

resting against the wall, elude unambiguous categorization and participate in the categories of both painting and sculpture. As John Armleder says in an interview in the catalogue, the marbleizing of the surfaces of some of the planks (*Untitled*, 1974, which is black and blue; *Untitled #V*, 1985, in yellow with dark veining) recalls the psychedelia of the '60s. A kind of spiritual tension is also evident in McCracken's "Mandalas," 1972, a series of drawings executed in felt-tip pen on paper. His work is reductive but not to the point of tautology. In a certain sense, ambiguity is its fundamental characteristic and perhaps the means through which he allows the spiritual essences he wants to evoke to penetrate the work.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

MILAN

Gabriele Di Matteo

FEDERICO LUGER

In the inventory of the Prado in Madrid, Velázquez's *Las Meninas* used to be called, rather, a "family portrait," and this is how Gabriele Di Matteo titled his exhibition: "*Quadro di Famiglia*." Five large replicas of the celebrated painting were exhibited on the walls, each the same size as the original but fragmented into sixteen square modules that, together, make up the famous scene—the presentation of the Infanta Margarita during a sitting for a portrait. More precisely, four paintings repeated this scene, while the fifth showed the modules in scattered order, a sort of re-creation in puzzle form. Additional modules, bringing the number of "family portraits" to a total of twenty, were stacked against the wall and in the gallery office. The idea of fragmenting the image came from the way in which large-scale paintings were often treated in the past, when they were cut into smaller pieces to facilitate sales, thanks not only to their size but also because of the changing popularity of various painting genres—a still life might be detached from its former context, for instance. Di Matteo's intention was to compare a fundamental painting of our history, one famously studied by philosophers, with the quotidian reality of the copy, as if to compare learning (art and philosophy) with its vulgarization.

In order to do this, Di Matteo set in motion a curious collective process. He invited five members of the Cooperative of Commercial Neapolitan Painters, accustomed to painting stereotypical subjects such as seascapes, flowering terraces, or floral still lifes in quantity, to accompany him to the Prado. There the painters spent three days studying Velázquez's masterpiece, developing a specific method for creating the

View of "Gabriele Di Matteo," 2011.



twenty requested copies in twenty days. A principal desideratum of commercial painting being speed of execution, upon their return to Naples, the five painters worked to produce one complete set of the sixteen modules each day, using as their point of departure a reproduction available at the museum.

Each painter concentrated exclusively on one part of the composition—the central figures, the backgrounds, and so on. The twenty resulting copies broadly resemble the original but are not exactly faithful copies of it, since one hand's pictorial gesture will always differ from another's. All the same yet all different, these nonetheless impressive *Meninas* present the problem of authorship that stems from the overturning of the distinctive individual gesture; they seem to be a parody of authorship, its almost farcical reversal. In fact the style here is careless, anonymous, realized without particular attention and without "cultured" intentions.

Moreover, the pieces that were not visible (those stacked up against the wall) underscored the economic, salable aspect of commercial painting, or simply of painting, if one thinks of the fate of many dismembered canvases of the past, restored to integrity, if at all, only by the philological rigor of our present-day art-historical approach. This loss of pathos, of aura, may be counterbalanced by the liberal use the purchaser could make of Di Matteo's work, beginning with the painting's commercial dimension: One can buy a few modules suitable for freely reconstructing the scene, or just one, as a souvenir. Commercial, indeed.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Andrei Molodkin

GALLERIA PACK

At the Fifty-Third Venice Biennale, Andrei Molodkin, a Russian-born artist living in Paris, made a splash with his installation *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Red and the Black), 2009. Displayed in the Russian pavilion, it revealed the artist's signature approach—encasing a hollow sculptural object in an acrylic block and filling it up with crude oil. For this installation he made two miniature replicas of the Louvre's *Nike of Samothrace*, adding pumps that pushed crude oil and blood through them. Red and black images of the sculpture were projected full-size onto a wall using small video cameras. Molodkin's wall text stated that the oil was Chechen, and the blood belonged to a veteran of the Chechen War, turning the installation into a revolt against the post-Soviet cultural establishment's disengagement from political discourse. Sure enough, the pavilion's curator scrapped the inscription at the opening.

Molodkin's "drilling" of geopolitical blunders does not stop with his native country. In "Sincere," his third show in Milan, he at times subtly but often aggressively confronted methods of ideological seduction and deception, as well as drew attention to increasingly blurred concepts of global sociocultural politics. The fact that Galleria Pack shares a courtyard with a music school helped Molodkin establish the show's deconstructive agenda. The oil pumps that the artist uses to flood oil into his sculptures, and which have sheltered his production from easy commodification, were here installed at the gallery's entrance. Their recurrent bombastic noise drowned out the sounds of soothing classical music that drifted in from the musicians' practice rooms.

