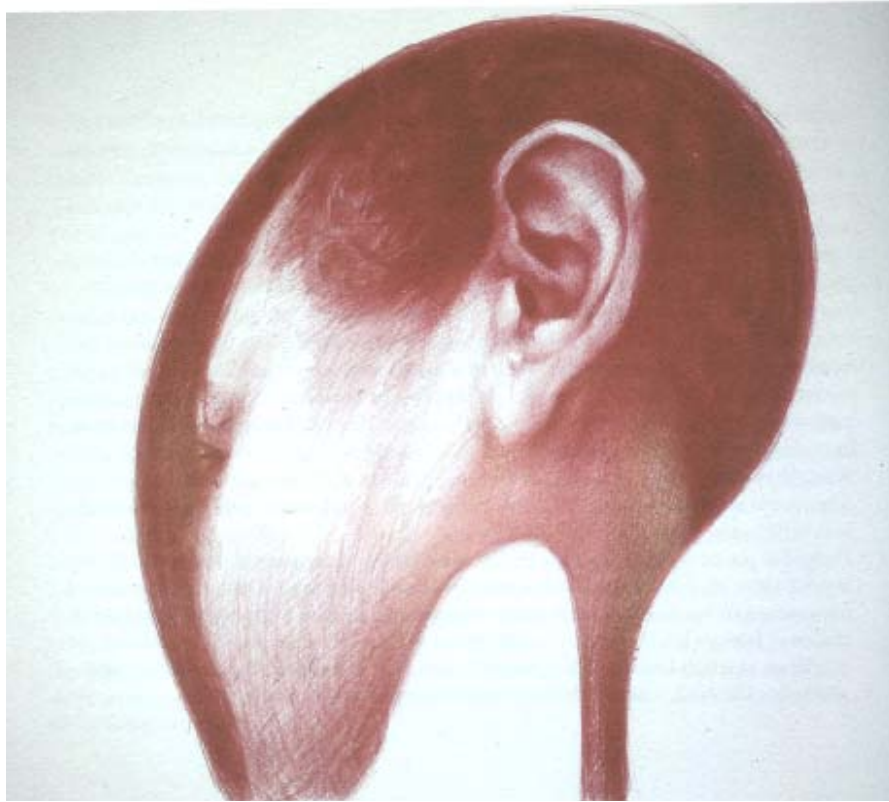


In the picture that seems to rise to the surface, we can see a vaguely sketched profile, with a clearly outlined ear placed almost in the center of the object. The ear is typical of Diego Perrone's work, and it is almost a metaphor of sculpture: empty and full, surface and space. Sometimes it is represented as the negative of itself, so it looks like a horn, which is another recurring element. 1 This permutation from negative to positive—either direct or only hinted at—seems to me central also in *I pensatori di buchi* [The Thinkers of Holes], a photographic work where the shots were entrusted to a photographer, but the holes that opened up in the earth, deep and mysterious, and which one could not see the bottom of, were dug by the artist. What the photograph does not show, but we may guess, is that to the gap into the ground there corresponds an equally impressive amount of land which has in the meantime accumulated next to the hole.

Untitled is placed on a pedestal, as an ammonite displayed in museums once freed from the stone...Or as an archaeological find, a giant version of the Augustan Gemma, but here—and even more so in the piece that went with it—the perspective is distorted. 2 After all, the deformation of features is a characteristic of the masks in classical theater, to which the title of the exhibition in which Untitled (2013) was presented—*Il servo astuto* [The Austute Servant]—alludes to. The mask is ultimately but a surface folded around a volume.

Fig. 02

This 50 x 70 cm pen and ink drawing on paper could be a preparatory sketch of the second of the two sculptures on exhibition in Bozano. Again, we see an ear is in the middle of the work, and the head is represented with great accuracy. More than enclosed by the strange form in which it is inscribed (a cross between an 'armadillo show' and I do not know what else, Diego wrote in the email that goes with the image— or a shell, or the burrow of some animal, or an organ of the body, as it seems to me), this head seems to be reflected on a concave surface, which alters its proportions in those places where it is mirrored on a bulge. It looks like a detail stolen from a Flemish still life, a presence captured by the reflective surface of a glass jug. What is the relationship between this drawing and the sculpture that in Bolzano formed a diptych with Untitled? The iconography is the same, but it seems to me that the subject, expressed through two different mediums, changes completely. And yet that the insistence on drawing—here real, and in the sculpture only alluded to, because even though it is a merger, what we perceive is very similar to an etching on glass—does not but resubmit and old question, namely that of the relationship between drawing and sculpture. It is an issue that never seems to find a solution in the history of art, because it involves not only a methodological proposal in the art of carving, but it raises another essential issue— that of the point of view. Michelangelo or Rodin, or the synthesis of their two positions, is in short one of the central issues of modern sculpture.



Il servo astuto, 2013

Fig. 3

Of this sculpture too there must exist versions in which it is photographed isolated or accompanied by the one—identical, but in a different material- that matches, as found on the occasion of the 55. Venice Biennale. In this photograph the work is instead in the artist's studio, i.e. it belongs to a time—and a place—bursting with life. It dawns on me that speaking of *La fusione della campana* [The Casting Of The Bell] 3 in an interview, Diego said that he preferred the photograph in which that work was surrounded by tools, rather than the work per se: still in progress, maybe not finished or potentially revisable, but, especially, surrounded by objects that represent the semantic context in which the work was created. So, behind *Vittoria* [Victory], a copy of the homonymous sculpture by Adolfo Wildt (which, due to the wide angle, seems to fly towards us with an open mouth, as if it were a terrifying Angel of History), one may notice a large drawing or photograph, which could be the study of the stars that decorate the wings of the statue and then, in the distance, tables and tools- an updated recount that the craftsman in the vascular paintings, or the sculptor Nanni di Banco in a bas-relief in Orsanmichele, told about their art through the tools of their trade and craft. It is a photograph that suggests that the work is the result of a process- a physical activity which involves hard work but also technical skills. It is also an image that tells of its landscape. In this sense, it is a self- portrait in absentia, and although I know that they are two entirely separate things- one is the documentation of a work, the other a work in its own right—it makes me think of the series *Come supportati da quello che dietro di loro rimane fermo* [As If Supported By What Of Them Remains Motionless], in which the horizon, over which the enigmatic ancient portraits loomed, gave back their history- a certain way of being in the world and belonging to a place of which one bears memory and scent. Viewed in sequence, these three images (three heads, the artist points out) suggest that the relationship between drawing, sculpture, and photography is the focus of Diego Perrone's research.

Of Adolfo Wildt (1868-1931), an artist hated by the avant-garde, but whose *L'arte del marmo* [The Art of Marble] is ultimately crucial for contemporary sculpture, implementing a synthesis between the two opposing positions which determined the development of sculpture (the revolution brought by Rodin, who introduced motion to establish the impossibility of maintaining a single point view, and the modernity of Michelangelo who, in working by carving, favored a single place) Milan- where Perrone lived in different periods for some time- holds two works: the winged Vittoria, in the Berri-Meregli Palace, and an ear-shaped intercom on the wall of Sola-Brusca Palace.



Victoria(Adolfo Wildt), 2013

1. As *Untitled*(2011) this a glass cast too, and the 2001 series of photographic portraits *Come supportati da quello che dietro di loro rimane fermo* [As If Supported By What OF Them Remains Motionless], but also *Untitled*, 1995, representing a pair of ears carved within horn.
2. Another reoccurring element in Diego's work, like in *La mamma di Boccioni in Ambulanza* [Boccioni's Mother In The Ambulance], 2007, or in *Untitled*, 2011, in which the painted aluminum surface is bent thus altering the proportions of the subject.
3. S. Chiodi, *Una sensibile differenza. Vonnversationsioni con artisti italiani di oggi*. Fazi, Roma 2006.

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ARTFORUM

Diego Perrone
MASSIMO DE CARLO | LONDON
55 South Audley Street
September 5, 2014–October 8, 2014



View of “Diego Perrone: void-cinema-congress-death,” 2014.

Diego Perrone’s latest exhibition engages the viewer in a conversation on the relationship between morphology and history. In the first room of this gallery/apartment, Perrone has chosen to “cool” the space, covering the floor with black linoleum onto which he has drawn a large red dragon. This legendary animal is here an iconic element, or rather an extraordinary motif, which is linked to two nearby sculptures in cast glass, each approximately thirty inches tall. Inspired by Alexander McQueen’s “Armadillo” shoes, these latter works feel like a kick to the face, and on close examination reveal an ear and an eye like fragments of a visage. The artist here also plays with chance, since he does not control the various chemical substances held in these works, which change color, particularly under the strong gallery lights. The sculptures also seem to have no texture: At times, they appear to turn into a transparent frame that allows one to see through them.

Along with his interest in alchemical processes, Perrone also plays with the opposition between the coagulation of materials and the instability of forms. On the gallery’s second floor he tackles ancient bas-relief technique. Here he shows five pieces, each created using various materials (plaster, sheet iron, PVC). Molded chairs emerge from the material, like bodies from the bowels of the earth. Four drawings in red ballpoint pen on paper complete the project; their subjects revive the motif of the glass sculptures in the first room, like the cast of an idea that has produced an autonomous image.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— Paola Nicolin

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Diego Perrone

Vittoria (Adolfo Wildt), 2013

PVC, metal

78.8 x 63 x 23.6" / 200 x 160 x 60cm

DP2013-010

Diego Perrone's investigation into the sculpture of Adolfo Wildt (1868 – 1931, Milan), an Italian sculptor from the early 20th century noted for his Gothic influences, began in his exhibition *Scultura che non sia conchiglia non canta*. Little known, Wildt represents an important moment in Italian art, not only for his experimentation with the grotesque and symbolic, but also for his influence as a teacher to artists such as Lucio Fontana and Fausto Melotti, among others. For the exhibition, Diego Perrone lined the walls of the gallery with sheets of PVC, each with meticulous, airbrush renderings of Wildt's *Maschera dell'idiota* (Idiot's mask), c. 1910. The mask fluctuates from painting to sculpture as the nose appears to protrude from the PVC, and then fades into a flat, black expanse.

