

Antonio Malta and Erika Verzutti

This exhibition features about 50 works by Erika Verzutti and by Antonio Malta, produced since 2000, with the aim of evaluating a notion of work in which the form is, in and of itself, a process of deformation. That is to say, a system of successive constructions and decompositions of figures, of articulations between things and aspects which are at first incompatible and, therefore, apparently unstable, temporary and commutative in their respective assemblies. The show furthermore proposes to underscore how contemporary production has recurred to visual repertoires of modern art, here interlinked and in friction with other aesthetic registers – of comic books, decorative objects, etc. – not out of reverence or irreverence, but as a challenge, motivation and provocation.

After all, art has never referred to the history of art so much as it does today. Paradoxically, the category “contemporary art” sometimes remains restricted to a fixed chronological segment, without strong filiations, impasses or conflicts with historical processes that established (and still establish) the conditions for its possibility. Simultaneously and for different reasons, some spasmodic efforts have taken hold within a production that has quickly become specialized in determined visualities, solutions, finishings and themes; it is often nothing more than a commentator on the “utopias and failures” of modernity. This is evidenced by the titles of many recent exhibitions that have involved variations of this topic (“Triumph and Failure of Modernity,” “The Utopia of Modernity,” “After the Utopia”...).

In contrast with these supposedly distanced perspectives – despite the prescriptions they contain – there have been less-bookish and more-disarmed attempts at a disinhibited contact with the modern tradition, in works such as those by Antonio Malta and Erika Verzutti. For them, the relationship with previous art is not resolved in a pure and simple citation, in statements or reflections on the past, nor in a good, stable and advanced form. It is not resolved, period. Because the references to art history are open and prospective, affective and analytic at a single blow, in allusions involving the unforeseen; they are never assertive, ironic or revisionist.

Malta (1961) and Verzutti (1971) work with different languages, come from different backgrounds, and have taken different professional paths. Each in his/her own way, they both internalize and process the iconography of artists, movements and “styles,” and only afterwards render them parenthetically, erasing certain clues in ways which in light of the refined norms may seem like deviations or inadequacies. They unpretentiously remove Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Tarsila do Amaral, Costantin Brancusi, Alberto Giacometti, Maria Martins, Jasper Johns, Philip Guston and others from their institutional confinement and return them to a field of colloquiality, placing them in a field of indefiniteness, where not even the “masters” reign alone.

Another characteristic Verzutti and Malta share in common is the informality of the – sometimes awkward, even crude – agglutination of materials, objects and fragments that seem to structure animated organisms in contortions, metamorphoses or crumpled states, on unstable supports, ill at ease and without any foreseeable comfort or stability. On the verge of either breaking apart or remaining forever in a state of struggling, the surfaces are always discontinuous, with parts that interrelate to imply violence, eroticism and humor. The misshapen character of the figures can even share the same space with very simple geometric shapes.

The fact is that the marks of their making – the dents, overlayings and scratches – speak of both artists' obsession for manual labor, which requires the viewer to adopt a tactile and synesthetic gaze. Because there are actually three-dimensional elements in Malta's painting – in the objectual treatment that he confers to some of his "motifs" – just as there are elements of painting in Verzutti's sculptures – in the patterns she uses to subdivide the configuration of certain things, in the monochromatic hues (especially in her most recent pieces), and in the "accidents" of paint runs and splatters. At rock bottom, the aim is not to categorize this or that technique as being abstract or figurative, or to discourse about one aspect or another, but rather to keep certainty at bay, the materials in transformation, and the history of art in dilemmas. By all indications, this is an exhibition of heads, breasts, genitalia, vases, fruits, vegetables, animals and monsters. That is all that is known up to now.

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