The pumps activated the centerpiece of this show, *Yes We Can . . . Fuck You*, 2011, a multimedia installation consisting of two- and three-dimensional works and of oil-filled plastic hoses, configured into a swirl on the floor. On the wall hung Barack Obama's once-hypnotizing slogan, YES WE CAN, rendered in capital letters formed out of white



Andrei Molodkin, *Yes We Can . . . Fuck You*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable.

negative spaces in a blue ground of precise and tight linear pattern, executed in ballpoint pen. This laborious handmade reiteration of Obama's ready-made catchphrase was neighbor to a freestanding acrylic block encasing the phrase **FUCK YOU**, with crude oil seeping through each of its letters. The juxtaposition of these phrases evoked a shift from utopia to dystopia in which the time span between a promise and its collapse becomes unprecedentedly short. The show was inaugurated the day after Obama's announcement of his run for a second term; thus when the deafening sound of the pump raised the level of oil in the hollow F-word, one could not help but think of the NATO air strikes in Libya and the US agenda of securing access to oil.

In a dimly lit room hung a pair of large canvases, *Untitled*, 2011, on each of which Molodkin had drawn—separately, with red and blue ballpoint pens, respectively—the short but laden word **SIN**. Each letter overlaps itself three times and is entrapped in an architecture of linear rhythms and shadings. A vertiginous effect once sought by the Futurists to disintegrate the object is here applied to assert the ongoing metamorphosis of the primal concept of sin. Molodkin's ballpoint drawings evoke Sisyphean manual labor, whereas in his sculptures he makes full use of high technology. This makes his oeuvre a meeting point of low- and high-tech practices, a space where industrial rationality takes turns with studio incarceration. The drawings operate within a series of binary oppositions: conscious/unconscious, controlled/accidental, intuitive/mechanical, resulting in a secession of images that, in Molodkin's words, “copy the heartbeat of the oil pump.” This is his way of simultaneously resisting and submitting to a machine, making the act a **SINC**ere contemporary schism.

—Margarita Tupitsyn

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA

Marzena Nowak

SALZBURGER KUNSTVEREIN

In video, installation, and painted works, Marzena Nowak presents the human body as the site of psychic sensations and states of excitement. In the past, the artist has used a phrase from Freud, “*Die Psyche ist ausgedehnt*” (The psyche is expansive), to describe her project, representing a view of the body as both part of and an extended expression of internal processes. Experimental approaches to the body—measuring, localizing, temporalizing, and wounding it—constituted a central theme in the avant-garde art of the 1960s and '70s, one that has

remained an important component of contemporary artistic practice. The fact that, especially in the '60s, interrogating the body tended to give work a certain subversive, socially utopian character is clearest in the work of artists from the former Eastern Bloc—for example, the sometimes quite drastic films and videos of Polish artist Józef Robakowski. Although Nowak is Polish and her work contains frequent references to the art of that time, she was born in 1977 and so belongs to a generation for whom questioning the body has different implications. Nowak's specific approach to the human physique is most apparent in her video works: The three black-and-white looped videos included in this show each focus on a specific body part: a hand whose fingers almost imperceptibly tremble (*Untitled [Hand]*, 2010) a mouth whose lips are being kneaded by fingers (*Untitled [Cosmos]*, 2004); the symmetrical formation of two hands that appear to be giving mysterious signs (*Untitled [Mizianie]*) [*Untitled (Fondle)*], 2010). The peacefulness of the hand at rest gives way to latent tension; the rhythmical kneading of the lips takes on a sexual dimension; the two hands interact as independent protagonists removed from their bodies. The body, then, is staged here less as the object of specific procedures than as a sensitive indicator of internal processes and emotions.

In the Great Hall of the Salzburger Kunstverein, the video pieces, with their emphatically plastic corporeality, were juxtaposed with installation works and paintings with a strong graphic slant that inevitably evoke more cerebral, less visceral responses: Canvases covered with grids in which colorful triangles have been inscribed according to intuitive principles and lines of overlapping patterns follow a Conceptualist approach, according to which the governing principles of a model of action channel the physical activity of painting. Monotony, repetition, rhythm, and stasis can thus be experienced not only as optical categories but also as physical ones.

Nowak often works with gaps that challenge the viewer to actively complete her works, asking us to engage with them by performing a labor of empathy. The small metal sculpture *Space Between Big and Second Foot Toe as Keyhole*, 2009, clearly exemplifies this modus operandi: The space between the toes was modeled with a sheet of steel folded around a hollow at its center; mounted, it preserved the view of the wall behind it. And so this “adapter” functions not only as a positive of the negative physical interstice but also as a peephole inspiring the viewer to engage in an act of imagination. This physical and psychic drawing-in of the viewer takes place in a climate of extraordinary interpretative openness that leaves space for experiences simultaneously surreal and real, painful and jubilant, familiar and strange.

—Daniela Stöppel

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.



View of “Marzena Nowak,” 2011.