For his contribution to *The Encyclopedic Palace*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni as part of the 55th Venice Biennale, Perrone has turned his attention to Wildt's *Vittoria* (also referred to as *La Vittoria*). The sculpture, whose title translates to *Victory* (or *The Victory*), depicts a screaming face that appears to be emerging from wings, embellished with stars. Perrone presents two reproductions of this enigmatic figure, one cast in resin and one hand-carved from blocks of PVC. Despite their similarities, they are opposed – one is the result of addition, formed in the single incident of a pour, while the other is the result of subtraction, the painstaking removal of the figure from a block.



Right:
Diego Perrone
Vittoria (Adolfo Wildt), 2013
PVC, metal
78.8 x 63 x 23.6" / 200 x 160 x 60cm
DP2013-010

Exhibition view: *The Encyclopedic Palace*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Giardini, 55th Venice Biennale.



Diego Perrone
Vittoria (Adolfo Wildt), 2013
PVC, metal
78.8 x 63 x 23.6" / 200 x 160 x 60cm
DP2013-010



Detail view
Diego Perrone
Vittoria (Adolfo Wildt), 2013
PVC, metal
78.8 x 63 x 23.6" / 200 x 160 x 60cm
DP2013-010

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Diego Perrone's work explores the cultural history of his native Italy, from regional folklore to modernist art movements such as Futurism, Arte Povera, and Transvanguardia. Using a wide range of media, including film, photography, sculpture, and installation, Perrone's work thematizes the process of art-making itself, emphasizing the transformation of materials and the manipulation of information. Rather than cohering into particular, fixed narratives, his works present elliptical, elusive impressions, heightened by his use of long, poetic titles that suggest a multiplicity of potential meanings.

In his photo series *As If Fascinated by What Remains Still in the Background* (1999), Perrone photographed elderly citizens of his hometown, the Northern Italian town of Asti, holding various animal horns, creating eccentric portraits that are simultaneously ritualistic and absurdist. Similarly, the photographs in Perrone's 2002 series *I Pensatori di buchi* [The Thinker of Holes] depict individual male residents of Asti sitting or standing at the edge of gaping, circular holes in the earth, which has been laboriously dug by the artist and his father over the course of several months. Alluding to Land Art and Arte Povera, the photographs are both elaborately staged constructions and documents of an ephemeral performance.

In works such as his large-scale sculpture *La fusione della campana* (2007), which attempts to capture multiple stages of the process of casting a bell in a single work, Perrone refers to the dynamism of Italian Futurism, presenting a condensed representation of the alchemical process of construction rather than depicting the bell itself. In a similar vein, the two works entitled *Vittoria* (Adolfo Wildt), both 2013—mask-like colored heads protruding from poles—suggest the popular traditions of Italy, such as carnivals and commedia dell'arte, as if refracted through the history of Italian modernist design.

- RW

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Diego Perrone, *Il Servo Astuto*
October 6 - January 7

Diego Perrone presents a new project for the Project Room, produced in collaboration with Vetroricerca Glass & Modern.

Experimental techniques meet classical traditions in the sculptures created for Museion: past and present come together in an elusive new dimension.

Curated by Frida Carazzato

For the exhibition three imposing glass sculptures will be taking up residence in the Project Room. The works are the result of a lengthy creative process: the artist selected details from a number of photographic portraits, transformed them into drawings and then transferred those onto the three-dimensional plane of wax sculptures. These forms then gave rise to the glass sculptures, which were fired in the furnace at Vetroricerca using the traditional *pâte de verre* technique.

In the transparency and colours of the glass, fragments of faces can be seen – bringing to mind the profiles on coins, ancient coinage in particular. Indeed Perrone's work often interprets classic themes and images from art history or popular culture.

The sculptures created for the Project Room resonate with echoes of the past and classical culture. History appears to have found a place in the contemporary scenario – but in an entirely new, indefinable dimension. Thanks to the inherent potential of glass, the references to classical coins and portraiture contained in the sculptures are merely a point of departure: the faces and profiles merge before our eyes, becoming difficult to make out. In the different colours the glass acquires, these eerie-looking images create an almost painterly landscape; the figurative aspect of each sculpture becomes less evident, making way for the mystery it contains, what is not revealed. As typical in his art, the images created by Perrone generate others, not revealing a single clear meaning but giving rise to an ongoing creative process.

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MOUSSE

5. Diego Perrone at Casey Kaplan

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"I read, some days past, that the man who ordered the erection of the almost infinite wall of China was that first emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who decreed that all books prior to him be burned. That these two vast operations – the five to six hundred leagues of stone opposing the barbarians, the rigorous abolition of history, that is, of the past – should originate in one person and be in some way his attributes inexplicably satisfied and, at the same time, disturbed me. To investigate the reasons for that emotion is the purpose of this note." 1

The impulse to chase down the references, concepts and information etched within a piece of art – which might somehow justify its logical or narrative operation – is such an obvious practice that we end up in a rather complicated position as viewers when, as with the work of Diego Perrone, we find ourselves constantly grappling with the feeling that we've made an error in judgement, rather than finding the key to any confirmation or reassurance that there is an internal structure that follows a shared logic.

Taking for granted that the constant recurrence of certain elements should be seen as proof of a secret need to communicate something on the part of the artist, who uses the artwork to bridge the gap between his own mental symbolism and someone else's world, comes to be more symptomatic of an obsession, sometimes a compulsion, of the viewer, rather than a genuine need dictated by reality.

Diego Perrone's work is built around just a few ground rules, a possible list of which might include the continual flight from any narrative form that is predictable or even simply predetermined, trying instead to arrive, in a totally instinctive, experiential way, at a dimension that goes "past the boundaries of what is known, to reach the realm of what might be".

Seen from this perspective, his practice turns out to be based on the creation of devices that are willing to be more fluid than they are concrete in their substance, objects open to the action of time and physical agents as well as to possible alterations and shifts in their meaning. To Diego Perrone, the work of art is not to be found in the final result, but rather its



Diego Perrone, Untitled, 2011

Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

process of evolution – its stratification – a result obtained by creating "devices" which play an active role in their own metamorphosis, bachelor machines.

For his last solo show at Massimo De Carlo, "Il Merda – parte prima (paesaggi)" in 2009, Perrone created a group of fragile sculptures made from sheet metal and resin, developed around elements drawn from two paintings – *Il gasometro* (1943) and *Paesaggio urbano e camion* (1919) – by one of the most important Italian artists from the first half of the twentieth century, Mario Sironi, and capturing the possible space that lies between the original two-dimensional nature of the model and the three-dimensional translation made by the artist.

Through a similar strategy of appropriation but reversing the technique, for his upcoming show at Casey Kaplan, "Scultura che non sia conchiglia non canta", Perrone has turned his attention to a small sculpture by Adolfo Wildt titled *Maschera dell'Idiota*, which once belonged to Gabriele D'Annunzio and is still kept at the poet's former estate in Gardone Riviera. In the artist's hands, it becomes the focus of an obsessive, at times groundless formal investigation, carried out through a repeated process of pictorial replication that presents the viewer with an image that could be easily confused with different views of a digital rendering, but which closer observation reveals to be made with a hyperrealist technique, which artist has achieved using an airbrush on black PVC. By searching for solutions to contingent problems, Perrone creates a

constant shift – an almost performative act – into realms unfamiliar to him, whether in terms of technique, concept, or form. Unevenly distributed throughout the halls of the exhibition space, the long rolls of PVC on which the artist has painted surround the viewer, their repetition highlighting the alien, disturbing nature of the face in the masks.

Rounding out the exhibition is a large sculpture, installed in the main room of the gallery, the “ghost” of a mollusk just over three yards long and made of resin, which seems to emphasize even further the elusive nature of Perrone’s language: yet again, the artist leaves the viewer hanging, faced with a rebus that has no solution. Beep beep, as the Road Runner would say!

“I would like my images to be thought of as words, and that doesn’t necessarily imply narrative.”

- *Antonio Scoccimarro*

1. Jorge Luis Borges, “The Wall and the Books”, from *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, James Irby and Donald Yates, eds. (New York: New Directions, 1986)

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21 x 21: 21 Artists for the 21st Century, exhibition catalogue, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino: SIPI, 2010, p. 138-143

Diego Perrone

Asti, 1970
Vive e lavora a / Lives and works in
Asti, Milano and Berlin

SOLO SHOWS

Il Merda parte prima (paesaggi)
Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milano, 2009

Lupi e la Fusione della campana
Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, 2008

We are in the black world of Mamuttones
Galerie Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin, 2008

La mamma di Boccioni in ambulanza e la fusione
della campana
CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux;
MAMbo Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna,
Bologna, 2007

Remain in Light
(con Ergül Cengiz e Isa Schmidlehner)
Galerie Andreas Huber, Wien, 2006

Toto nudo e la fusione della campana
Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo,
Torino, 2005

GROUP SHOWS

Esposizione Universale L'arte alla prova del tempo
GaMeC, Bergamo, 2009

Rumore. Un buco nel silenzio
Spazio Oberdan, Milano, 2008

Nathalie Djurberg & Diego Perrone
Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2008

Italics: Italian Art between Tradition
and Revolution, 1968-2008
Palazzo Grassi, Venezia; Museum
of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2008

After Nature
New Museum, New York, 2008

50 Moons of Saturn
T2 Torino Triennale, sedi varie, Torino, 2008

Apocalittici e integrati. Utopia nell'arte italiana di oggi
MAXXI Museo delle Arti del XXI Secolo,
Roma, 2007

The Shapes of Space
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, 2007

Solo 24 ore
Museum Museo d'Arte Moderna
e Contemporanea, Bolzano, 2007

Of Mice and Men
4th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art,
sedi varie, Berlin, 2007

Perspectif cinema 2003-2004
serata di proiezioni, Centre Georges Pompidou,
Paris, 2004

Sogni e conflitti: La dittatura della spettatore
50^a Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
della Biennale di Venezia, Venezia, 2003

