

Ruben Montini

“Come fuoco in una pozzanghera come fuoco spento”

Critical essay by Domenico de Chirico

Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan

Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani is proud to present Ruben Montini's new solo exhibition “Come fuoco in una pozzanghera come fuoco spento” accompanied by a critical essay by Domenico de Chirico.

Resisting every kind of ostracism, misoneism and insidious domination, Ruben Montini directly references French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault's essay *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, whose first Italian edition was published in 1976, i.e. “historically, the process by which the bourgeoisie became in the course of the eighteenth century the politically dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary representative régime. [...] The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines”. Similarly, the artist explores the evolution and impact of punishment, discipline and surveillance within the convoluted context of Western societies. More precisely, he examines the way power is enforced, both outside and within the domestic setting, not only through physical coercion but also by the way of a strong psychological and social control.

His work is protean and visceral, firmly rooted in a prohibitive and sensationalizing flow, it materializes in mutual and endless contaminations of performance, sculpture, installation and video drawing from both his own experiences and those of others, particularly within the LGBTQIA+ community addressing themes of queerness, gender fluidity and identity. Furthermore, his art oscillates between individual experiences and the irrepressible desire for a shared and equal collective existence while tangibly strengthening the global dialogue on human rights and inclusivity.

These ideas are not reduced to a lifeless series of quotations; instead they resonate passionately, striking the trembling cords of the present until they bleed. Such present is profusely filled with the issue of migrants, the ongoing attempt to deconstruct the identity of human beings, the resurgence of nationalisms, the cultural flattening and the tricky matter of human rights that, in this case, stands with fury to oppose every kind of homotransphobia and, more generally, of discrimination. Amid social tangles born of harmful ideological involutions, everything here is exalted with respect for its colour and its incomparability. Here, where the woven fabrics outlining the fiery perimeters of the discernible human figures cry out. These human figures, stretched and potentially moving, find, such as flowers, their own light within the entanglement.

These are the reasons why Ruben Montini turns most of his attention to the human figure, first by undressing it and then by representing it through a seemingly theatrical language, at times sacrilegious, at other times sprightly. His interpretation of the body is not limited to naturalism but it ventures to a deep investigation of emotions and of the human mind. It addresses themes such as pain, fear, self-flagellation, loneliness, troubles and physiological alterations, abuses, unbalance, shortage, ecstasy, redemption

and, finally, catharsis. Indeed, his figures often seem self-imprisoned, yet at the same time they exude a sort of sacred and invaluable power. By doing so, he highlights the inevitability and uniqueness of the existence and the intensity of the human experience. He explores the tension between light and darkness, life and death, beauty and misery. Through a vivid polytheism of fabrics sewn by multiple hands - a powerful metaphor for collaboration, collectivity, memory and continuity - Ruben Montini wants to explore human relationships, the construction of a collective meaning and the interaction between individuality and broader community. By weaving together colours, materials, images, words, slogans of denunciation or of awareness, his art explores the interconnection of opposites and suggests that every aspect of human life is intrinsically linked to the other.

His unique style is strongly analytic and ostensibly provocative. He employs a wide historical, philosophical, sociological and empirical repertoire that lays at the foundation of his research and of his works. The approach is systematic and multidisciplinary - it combines history, politics, philosophy and psychiatry - and it employs a specific vocabulary that often implies provocations. The viewer is constantly invited to reflect upon the impact of the power structures on the everyday life by trying to show how these evolved genealogically to respond to new political and economic needs. Finally, as the artist of Romanian origin Dan Perjovschi said during an interview: "I grew up in a society that did not have a variety of voices in public art. Everything was controlled and censored [...] The first graffiti I saw in 1989 was revolutionary, it said: "Down with Dictatorship!" I will never forget this graphic scream" *. He was known for his works combining humour, social criticism and global politics, whose conceptual power constantly stimulated reflection. Similarly, Ruben Montini, even if the time and context differ, in light of his most recent experiences gives us once more, on the occasion of *Come fuoco in una pozzanghera come fuoco spento* - the title is borrowed from one of his works in the exhibition - a proscenium where it is possible to call things with their correct and irreplaceable name.

Considering then that modern society doesn't only punish but constantly produces new ways of being, new forms of subjectivity that accommodate the new demands for discipline and surveillance, the doubt doesn't change: how can a single human being's uniqueness assert itself without ceasing to listen, an essential activity to understand its position in the world and to empathize with the otherness? And more properly, as verbalised by Emil Cioran in his first philosophical essay published in 1934 *On the Heights of Despair*: "what would happen if a man's face could adequately express his suffering, if his entire inner agony were objectified in his facial expression? Could we still communicate? Wouldn't we then cover our faces with our hands while talking? Life would really be impossible if the infinitude of feelings we harbour within ourselves were fully expressed in the lines of our faces. Nobody would dare look at himself in the mirror, because a grotesque, tragic image would mix in the contours of his face with stains and traces of blood, wounds which cannot be healed, and unstoppable streams of tears." A primordial fire, indeed, discernible in the contortions and expressive variety of the exhibited works, where memory is revealed through a silent yet fierce glow - a multi-coloured language that glorifies the flesh of reality in a world attuned to wearing transience.

* Ten Questions to Dan Perjovschi - Interview by Marius Meli published on Kunstkritikk - 13.11.14 - <https://kunstkritikk.com/ten-questions-dan-perjovschi/>