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MOUSSE

INTERVIEWS

Diego Perrone “Self Portraits and Herbivorous Carnivorous”
at Casey Kaplan, New York and Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Diego Perrone interviewed by Charlotte Laubard



installation view

CHARLOTTE LAUBARD: There was a small thing that happened years ago when we both lived in Turin that seems to me to say a lot about your relationship with the world. We went to the cinema to see a film. I don't remember the film, but I remember very well that at the film's emotional apex, when everyone had tears in their eyes, you started laughing uproariously. And the more hyperbolic the cinematography became in creating these emotions, the more you laughed. At that point the people sitting beside us got angry: they were furious because they had been torn from their voluntary suspension of disbelief, and we actually had to run out of the cinema. What is your relationship to belief?

DIEGO PERRONE: It is a very vast argument, but I am certainly fascinated by the immersive aspect that belief can produce. And above all I am interested in the languages and tools that make this belief possible. Therefore, my relationship with belief is concrete but at the same time irrational. I think I nurture myself with the wonder that produces this phenomenon in order to create a different effect. "If I could only remember what comes after 'abra' I would make the whole audience disappear" is a famous quote from Harry Houdini, who besides being known as a magician was also known for unmasking fake spiritualists.

CL: It seems that your work is a constant attempt at pushing the limits of what is representable, from the relative common acceptance of things to the meaning of images. In recent works that you are showing right now at two galleries, Casey Kaplan and Massimo De Carlo, drawings and sculptures of skulls invaded by fish and tractors, you go beyond the convention of inserting a foreign sign in someone's head. An image that in the public imagination represents the activity of imagining, like that man "is thinking of a fish or of a tractor." In the case of your sculptures, on the other hand, the fish float on the skin and the tractors plough through the epidermis. How are these images born?

DP: The tractors work the skin and render it fertile like soil, and the fish make it liquid and muted, like sound underwater. What happens in these two different kinds of landscapes happens in the intermediary space between the inside and the epidermis, as in how someone who is underneath a blanket still allows their volume to be seen externally. I remember *Shivers* (1975), an old David Cronenberg film, where in Italian the title is translated as "The Demon Under the Skin."

CL: Speaking of this, I find a curious tension in your work. On the one hand it seems like you think in images, yet on the other your work expresses a strong interest in materials and the manipulation of those materials. Can you tell me about your recent relationship with a material that is very difficult, namely glass?

DP: Above all, in these most recent sculptures, it is very important that each one is a single block of glass. You can look inside the composition of the material itself and nothing is hidden, the profundity of the piece is nude. Each of these pieces was thought of as a low relief, but being composed out of more types of glass with different colors, the first thing that I notice looking at them is the spots of color within them. This means that you create an ambiguity between the sculptural mass and the image that is, by its very nature, two-dimensional.

CL: A complicated process. Where did you make the sculptures, and how did you work with the company specializing in glass manufacturing?

DP: When I first contacted Vetroricerca, the company in Bolzano that worked on the production of these recent sculptures, I was completely inexperienced and unaware of the limits and possibilities of glass. I worked with them and tried to bring the material and the technical aspects to the extreme, staying at the limits of what was possible. There are measurements, weights, and times to strictly respect; even the molds must have precise characteristics that have to be respected. It is not a material that you leave to behave as you think it will. I had to accept many compromises, and the challenge was finding solutions to circumvent the rigidity of the material and to rediscover the strength of my vision. In the final result one can perceive a kind of internal natural harmony that was completely unexpected but comes from meticulous technique, a precise determination in which the pictorial results are enhanced by chance.

CL: I always had the feeling that your visual imagery tended irremediably toward something of the obscene, in the literal sense of *os skené* (outside of the scene), meaning something that would not be suitable for the public. I think, for example, of the girl that has her boyfriend cut her ear off, *Angela e Alfonso* (2002); of *Totò nudo* (2002); of the dog dying on the outskirts of a city, *Vicino a Torino muore un cane vecchio* (2005); or of the imaginative strength needed to formalize the instantaneous moment of casting a bell, an underground process (2007). Now you talk about "natural harmony," of "pictorial results." What do you hope to achieve in this phase of your artistic path?

DP: As you rightly said earlier, my practice is very much based on visual results. In this case the term "pictorial" was intended. Thinking of the transparency of these sculptures and therefore of light that normally serves to make surfaces legible, in this case it goes inside. The texture is read with difficulty, as are the volumes; the plastic requirements are lost in becoming solid and the totality of the mass becomes heterogeneous. I would say "hologram" rather than "monument," and "screen" rather than "relief." I am not sure if all of this relates directly to being "outside of the scene," but I think that both the drawings and the sculptures are almost empty, almost like holes in the environment.

CL: This reference to emptiness is intriguing! This way we can come back to one of your works that I consider seminal: *I pensatori di buchi* (The Ponderer of Holes, 2002). That also seems to me like an attempt at representing emptiness, something that is itself outside of the scene of life, the well that we seek to fill unceasingly and that generates all belief, both religious and artistic.