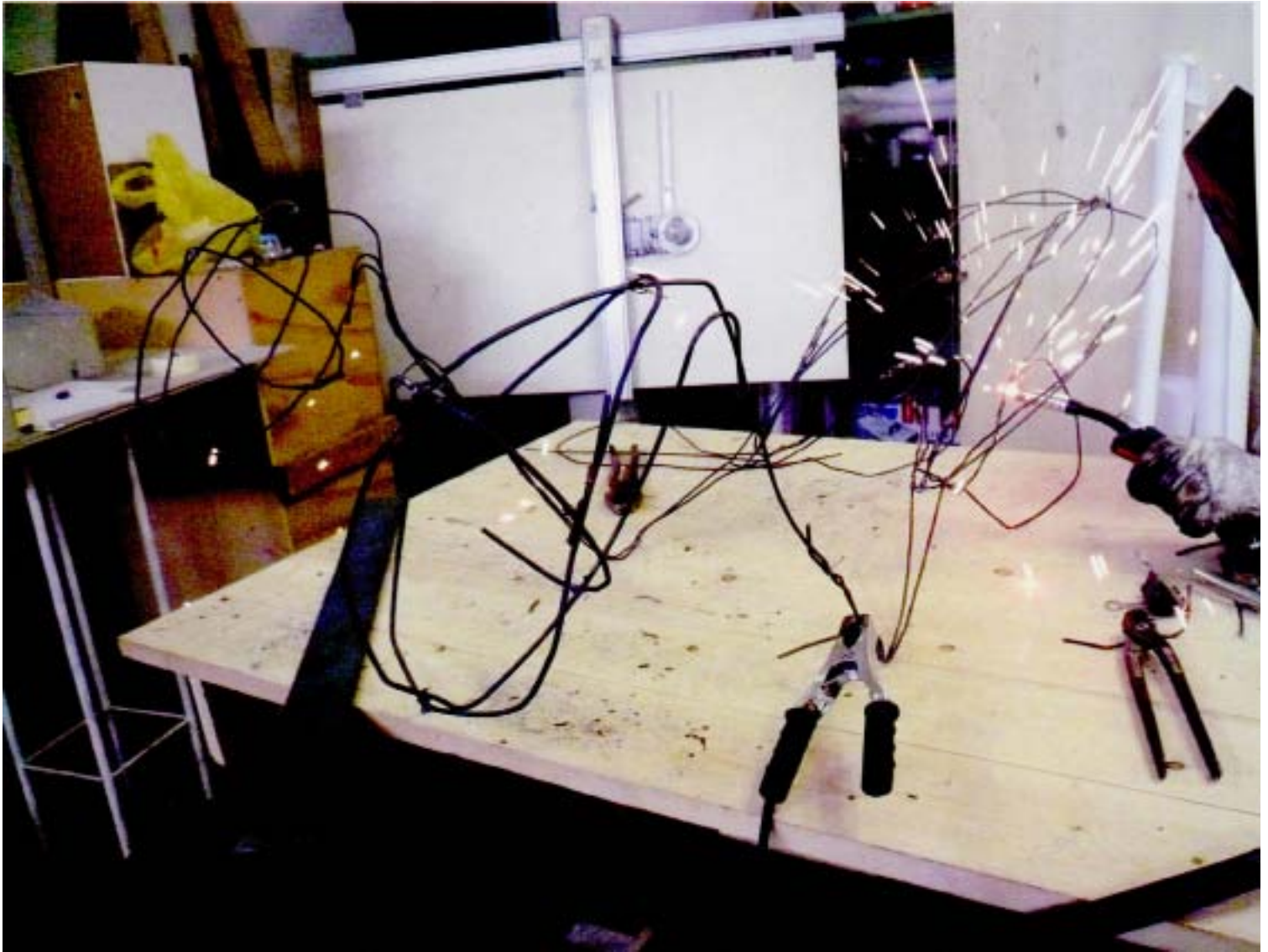
Perrone's work is characterized by the variety of the media he utilizes— from video to photography, painting, sculpture, drawing and installation, which he exploits to produce elegant esthetic results and create an unmistakable style. The title is often very long, a sort of micro-narration that describes the work and, at the same time, enhances its evocative power and enigmatic aura.

Perrone invents stories, which he tells through the use of images rather than insisting on narrative accuracy. These images are the evidence of a complex thought process, revealing the toil behind the constant processing of real data.

His works are characterized by an accurate study of space and by the operational aspects of "art-making" The artist wants to show us the whole process, the metamorphosis of matter that leads to the final work. His works, even when they are finished, have an extremely dynamic and flexible appearance, as if they were about to change shape, as if the creative process should never come to an end. The different stages of work do not erase each other— on the contrary, they form layer upon layer, shaping the work itself. Perrone's most recent sculptures, inspired by the futurist movement, actually involve a high level of energy.

For Perrone the work of art does not identify with the end result, but rather with a project that activates the mind, allowing the artist, but also the public, to push their thought beyond the limits imposed by reality.

The exhibition includes a new work from a series of sculptures inspired by a listening experience: a sound and its modification, the noise produced by a landslide, a huge movement of the earth followed by other, different natural and artificial events, evolving and combining, coming to life in the sculptural process.



Pendio piovoso frusta la lingua, 2010
Setole di nylon, vetroresina, ferro, finitura acrilica / Nylon bristles, fiberglass, iron, acrylic paint
Immagini della lavorazione / Images of the production



Pendio piovoso frusta la lingua, 2010
Setole di nylon, vetroresina, ferro, finitura acrilica / Nylon bristles, fiberglass, iron, acrylic paint
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Flash Art: January - February 2010

FEATURE



Diego Perrone and Simone Berti

CAUSE-EFFECT

Samuele Menlo

SAMUELE MENIN: When you are invited to participate in a group show with a specific theme, how does this theme influence your work?

Simone Berti: The work of an artist is not defined by a theme. An artist is always able to find a direction to convey his ideas. If there's a limit, that's even better. It is even more challenging.

SM: Have you ever said to yourself: "Why did they invite me?"

Diego Perrone: I think in that case you have to think about the rhythm of the show. What an artist can do is either try to break the rhythm with his/her work or try to achieve continuity, a flux in which he/she can merge.

SB: I think an artist's work is similar to a job in advertising. Both situations include receiving a commission and finding a solution. What differs is the aim. The aim of an artist is not selling.

DP: I agree. I think today it's more interesting to be part of a group exhibition, a biennial, in which you have a strong piece that is

competing—visually speaking—with the others. It's increasingly important and interesting to think not only about your own piece, but also how your work achieves a sort of symbiosis with the whole show.

SB: That's true, but at the same time, for me, the work of art, if it's good and strong, must be autonomous in whatever situation you place it.

DP: We can't just be creators of strong, disjointed artworks that can be separated from their contexts. Art becomes self-referential. Instead, we should be forward-thinking and try to work with the context in which we are participating. You can only participate if you understand the terms of your own participation.

SM: Do you think you have succeeded, in this sense, in your participation in the 4th Berlin Biennale, where you presented *Il primo papà gira in tondo con la sua ombra / La mamma piega il suo corpo cercando una forma / Il secondo papa batte i pugni per terra* [The first dad spins around with his shadow / The mom folds her body, trying to attain a shape / The second dad punches his hands on the ground]?

DP: Yes, behind that Biennial there was not just a concept but also a specific taste, something very physical and immediate, a common flavor that you could experience throughout the Biennial, also as a natural response of the artists to the context and to the situation. And this was new.

SM: There is something I have always wondered. Why are you so interested in ears?

DP: It's a formal pretext. The ear is so beautiful, but also so scientifically fascinating. When you think of an ear, how it's made, the pavilion, then you are reflecting on sound, the physical reality, the emissions, the fullness and emptiness, the idea of casting...

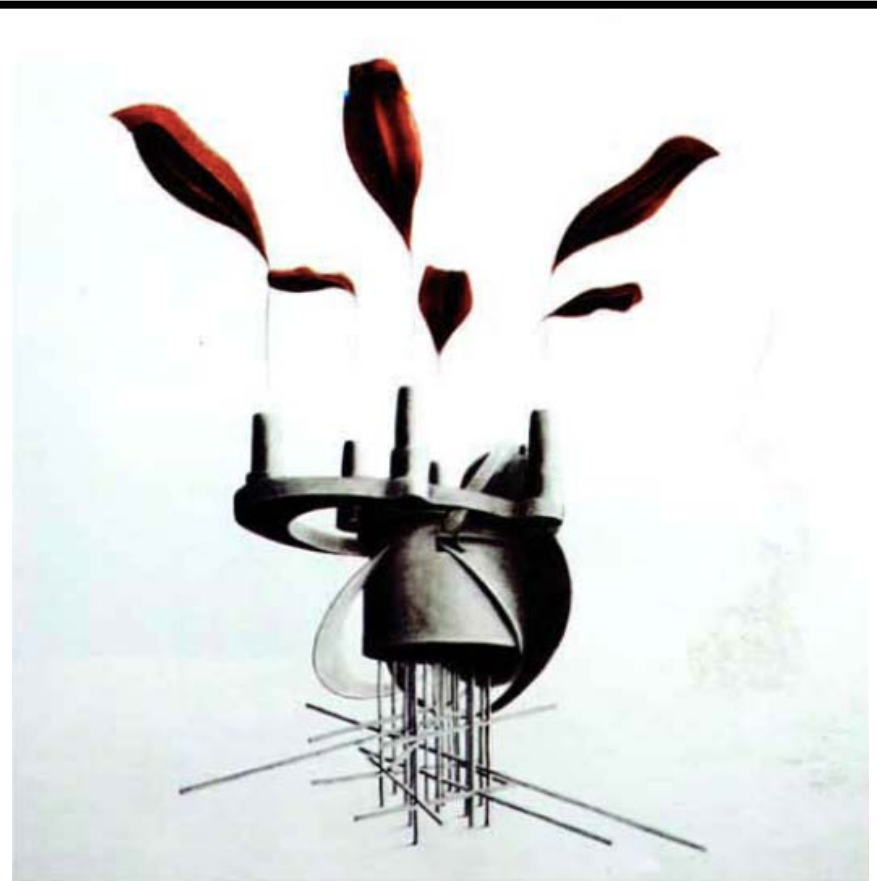
SM: In your video *Angela e Alfonso* (2002) it is the very dramatic and painful experience of two lovers where he cuts her ear off.

DP: There, the act of cutting the lover's ear off is made to last for as long as possible. It is the culmination, the logical end of a love relationship characterized by this excess of passion. I am not into producing objects. I want my work to go straight to the point and on to the viewer, painfully lacerating.

SB: I personally believe the artwork is still a matter of form. Do you think that art has to do with morality?

DP: I don't think morality is at stake here. It's more like something that just happens. It's more related to the cause-effect chainreaction. It's an intent that has an effect; the responsibility for it rests with both the players who "throw" it and who "receive" it.

