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FLAVIO FAVELLI
Air Zaire

In dialogue with PAOLO CHIASERA

Curated by Antonio Grulli

Opening Thursday 20 March at 19:00
Runs until 3 May 2014

What emptiness here / In my place. / All anxiety consumed. / Nothing remains of me / If not the source / Which it did not indicate.

Karl Kraus

Zaire was the name of the present Democratic Republic of Congo for just over twenty years during the last century. Today the name has lost any kind of practical function, it's useless; and yet we find it nonetheless in the title of an art show, what's more in the outdated context of the country's defunct airline. This is the initial cue that Flavio Favelli decided to give us for the project in dialogue with Paolo Chiasera, presented at Francesca Minini. The artist will completely rethink the gallery's spaces, working both with installations and sculptures that will also be the sources of light for the show.

As often happens in Flavio Favelli's work, the artworks and the titles allude to suggestions from his personal past, which may sometimes also coincide with the memories of others. But I shall not go into this aspect of his work, as it has already been amply discussed in many texts.

There were two starting points from which we began working on *Air Zaire* and even if we subsequently moved away from them freely, upon close scrutiny the project's double origin is still visible.

The first is the relationship between Flavio Favelli's works and the written word. In a past dialogue with the artist I noted how his works had an "attitude" that was almost anecdotal, as though they were brief stories of daily life condensed into an object. It seems to me however that the way in which words enter into his work has never been explored in depth, it is perhaps one of the aspects that is the least noticed by the public, despite its importance in the artist's work. There are many words in the work of Flavio Favelli, they crop up continuously, especially in recent years. The word, in his works (posters, neon lights, furniture décor...), usually appears singly or in very short combinations, occasionally in anagrams. The final result is very similar to experiences of visual poetry or concrete poetry. Isolating a word or inserting it into novel combinations creates an effect of framing it, increasing its power as a psychological detonator. His other way of using words is through the creation of texts of varying lengths that are critical and intellectual reflections on arts and its system, as texts that form a relationship with the works or the exhibitions thus becoming an integral if not indeed fundamental part of the work.

The second starting point was instead an exhibition that I discovered about one year ago, while rummaging through second hand bookshops, when I found its beautiful catalogue: *The Metaphysics of the Quotidian*, organized in 1978 by Franco Solmi, who was at that time the director of the GAM in Bologna. As the title suggests, it was a project about artists who had worked to bring together two concepts sometimes seen as being in opposition: the quotidian element (made up of objects and events connected with the individual or collective life) and a metaphysical

dimension, suspended, sometimes spiritual when not outright religious. Reference to a key figure such as Morandi was inevitable, but the show was developed through the work of artists of the most disparate of backgrounds: from the group of Fluxus to intellectual painters such as Leonardo Cremonini, along with such things as sections curated by Alessandro Mendini and a focus on the production of advertising manifestos and political propaganda.

It is no coincidence that *The Metaphysics of the Quotidian* is also an excellent interpretive lens to view the work of an artist such as Paolo Chiasera. Indeed in *Air Zaire* a dialogue comes about with two important works of the artist (also from Bologna), who has been working with the gallery since the beginning. The two works are part of the series *Exhibition Painting* (shows that take place only inside pictorial representation), which Chiasera has been working on in recent years. But the proximity of certain themes or atmospheres is not the only reason for the presence of these two works in the project, for they are two curatorial instruments capable of triggering further reflections and even of setting the pace of the show. The large painting *Our lifestyle is not up for Negotiation* depicts a show that I curated along with Chiasera, set on a Mediterranean cliff, and in which, in addition to the works of other artists, two sculptures of Flavio Favelli are “present”, designed by the artist appositely for the painting. The second work, *Choreography of Species: Rosa Tannenzapfen*, depicts a project curated by Elena Tzotzi and the critic Marianne Zamecznik, who, taking as a starting point the work of the Lithuanian archaeologist and linguist Marija Gimbutas, invited the artist to paint (in thirteen small canvases profoundly Morandian in appearance) a special potato that is superimposed both formally and symbolically over the mythological figure of the “Great Mother”, worshipped since prehistoric times throughout all of Europe and beyond.

Both to prepare this show and to prepare myself for it I have been reading a lot of Karl Kraus. He is as well a perfect joining link between these two artists. But we'll get into that later on...

Antonio Grulli