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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



Diego Perrone, Untitled, 2011
Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

found in the final result, but rather its 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, “Sculptura 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.”

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)

(text by Antonio Scoccimarro)