SB: In relation to art, morality is an imaginary problem. When discussing art, any given issue becomes a pretext. Art must always be political, but it cannot



Opposite: Diego Perrone, *Untitled*, 2009. Iron, epoxy, carbon-fiber, fiberglass, ballpoint ink, 76 x 145 x 615 cm. Courtesy Massimo de Carlo, Milan; Annete Gelink, Amsterdam. Above, Simone Berti, *Untitled* 2009. Graphite, charcoal and sanguine on lined paper. 190 x 150 cm. Courtesy private collection.

deal with politics in a documentary way.

DP: Yes, the problem lies in its inception. When you create something, you feel a specific responsibility. When you deal with art, you feel the duty to make something that is for mere contemplation.

SB: Sure, the artist must be aware of politics, especially when you speak about political strikes or social engagement. But the actual artwork cannot become purely explanatory, like a caption.

SM: Could you tell me about your early work *Untitled* (1998)?

SB: I've always been intrigued by the potential energy that is, ideally, a kind of blocked kinetics. The more you block it the more it grows, like a dam; we have to give freedom to this kinetic energy that has been accumulated. This is what *Untitled* (1998) was about. There you have a bar going through the center of three big wheels becoming potentially unstable.

DP: From this point of view you are like a scientist who works with art. As an artist, you think about possible functions of energy without considering the danger implied. I like the idea that my work generates a chain reaction that I cannot control.

SM: In *The Social History of Art*, Arnold Hauser analyzes how artworks influence society. However, your discourse is based upon the idea that an artwork can evolve alongside society.

SB: Yes, it depends on who's standing in front of it. It creates an open path in that sense.

SM: We could try to imagine how your work would have been perceived during the French Revolution for example...

DP: Now I'm thinking about something else that is more related to issues of loss of authorship in the creating of an artwork. If we look at an artwork, we see an undeniable change, an evolution. And nevertheless we are taught the original intentions and significances of works of art, which are generally meant to remain the same throughout time: the work will always be the same. We are looking at the situation from another perspective.

SB: Yes, but for us, it's impossible to perceive the complete evolution of an artwork. Maybe even the gesture of the artist becomes the reflection of the political situation

FEATURE



of the country from which the artist originates. I'm thinking about Gino De Dominicis: he was playful, probably because of his cultural background.

DP: Now Italy is living in a deeply problematic political reality, one which could call into question why Italian artists are not interacting with political issues, but instead are perpetuating this sort of playful mood.

SB: The artists should react, but in another way. Those in power now use communication—the media—to control. It's a form of persuasion that is very effective because it modifies the mind of the people. Maybe the reaction of the artists should be similar: they should use the same method. But obviously this act needs to be contextualized.

DP: Why do you think we are so afraid to make simple art? Maybe it is because we are afraid of getting so directly to the cause-effect reaction.

SM: Probably it's somewhat related to the heritage of art history in Italy.

DP: That's a possible interpretation. We have a much deeper respect for the history of art in Italy than in other countries. Being an artist has almost a mystical value for us. We think we are in an inferior position because we are the inheritors of Humanism and the Renaissance. From this position, it's hard to be too direct.

SB: I disagree. Many artworks we have done were very explicit, especially early on. They were simple and direct. For me, it's less a matter of being simple and direct. Rather, it's making sure an artwork isn't too explanatory.

DP: We are always scared when there's no mystery, when everything is said. I really get

scared when art is clear and everything is out there. You don't fall in love with art if everything has already been said.

SM: It's like a soap opera: they make you wait for the next episode.

SB: In other words, the artist shouldn't be explicit. Otherwise, he or she risks being too didactic.

SM: The artist has to indicate possible interpretations.

SB: Yes, but on the other hand, I think that any artwork can be political.

SM: It can also change in response to the environment.

SB: Yes, but if we keep it on a more practical level, we can consider an artwork "thrown" into history. I would say that most art is. (Translated from Italian by Ben White)

From left: Diego Perrone, *Untitled*, 2009. Digital print, biro. 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photo: Emanuel Biondi; Simone Berti, *Untitled*, 2009. Moss, wood, steel. 250 x 250 x 250 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Samuele Menin is editor in chief of Flash Art Italia.

Simone Berti was born in 1966 in Adria, Italy. He lives and works in Milan.

Selected solo shows: 2009: Vistamare, Pescara (IT). 2006: Base/Progetti per l'arte, Florence. 2005: GAMEc, Bergamo; Massimo De Carlo, Milan. 2000: Massimo De Carlo, Milan. Selected group shows: 2009: Venice Biennale. 2008: "Italics," Pinault Foundation, Venice / MCA Chicago. 2007: "Apocalittici e integrati," MAXXI, Rome. 2004: "I nuovi mostri," Fondazione Trussardi, Milan; "Vernice," Villa Mannin, Pasariano di Codroipo (IT). 2002: "ExIT," Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin. 2001: Istanbul Biennale. 2000: Manifesta, Ljubljana; "Over the Edges," SMAK, Ghent.

Diego Perrone was born in 1970 in Asti, Italy. He lives and works in Asti, Milan and Berlin.

Selected solo shows: 2009: Massimo De Carlo, Milan. 2008: Casey Kaplan, New York; Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin. 2007: CAPC, Bourdeaux (FR) / MAMbo, Bologna. Selected group shows: 2009: "Cocker Spaniel," Kunstalle zu Kiel (DE). 2008: "After Nature," New Museum, New York; Estratos, PAC Murcia (ES); "Italics," Pinault Foundation, Venice / MCA Chicago; T2 Turin Triennial. 2007: "Apocalittici e integrati," MAXXI, Rome; "The Shapes of Space," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. 2006: Berlin Biennale. 2005: Moscow Biennale. 2003: 50th Venice Biennale. 2002: "ExIT," Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin.

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frieze

Diego Perrone

GALLERIA MASSIMO DE CARLO, MILAN, ITALY



The title of Diego Perrone's solo show at Galleria Massimo De Carlo, 'Il Merda – parte prima (paesaggi)' (The Shit – part one [landscapes]), has a long artistic lineage. Besides Piero Manzoni's infamous cans (1961), merda is an Italian word with a noble literary tradition, first appearing in *The Divine Comedy* (1308-21), specifically in the eighth circle of *Inferno*, where sinners guilty of excessive flattery are immersed in a river of excrement. More recently, Pier Paolo Pasolini took the word almost directly from Dante in two late works, both of which appeared after his brutal murder in 1975. For example, in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975), he dressed the perpetrators of Sadian atrocities of the *Girone della Merda* in fascist uniforms. In his unfinished novel *Petrolio* (*Oil*, published in fragments in 1992), a visionary tale on the corruption of Italy in the '70s, Pasolini devotes a long chapter to the horrible misadventures of 'Il Merda' and his girlfriend Cinzia, on the hellish backdrop of 20 streets around *Via di Torpignattara*. In this last 'hypernovel', Pasolini plays with manifold viewpoints, split personalities and simultaneity, in a fluid mixture of time, space and language, where the only possible unifying principle (or way out) is the experience of the senses.

Perrone, who titled one of his first videos *The Suburbs Go into Battle* (1998), and whose more recent sculptures probe the possibilities of shape-shifting, compressing each different phase of the production process into a single work-in-progress, must have felt at home with *Petrolio*. But it's from the paintings of another great Italian master of doom, Mario Sironi, that Perrone takes his visual cues.

At Massimo De Carlo, Perrone has isolated some details from Sironi's industrial landscapes and peripheries, then photographed, drawn or printed them. He then turned them into three-dimensional objects. The exhibition groups four works (all Untitled, 2009): a large, shiny 'collage' of folded aluminium sheets, hanging on high and thin iron legs, like dark sketches on a white page; a black modernist knot of graphite, iron and resin, protruding from the wall like a bullet stopped in mid-air; and two drawings on photographic paper, one framed, the other almost free-standing, with only one corner attached to the wall. The exhibition thus moves from a bi-dimensional plan to a three-dimensional one, and back again, with striking lightness. It is an exercise in what Italo Calvino called a 'hermeneutics of multiple solutions'. The clean, well-lit, orderly white cube of the gallery overcomes all shadows, and seems to keep at bay the dark, stinking and often scary underbelly of the Bel Paese, so dear to Perrone.

- Barbara Casavecchia



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AFTER NATURE

THE NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK
17 JULY - 21 SEPTEMBER

Neil, Jonathan T.D. After Nature, Art Review Magazine, October 2008 p.

After Nature takes its name from the title of a small book of granite-edged narrative verse penned by that most melancholic of German writers (but honorary Englishman), W.G. Sebald. More specifically, the phrase 'after nature' appears in the first of Sebald's three prose poems, a meditation on Matthias Grunewald, which observes of the painter's 1505 Crucifixion that its landscape, a recessionary abyss, one which 'reaches so far into the depth/that our eyes cannot see its limits', likely had its visual precedent in a solar eclipse of 1502, an event, as Sebald narrates it, which Grunewald would have seen and

*so will have become a witness to
the secret sickening away of the world,
in which a phantasmal encroachment of dusk
in the midst of daytime like a fainting fit
poured through the vault of the sky {...}*

Sebald begins this passage by explaining that

*Most probably Grunewald painted
and recalled the catastrophic incursion
of darkness, the last trace of light
flickering from beyond, after nature {...}*

It is a fitting passage for an exhibition which takes as one of its central themes perceived catastrophes and their representation; but in some ways the choice of Sebald's text as accompaniment and catalogue (in a rather ingenious move, an added dust jacket contains the requisite curatorial essay, acknowledgements and works list) is a detrimental one, because, as a work of art, it undercuts - and outstrips- what After Nature, as a show, would like to achieve.

This is not to suggest that it is somehow the art itself that is lacking. We in the US have had to wait a long time to see one of Werner Herzog's contributions to the art of film find its way into a museum. So the decision to open After Nature with a recut version of Lessons of Darkness (1992), Herzog's sublime vision of Kuwaiti oil fires (from the first GulfWar) as fruits of some sinister alien harvest, can only be described as inspired. Likewise, Artur Zmijewski's digital video, Oko za Oko (An Eye for an Eye) (1998), in which two maimed individuals receive assistance in everyday tasks, such as walking and washing one's hair, from an able-bodied counterpart, presents an unsentimental testament to the limitlessness of human care (and as if a coda to this, Tino Sehgal's solo performer writhing in slow motion on the floor around the corner reminds one of the despair that stands just offscreen in Zmijewski's lesson of hope).

What these and certain other of the best works in the show share is traffic with physical facts: infernos, mutilation, other people; Zoe Leonard's Tree (1997) is just that, with some

assistance from steel cables and supports; Roberto Cuoghi's national portraits, some of so-called rogue states, emerge from admixtures of everything from lead to wax to cocoa butter.

But what After Nature really wants to traffic in ultimately, is a specific kind of fantasy. As curator Massimiliano Gioni, admits, 'After Nature' is 'an exhibition of prophecies and visions', one that 'wants to act as a machine for producing myths by inventing stories, even lies'. Citing Herzog, but perhaps following Grunewald's lead, Gioni notes in closing that the exhibition 'is an attempt to blur the distinction between artworks and documents...that facts only create rules, while fictions can lead to new ecstatic truths.' In other words, what comes after nature is religion - to which the many undated and untitled Sermon Cards, scrawled by the Reverend Howard Finster, can more than attest.

One cannot stress how very contemporary is this disillusionment with the modern world, a disillusionment nowhere more manifest than in calls for retreat into the premodern (what else does it mean to 'reduce' one's carbon footprint?) that are at the same time indistinguishable from certain coercive forms of reenchantment (fundamentalisms of every stripe, Islamic and Judeo-Christian as well as environmental). But the fantasy that is religion, of truth 'revealed' rather than forged, is not the answer, nor the art that we need, just as it is neither for Sebald's autobiographical 'I' in his own After Nature. (One of Sebald's earliest works, After Nature was published in English only in 2002, after the author's death.)

There, in the final of the three poems, the narrative again turns to a work of painting, this time Albrecht Altdorfer's 1529 depiction of the Battle of Arbela, an epic scene of warfare between East (King Darius of Persia) and West (Alexander the Great). The mood struck is not one of taking sides. Rather, in the final lines, attention again falls to the receding landscape:

*The Nile Delta can be made out,
the Sinai Peninsula, the Red Sea
and, still farther in the distance,
towering up in dwindling light,
the mountain ranges,
snow-covered and ice-bound,
of the strange, unexplored,
African continent.*

Here, eclipse is replaced by the undiscovered, darkness for the Dark Continent, but nowhere, in either case, are we confronted with anything except the natural, as opposed to supernatural, world itself. It may indeed be a place of cruelty and sadness, or of madness and melancholy, but it is the only place. And to entertain the delusion that there is anything that comes 'after nature', in the temporal, otherworldly sense, is to fall prey to a far bleaker darkness than could ever arise from blotting out the sun.

-Jonathan T.D. Neil

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Teconi, Roberta, "Former Jewish School for Girls," *Of Mice and Men*: 4th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, organized by KW Institute for Contemporary Art, curated by Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Giani, and Ali Subotnick, Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2006, p. 113.

Diego Perrone

·1970 in Asti, Italy

A deep sense of time and history pervades Diego Perrone's sculptures, videos, and photographs. In his works he rediscovers Italian rural traditions that allude to the cycle of life from birth to death. He creates images that lie in a dimension behind reality and provoke existential speculation.

In the photographic series *I pensatori di buchi* (The hole thinkers) (2002), he physically renders emptiness: Large-format color prints depict holes of different diameter and depth shaped by the artist in the fields near his home in the region of Piedmont in North Italy. Over several months he dug the terrain and regularly shot photos of local people standing precariously close to the edge of the resulting holes. These works invoke peasant culture, and even land art, but above all their importance lies in Perrone's process, his attempt to paradoxically represent the thing - here the void - rather than the action itself.

Perrone's works are often concerned with inexplicable or nonsensical rules. The video *Ange/a e Alfonso* (2002) suggests a darker side to human behavior: In a car in a parking lot a woman passively allows her ear to be sliced off by a man who seems to be her boyfriend. In the video *Toto Nudo* (Toto naked) (2005) an animated version of Toto, an icon of Italian comic cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, takes off his clothes in desolate woods to the sound of a dog barking. This representation of the renowned comic actor is neither funny nor spectacular. Instead, Toto's slow movements and his nudity make him appear sad and almost desolate, a weak, fragile, and elderly man.

Although Perrone's work is highly emotive, it remains strongly rooted in form. The sculpture *La fusione della campana* (Casting the Bell) (2005), is a black fiberglass cast, almost 3.5 meters in diameter, that looks like an enormous, mangled flower. It represents all the stages that go into the casting of a bell- but not the bell itself. Here, as in Perrone's other works, what is important is the representation of an artistic process that reaches into the

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tema celeste

september | october 2002

diego perrone

Casey Kaplan
New York



To go to work, Diego Perrone goes home. That is, he casts the central characters in his photographs and short videos from among the residents of his hometown in Italy. As a result, an air of both intimacy and rural languor characterizes the work. For his first US solo exhibition, Perrone showed several videos and "I Pensatori di Buchi" (2002), a series of photographs featuring a plot of land marked with cavernous holes. The images position men, usually nude, in various acrobatic postures near recently dug circular pits. It has been raining, the bodies are wet, and rivulets of mud run down into the ominous darkness. Holes in the ground usually signal burial, but in this case the men's contortions suggest a birth out of the primordial ooze.

Although the photographs occupied the entire front gallery, the videos in the back room were the highlight of the show. They ranged in style from an animated cartoon about a group of young boys in a playground, who punch, push, and taunt one another in the name of fun, to a scene shot with two actors in a parked car at night.

In this disturbing drama, a man and woman embrace lovingly and then, with her full cooperation, he methodically cuts off her ear with a razor. In the video *La periferia va in battaglia* (1998), an elderly man and woman sit side by side, doing and saying nothing while turtles crawl around at their feet.

In his modern-day version of the three ages of man, Perrone documents the cruelty of children, creates a metaphor for the disfiguring pain of adult relationships, and wisecracks about the slow pace of old age. The artist spotlights ordinary people who deal with extraordinary situations. In the video *La terra piatta e una dimensione lirica del luogo comese regredire fosse inventare* (1999), an earlier work, a man known as the village idiot in the Diego Perrone's home town, Asti, makes frustrated attempts at building a shelter from a pile of bamboo sticks. His disappointing results are less interesting than his quiet concentration and hesitant strategizing, two working methods that Perrone himself seems to employ to captivating effect.

-Merrily Kerr

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Smith, Roberta. "Art in Review: Diego Perrone," The New York Times 7 Jun. 2002.

The New York Times

Diego Perrone

Casey Kaplan
525 West 21st Street

The centerpiece of Diego Perrone's New York debut is "Angela and Alfonso," a six-minute video in which a man tenderly and carefully slices off the ear of his lover while they sit in the front seat of a car. The video announces Mr. Perrone as an artist to watch, if warily. It is riveting, horrifyingly convincing and beautiful in its own terrible way. It is accomplished - through the help of professional actors, directors and special effects - with an aesthetic economy and emotional complexity that reduce its sensationalist potential, if not its sexist implications.

The video prolongs the violent split-second climaxes of mainstream and avant-garde movies, including "Reservoir Dogs," "In the Realm of the Senses" and "Un Chien Andalou," and echoes the close-up of the screaming woman shot through the eye in Eisenstein's "Potemkin." It is also, like a Cindy Sherman film still, a fragment of a nonexistent narrative,

played straight and sincere, that stands alone while evoking several possible before and afters.

Four other very short videos, shown on request, also combine interests in film's formal elements and in basic human relationships. "Soprano" is a singing version of Michael Snow's "Wavelength." "The Green Days" ("I Verdi Giorni"), an animation of little boys bullying one another, which was shown at P.S. 1 last fall, gives unbroken tension and screaming close-ups a comic edge.

In the front room, 10 large color photographs show solitary young men, clothed or naked, sitting or cavorting next to deep holes freshly dug in a field. More generic, they nonetheless evoke some rudimentary, even primitive form of power or connection, like a male version of Ana Mendieta's images.

- ROBERTA SMITH

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ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2002

Diego Perrone Casey Kaplan

From Alberto Burri's tachiste allusions to bloodsoaked bandages to the quasi-chemical experiments of arte povera, postwar Italy has produced numerous artists captivated by the transformative properties of elemental matter. Diego Perrone's new series of photographs "I Pensatori di buchi" (The thinkers of holes; all works 2002) depicts solitary figures posed at the edges of yawning pits in the dirt. These pensive loners seem to be pondering their gritty surroundings before merging with the darkness.

Perrone hails from the Northern Italian town of Asti, not far from Turin, Milan, and Genoa, where the arte povera movement, promoted by the Genoese critic and curator Germano Celant, first flowered in the late '60s. Perrone has recently carried out projects that speak to both the artistic legacy and the more general local flavor of his home region. In his 1999 photographic project *As If Fascinated by What Remains Still in the Background*, Perrone shot elderly citizens of Asti holding animal horns, aligning weathered faces with brittle organic surfaces. In preparation for the eleven photographs from "I Pensatori di buchi," on view here, the artist and his father spent three months shoveling several holes as deep as nine feet on the family property, first burning the earth with a gas torch to soften it. This arduous labor was followed by visits from townspeople, who were photographed while balancing precariously on the ridges of the crevices, straddling terra firma and the backyard abyss.

The works themselves occupy another kind of border zone: between photography as documentation and photography as self-sufficient image. The documentary aspect links them with countless photos usually black-and-white, from performance and Land art in the '60s and '70s. Yet Perrone's are self-conscious constructions that make use of artificial lighting and rich color printing to create strong pictures that hold their own. For one work, the camera was poised above the mouth of a hole, the lens directed toward the black-and-gold soil of the interior (some photographs do not include people). The highly textured, moist earthen wall takes on a quality that can only be described as painterly, calling to mind Robert Rauschenberg's early monochromes or Anselm Kiefer's blasted landscapes.

Perrone's physical manipulation of the land might be read not only as a reference to '70s Earthworks but as a metaphor for widespread forms of environmental manipulation, it is no

Williams, Gregory. "Diego Perrone," *Artforum* Sept. 2002: 204.

accident that in these works he only portrays men, the "thinkers of holes" who seem to plot the earth's destruction. A video shown in the gallery office, which one could view only after reading a warning, heightened the undertones of aggression evident in the photographs. Called *Angela & Alfonso*, the six-minute scenario plays out in gory and repulsive detail the slow and deliberate removal of a woman's ear with a box cutter by a man who appears

to be her boyfriend in a parked car at night. She seems to take part in the act voluntarily, though any possible motivation is left entirely unaccounted for. In light of this video, the photographs in the gallery suggest a darker side of human behavior: Just what dirty deeds are these men planning? In one photograph, Perrone himself is seen naked, straining to maintain a backward "bridge" position without tumbling downward. He seems simultaneously rooted in the soil and close to being swallowed up by it. In his

efforts to excavate Asti's terrain and chronicle its inhabitants, Perrone maintains a two-sided relationship with his locale, transfixed by its past while struggling to understand its present.

-Gregory Williams



The Thinkers of Holes (I Pensatori di buchi), 2002. Chromogenic print, edition ed. 5, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2" From the series I Pensatori di buchi © Diego Perrone

PLAY>

GIGIOTTO DEL VECCHIO

Narration takes care of fundamental functions in the historical process for the growth and the development of humanity: first of all, that of bearing witness to events of the past for later generations, or a function of documentation thanks to which the present is structured, in continuity with the teachings and experiences of the past.

In coordinating this relationship with memory the main tool of narration has been language more than linguistics, and by considering the vast range of meanings of the notion of language we can comprehend how narrative practice has approached different spheres, the most interesting of which is that of artistic representation. In this case there is a clear relationship of autonomy established by narration with respect to reality, where imagination and creativity have been and are the effective foundations of artistic production.

It is useless to emphasize the fact that it is not possible to formally define the artistic language as a compact unicum, given the variety of forms it takes, all born of technical-technological growth, although we can safely state that in recent years distinct specific roles are giving way to more ductile figures whose abilities and expertise involve a vast number of different spheres. Artistic narration was significantly enriched in the 1800s by two inventions, both the offspring of the sciences: photography and cinema. Examples of how what records history as a tool of information can become a tool of fantasy, cinema and photography are two complete, complex arts, each with its own semantics and its own rich, though recent history. The case of film is particularly interesting, as the most articulated form of expression, given the fact that to exist it requires all the arts: the visual arts, literature, music, architecture. Such structural complexity, sustained by the choice of often immediate messages, accessible to all, has given rise to the true media event of the 20th century, the instrument that has concretely permitted a faster, more immediate spread of knowledge: television.

Increasing the spaces of information and creation, the urgent need has arisen to invent roles to be consumed by the collective imagination: there has been a clear, forceful recouping of many literary figures, together with the creation of new heroes and heroines, but a place of honor (just consider Neo-realism) has been assigned to the narrative of the average man, of his little-big fortunes and little-big humanity. This recovery of the quotidian dimension, of the force of real people, is probably the result of the historical events of the 20th century, or namely the two world wars, disasters of such proportions as to demand the bards of all the world to narrate the horrors humanity has inflicted upon itself. But undoubtedly the main driving force behind the new focus on man must be attributed to Freud and psychoanalysis. The new psychoanalytic theories, telling of the id, the superego, the potential of the subconscious, have revolutionized the interior histories of individuals, modifying the perception of the self and its potential, restoring to chaos what the Enlightenment had attempted to remove from it. In fact the image forces that were the focus of their research (both in anthropology and psychiatry, and in classical religion) wound up challenging the rational, adult man of the Enlightenment, his method and even his mind.

With this vast range of premises and possibilities that artist learns further to narrate the illnesses of an increasingly pathological, disorderly society. The new means utilized by artists reveal the need to reduce the narrative aspect of the works to clearly demonstrable statement, where video art could have used a traditional narrative form, closer to that of cinema, or where "art" photography would run the risk of resembling the more sterile, symbol-charged images of magazines. What emerges is a new idiolect, the "language of a linguistic community," produced by an awareness that the narrative approach, unless renewed, runs the risk of the greatest sin art can possibly commit, namely that of obsolescence due to a slow deterioration both in terms of themes and of forms.

The new generations of artists, whatever tools they select, take a critical stance with respect to narration, but without renouncing it: through the mediatic miscellany that has nurtured and nourishes their culture, through the imaginary - but also concrete, in each person's everyday life - pressing of a hypothetical PLAY> button, they activate a necessary process of "digestion" thanks to which the work gathers life from a book by Gadda together with a good film, a music video, a song. This is how to rehabilitate narration, simultaneously fantastic and concrete, the result more of necessity than of imagination, of catastasis than catharsis.



Come suggestionati da quello che dietro loro rimane fermo 2001
Color photograph, 150 x 110 cm
Courtesy Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan



Diego Perrone, I verdi giorni 2000
Cartoon, 2 min. 30 sec.
Courtesy Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan

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Manifesta 3

Ljubljana

'Manifesta 1' was held in Rotterdam in 1996, the second in Luxembourg in 1998 and most recently, 'Manifesta 3', in Ljubljana, capital of the Republic of Slovenia. Whereas 'Manifesta 2' offered an optimistic view of a liberal Europe, focusing on ideas of 'local' and 'personal', 'Manifesta 3' explored crises, such as the resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia. As the title 'Borderline Syn-

drome – Energies of Defence' indicated, the curators, Ole Bouman, Francesco Bonami, Mária Hlavajová, and Kathrin Rhombert, chose to describe Europe as suffering from a kind of neurosis/psychosis. The many failures of political systems in recent years could certainly justify disillusionment, but nevertheless, the curators' approach was somewhat paralysing. To interpret political problems as pathologies is to portray them as potentially fixated states. To provoke analysis and action, pragmatic rationalism might work better than psychologi-

As the title, 'Borderline Syndrome – Energies of Defence' indicated, the curators chose to describe Europe as suffering from some kind of neurosis.

cal fatalism. (In this sense, Brecht beats Freud.)

It is arguable whether the show's somewhat sensational claim that Ljubljana is situated in a critical 'bor-

derline position' between East and West is valid. Of all the states that once belonged to Yugoslavia, Slovenia has always been closest to the West both in cultural and economi-

cal terms. It remained largely untroubled by the civil war and is one of the first countries in line for admission into the EU. Ljubljana is a prosperous, lively city – anyone who crossed the border and expected it to be a miserable place was likely to be disappointed. Still, it was hard not to notice that 'Manifesta' was overshadowed by local power games: only representative state institutions were chosen as exhibition venues and Ljubljana's art scene remained more or less invisible for the duration of the show. That the torch-lit opening ceremony was held in what was once former Yugoslavian President Tito's summer residence added to the impression that the authorities perceived 'Manifesta' to be a prestigious state event.

The function of a European Biennial is one that has often been criticised – promoting the idea of Europe can mean advertising the economic system of the EU. Yet it seems wrong to label 'Manifesta' as an agent of global capitalism. Many blockbuster exhibitions of 'global art' celebrate their neo-liberalist generosity by presenting work of non-European artists as delicate symbols for cultural otherness. In contrast, 'Manifesta 3' offered a more convincing solution, stressing the discursive capability of art to inform. Throughout the exhibition, video-works with a documentary approach prevailed. As a result 'otherness' was not commodified but presented in a specific and explicitly political context.

Difficulties associated with the Diaspora are explored in Amit Goren's *Your Nigger Talking* (1999), a video portrait of a worker from Ghana who runs a kindergarten for illegal immigrants in Tel Aviv. Nusrin Tabatabai filmed Rotterdam from the perspective of a Turkish resident in *Old House* (1999). Many videos touched on the trauma of Former Yugoslavia's civil war: Jasmina Zhanic, for example, spoke to Bosnian children about the death of their relatives in *After, After* (1997). Anri Sala's video *Nocturnes* (1999) told the stories of two young Parisians: an ex-soldier who is haunted by his memories and spends sleepless nights performing war games on his Playstation, and a nerdy animal lover who dedicates himself to the maintenance of his huge aquarium.

Other works offered a more ironic take on their subject. In a satirical animated cartoon, *Disotver Latvija* (1999), Agnese Bale mocked Latvia's self-imposed isolation by reporting that Latvians are stuck in 12th-century traditions and have never stopped living in barrels. In a similar way, Josef Daberning's film, *Wisla* (1996), satirised unacknowledged stagnation. Set in an empty and dilapidated stadium in Krakow, Poland, the film followed the movements of two sport coaches, who, unconcerned by the fact that there is no game, still go through the motions of coaching.

Jan Verwoert



Diego Perrone
Untitled
1999
art photograph
150 x 110 cm

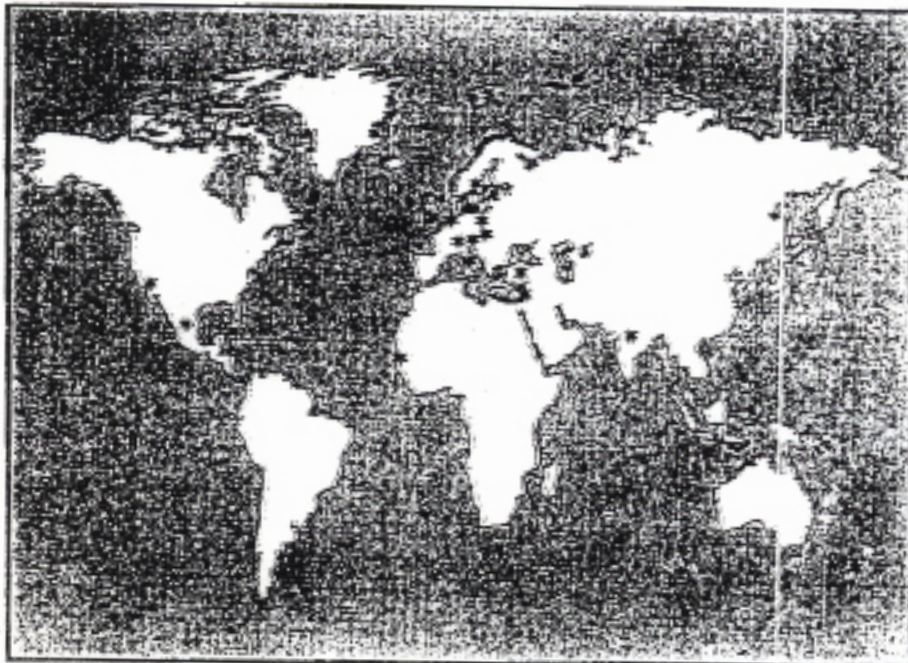
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FONDAZIONE
SANDRETTO RE REBAUDENGO
PER L'ARTE

FONDAZIONE SANDRETTO RE REBAUDENGO PER L'ARTE

GUARENE ARTE 2000



GUARENE ARTE 2000

The dead zone

There's a crease in reality. A ravine in which could fall a house or a tree, or where you could hide. A refuge in which reality appears suddenly transfigured, widened and silent, bound by inscrutable laws.

It is in these spaces that the figures of Diego Perrone live: suspended, immobile, as though awaiting a supernatural signal or event. They have a geological, archaic heaviness. They live according to ancient rituals, involved in superstitious, pointless rituals. Like knights in a new medieval period.

An old woman in slippers, perhaps a peasant returning from the fields. She is carrying neither flowers nor a basket of fruit, but a gigantic horn gathered who knows where. Perhaps it is the remains of a prehistoric animal which has fallen into the kitchen garden. Or perhaps the horn was torn from her forehead and will soon end up in the collection of some country doctor. Or, even, Perrone has come upon the old woman whilst involved in some pagan ceremony or exorcism. It does not much matter in the end, because Perrone's works do not recount a story: they create a suggestion.

The world as Perrone would have it is a cross between the fairy-tale lightness of Italo Calvino and the tragic absurdity of Beckett. A world in which the limits must be redefined and tested each time through successive soundings, making mistakes with the awareness of the error.

For this reason, Perrone's world is populated with fragile, blind, obtuse figures. In the 'La periferia va in battaglia' ('The suburbs go to war') video, an elderly couple sit contemplating two tortoises dragging themselves slowly across the floor. This is a timid suggestion of immortality: stretching time so as to be able to escape, so as not to die. The two elderly persons stay aside; they do not speak, and if they were to, they would use a dialect thick with earth and tied to the past. An incomprehensible language in which imperfection is elevated to system.

It is the same language as would be spoken by Dario, protagonist of the video 'La terra piatta è una dimensione lirica' ('The flat earth is a lyrical dimension'). Dario is the village idiot, as he used to be called before the triumph of the culture of whining and euphemism. Perrone asked him to build a hut of branches and filmed him whilst, impassively, he watched the collapse of his fragile refuge: Dario watches it tremble and flop down, and he bends down to collect the remains, before beginning again to build it, Sisyphus-like, continuing his error to infinity and ignoring the laws of gravity and logic. Dario is the wild child, a Robinson Crusoe building an escape, away from the dead zone of reality.

There's no violence in this video, no intrusion, because Perrone makes no concession to spectacle. His images are always discreet, in low definition, even traditional in their disarming simplicity: little stratagems to open a crack, a fold. Little tricks, such as lifting a chicken, suspending it from a nylon cord and photographing it there, in the middle of the living room, whilst it conquers its nature and tries to fly. Or cyclopean projects which are almost always condemned to failure, such as extracting a hole from the ground or measuring the speed of the cosmos and history, or retouching one hundred royal portraits to give them a mocking sneer unintended by their original painters.

Whether concentrated upon the immobility of an animal or the vastness of the universe, Perrone's exercises in thought are designed to suspend time: magic rites, followed according to an enigmatic, mysterious plot such as the twisted logic that holds up Dario's hut. Each time, it is as though the artist had available a check on existence, compiling a catalogue of solitudes and imperfections. A catalogue that unfolds in accordance with slow, geological rhythms, almost without suffering the fascination of contemporary art, because Perrone pursues profundity and respects the discipline of the earth.

Project for: *"The awareness of the roundness of the planet that can have a worm within the earth"*.

Last year, I began to dig a hole in the ground which would have a circumference perpendicular to the surface of the terrain. I began to dig without a clear idea as to the result; it wasn't so much a job or a work, but a sort of project without end. It was a way of working whilst allowing myself the luxury of being transported by a series of consequential processes, little by little denaturing the point of departure, but without knowing where I would arrive.

Everything sprang from the pleasure of imagining a circular hole, of reading it as a metaphor of the awareness of the roundness of the planet that can have a worm: a worm that digs within the earth without points of reference and without perceiving its own body in space...

Thus, I dug a trench 2.5 m deep, 2 m long and 1.5 m wide, after which I placed a flexible PVC tube in it that had been folded to form a circle. I closed the hole, burying the tube and waited for the ground to settle, so that it would appear never to have been disturbed. Then, using a winch with a pulling capacity of 2,500 kg, I hooked up one end of the tube and slowly pulled it out, leaving a small circular tunnel of a diameter of about 2 m.

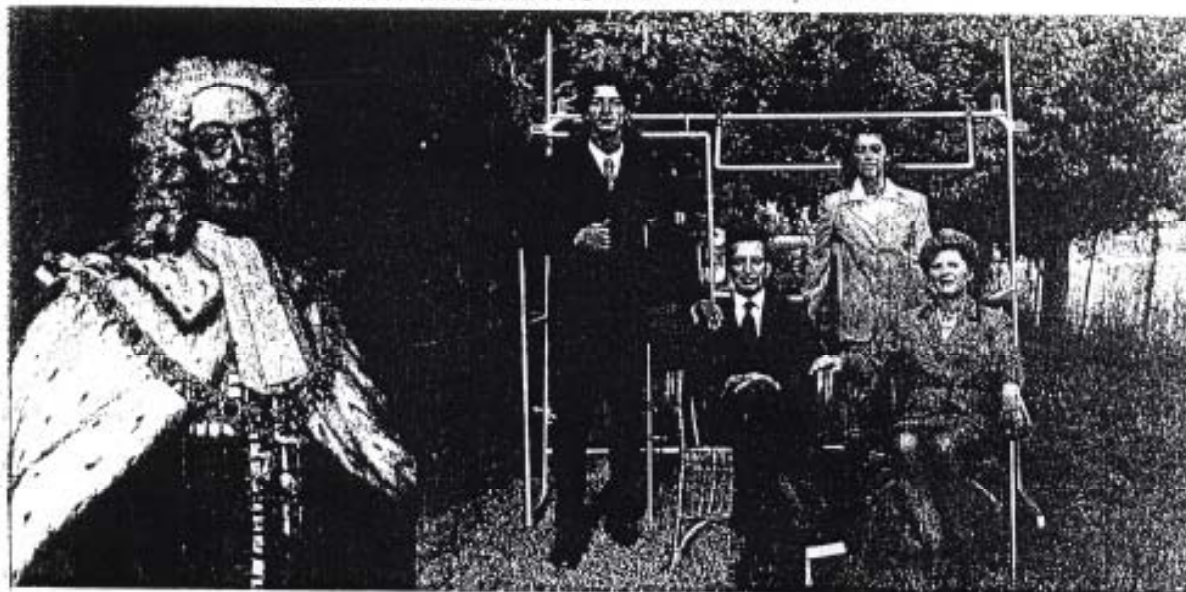
At that point, inspired by the impossibility of being able to realise it, I had the idea of transporting the entire hole from the ground so that it could be contemplated from outside. Naturally, in order to be able to lift the earth, I had first of all to increase its consistency. To do this, I decided to cook it, to submit it to such a high temperature as to make it crystallise within. I used an oxyhydrogen torch and gas torch fed by hydrogen, oxygen and propane torches which, assisted by two compressors, fed high-pressure flames into the hole. I spat flames and air into that hole for 18 hours, although I believe it takes at least 40 hours to bring the earth to the right temperature for proper crystallisation.

Having solidified the terrain, with extreme caution, I dug around the circumference of my hole so as to create a disk of earth that was 2 m in diameter and 70 cm thick, and weighing about 4,000 kg. This mass occupied a rectangular trench of 4 m by 2 m. I would have liked to lift the block of earth, and bring the hole out. I attached the enormous disk to two thick chains and with the help of the winch tried to lift it: however, the earth was not compacted enough to support its own weight and the hump broke up, giving way, thus bringing my project to a close with a natural failure.

Today, therefore, I have to start again from the beginning and build an external structure, a framework that can lift the earth without breaking it into lots of pieces. Perhaps it is no longer the hole to interest me so much as the possibility of extracting it and rendering it transportable.

DIEGO PERRONE

FLASH ART INTERNATIONAL - March/April 2000



Left: DIEGO PERRONE, *La Stanza del 109 Re che ridono*, 1998. Lambda print, detail of the installation. Right: SIMONE BERTI, *Untitled*, 1999. Lambda print, 180 x 150 cm. Courtesy De Carlo, Milan.

Aperto Italy

MISTAKES. MIS-SHAPES

Massimiliano Gioni

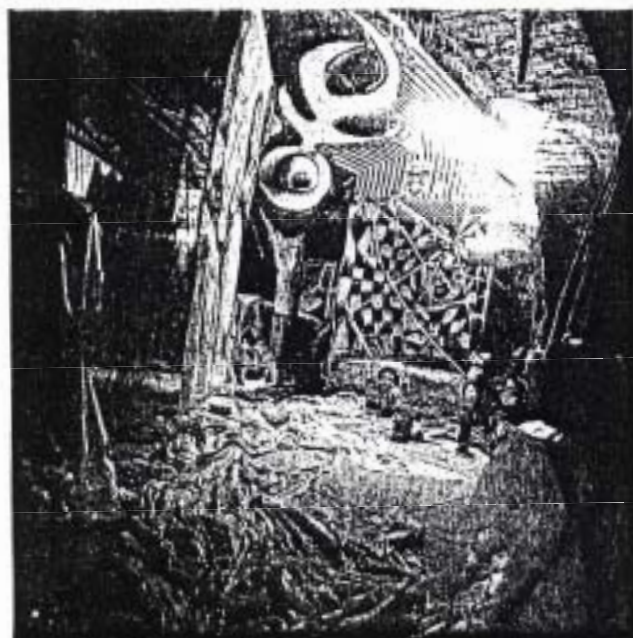
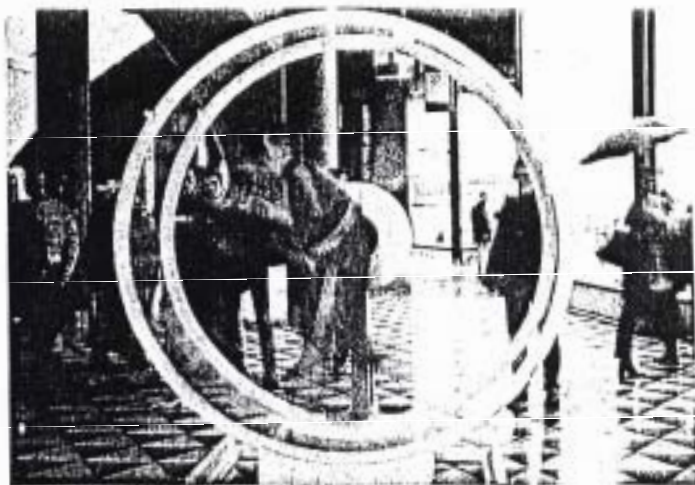
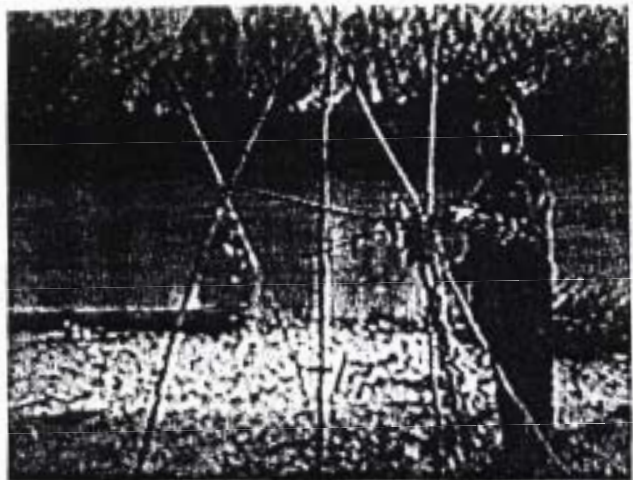
Aperto is a Flash Art "virtual" exhibition curated to highlight the art currently being shown in a particular city or region. It will soon be available for viewing on Flash Art's new Web site.

There is a sharp precision in the works of the Italian artists that are already strolling along the caravans of international biennials and triennials. To the likes of Vanessa Beecroft, Giuseppe Gabellone, Monica Bonvicini, and Paola Pivi precision means aggressiveness. Nevertheless their attacks and act-outs are always translated into something else, either a glamourization of labour, or a stratification of references to minimal and process art, that muffle the sound and the fury, and turn the roughest images into silence and finiteness. For others, such as Luisa Lambri, Margherita Manzelli, and Grazia Toderi, precision combines with intimacy, empty corridors and small toys, whereas for Francesco Vezzoli nostalgia mingles with gay cult, irony and soap opera aesthetics. No matter how diverse their works might seem, these artists all share the same faith in bringing things to an end, leaving no room to chance, loss and failure. Reflected in these

polished images, Italy turns into a mirage of efficiency, erasing the traces of boredom and ugliness, that – believe it or not – compose the fragile geography of this country. Alas, Italy is not just designers' clothes, Chianti wine, and Rome in the spring. Italy also means scary unemployment rates, depressing suburbs, dysfunctional extended families, and a feeling of sleepy laziness stretched all over the country, like a curtain of fog. This is the Italian landscape according to a new generation of artists: a place where doubt and weakness are elevated into an unstable system, offering no final solution. The emerging Italian artists are no longer speaking a firtate language: they use a vernacular speech, built on imperfection. Probably the most striking image of what being an artist means in today's Italy is Patrick Tuttofuoco's video *Criceto*: trapped in a gigantic hamster wheel, Tuttofuoco runs endlessly, with no direction, falling, getting back on his feet and falling

again. The only reactions to this self-imposed vexation are the screams of the passer-bys that gather around the artist and yell insults at him, improvising a ritual of humiliation carried out as a sudden hooligans' rally. Shot right in the center of Milan, this portrait of the artist as a hamster turns into an involuntary incursion in the fields of sociology, depicting the crowds of out-of-towners and mall rats that migrate from the peripheries to down town, looking for the heart of Saturday night and eventually stumbling onto Tuttofuoco's wheel. This population of adolescents is the main character of another work by Tuttofuoco. In *Scooter* the artist realized the dreams of two barely eighteen years old kids. After six months of meetings, projects and plans, Tuttofuoco produced a customized scooter, which is built according to the directions of his two younger friends: a perfectly functioning work of art, which runs at 150 kms per hour, bringing together

two different sensibilities, making them collide at full speed, while keeping an eye on Duchamp and an eye on the rear mirror. *Scooter* will soon become a video, but it's also a sculpture, an object, a six month performance: in a precarious system, art can't coagulate in a concise form. It is bound to stay open, always turning into something else. The impossibility of form and finiteness is one of the underlying themes of Roberto Cuoghi's work. At age twenty-five Cuoghi broke the arrow of time by turning into an old man: he dyed his hair white, grew a beard, gained a few kilos and started wearing only his father's clothes, fighting the Oedipus complex with the help of Freud and Bergson. Cuoghi's performance has become a year long act of endurance, a limitless living sculpture that must intertwine with the exigencies of daily life: the steps that have become too steep, the rhythm of his attenuated breath, the puzzled reactions of strangers... Little re-



Clockwise from top left: DIEGO PERRONE, *La terra piatta è una dimensione lirica*, 1999. Video still; PATRICK TUTTOFUOCO, *Criceto*, 1999. Video still; SIMONE BERTI, *Untitled*, 1999. Alkyd on canvas, 320 x 290 cm; ROBERTO CUOGHI, *Emozione Piemonte*, 1999. View of the installation at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Genere.

mairs of Cuoghi's performances, as if they were too complex to fall into a form and could only live on in the stories that surround the artist, like a private and portable mythology. When forced to leave an object or a trace, Cuoghi reacts by provoking "timequakes." In his latest show the artist met up with his old friends, whom he had stopped seeing since the beginning of his aging process. Together they built an installation that recalls a squatters' hideaway or a stage for a rock concert: this monument to teenage rage and clichéd punk aesthetics stands in memory of the frantic pace of youth, which Cuoghi left behind when he decided to turn into the mirror image of his own father.

Family is yet another obsession of emerging Italian art, maybe because in times of uncertainty the parental circle can offer protection and help. But now it's as if family itself was

in need of some help, split as it is between the exigencies of modernization and the burden of tradition. In Simone Berti's photos the artist's family and relatives appear leaning against a shaky architecture built with medical prosthesis: it's an uncanny group portrait that recalls images from the 19th century, when photography was still a mystery and people would stroll to the fair, dressed up in their Sundays clothes, to get their picture taken. Nevertheless Berti's images aren't just nostalgic icons: they also speak of a subtle death drive, exposing the weakness of family ties, while depicting a sort of mutant humanity, on the border between normality and absurdity. Mutants and borderliners are also the subjects of Berti's paintings. His white, vacuum-empty canvases host a series of animals affected by the strangest diseases: a catalogue of misery and imperfec-

tion, populated by obese elks and rhinos with broken legs.

Mistakes, mis-shapes and misfits seem to be Diego Perrone's favorite things. For his video *La terra piatta è una dimensione lirica*, the artist asked his old friend Dario to build a hut of branches on a river side. Dario is what is commonly called the fool of the village, once a typical character of any rural society before the culture of complaint imposed the politically correct label of the "mentally challenged," erasing the poetic implications of ingenuity and weakness. Watching Perrone's friend building his shelter, we are finally taken back to a surreal atmosphere of suspension, in which imperfection couples with dignity and detachment from the boredom of life. As a Robinson Crusoe reborn, or a Truffaut's wild child, Dario watches his fragile refuge crumble as it's hit by a gust of breeze; he

picks up the debris and starts all over again, just to stare in amusement at his construction collapsing for the second time. *La terra piatta* is an exercise in loss, proving there are no solutions, only problems. But it's also a suspension of logic and time, that looks like a tragic parody of the role of the artist, as if Bruce Nauman had gone nuts. Then again, Perrone loves laughing at the past, as his room of the one hundred smiling kings suggests: for his first one man show, the artist collected one hundred portraits of kings, selected from famous and infamous paintings of the past, and retouched all the images in order to make the sovereigns smile. In this cabinet of wonder one can almost hear the silent laughter of idiocy: an evil and bitter grin that might be the only certainty we can cling to.

Massimiliano Gioni is an editor at *Flash Art Italy*.

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D I E G O P E R R O N E

Diego Perrone

Born early in the nineteenth century, by the age of twenty-four Madame Dimanche had already undergone a series of operations to remove the excrescences and tumors which had appeared on many parts of her body. She retained only the horn dangling from her forehead almost as far as her chin: a mysterious cartilaginous protuberance, twenty-five centimeters long, all knots, nubs and lumps, like some sort of ancient plumed hat. At eighty-four, the poor lady felt her end was drawing near and was unwilling to face her creator with that obvious sign of satanic revenge on her face. Gathering her courage, she turned to the best doctor in Paris, Monsieur Souberbeille who successfully removed her tumor. Madame Dimanche died seven years later, leaving behind nothing but a ghastly memento of her horned head, frozen in a wax mask which soon became part of the collection of Doctor Muetter.



As if fascinated by what remains still in the background, 1999,
photographic print

Two centuries earlier, in 1668, Mary Davis of Saughall, a midwife from Cheshire well into her seventies, sat for a portrait. The picture shows the woman's profile, etched with strong and dark traits, a strange madness in her eyes. On the side of her head, just above her right ear, two curved exostoses had grown: hard, thick and black, like a ram's horns or a Viking helmet. Mary Davis had her tumors removed twice, one of her horns being offered as a gift to the king of France.

Diego Perrone's figures perhaps belong to this same gallery of human oddities, the last custodians of fabled adventures. Like Mary Davis and Madame Dimanche, they live according to the slow rhythms of miraculous growth and inauspicious mutation, in harmony with the cycles of some unstoppable geological revolution.

Planted like trees at the centre of an immobile universe, these old people defend their territories with ancient weapons. Their realm extends beyond space, embracing history, measured with a horn compass.

In reality, however, these poetical surveyors of the world are provincial shamans performing their propitiatory rituals in kitchen gardens or living rooms suffocated by wallpaper. And yet they are as proud as totems or knights alongside the most precious of trophies: heraldic figures that sink their bones into the past and live out the evocation of a new Medieval in which the lightness of invention blends with the weight of the earth.

Massimiliano Gioni

Massimiliano Gioni (1973) is editor of Flash Art



*As if fascinated by what remains still in the background, 1999,
photographic print*

Diego Perrone

born 1970, lives in Milan