

FRANCO GUERZONI | LORENZO MODICA

NASCOSTO IN BELLA VISTA | HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

with a text by Davide Ferri

Opening Friday 26 November from 5 pm to 8.30 pm
27.11.2021 - 19.01.2022

I often repeat this when I talk about him: I met Franco Guerzoni a few years ago, while he was working (with me) on an exhibition at the Triennale, in Milan, on the years of his collaboration with Luigi Ghirri. Since then, I have kept on thinking back to that period, in the early Seventies, as if it was a laboratory of ideas and reflections, created in the intimacy of a friendship, a living archive of possibilities and unfolded things which still inspires Franco, especially now. At that time, Guerzoni was working on photography, which very often happened to be by Ghirri; pictures of abandoned houses, ruins, walls, interiors with windows overlooking the countryside, scaffoldings, toolsheds. Pictures taken during their “stray journeys” in the countryside between Modena and Mantua.

According to Guerzoni, working around photography meant to develop a research within the image, which is, from the photograph towards the possibility to develop and expand it materially, with objects and interventions that settle on the photograph and represent its emanation, or objective correlatives, as Franco uses to call them. Or, in the opposite sense, to create around that image a landscape of pure materiality, a thick and material background/frame where the photograph is placed to reiterate its material existence.

Even Lorenzo Modica – whose works are displayed for the first time at Galleria G7, in a dialogue with those of Guerzoni – works sometimes by using photographs, making them fall into the paintings in the form of photocopies and clippings, after placing around them a series of spots, brushstrokes and backgrounds, creating a landscape of fragmentary images. It would have been easy, therefore, to put the core of their dialogue around a particular use of photography in the two artists’ poetics, but this would have meant showing only a well-known part of Guerzoni’s work from the Seventies, that of series such as *Archeologie*, *Dentro l’immagine*, *Affreschi*. Therefore, when we started working on the exhibition, we thought it would have been better to seize the opportunity provided by this unprecedented dialogue, in order to consider Guerzoni’s work in its moments of passage and junction.

In addition, both Modica and Guerzoni, are mainly painters. Modica’s specifically pictorial work is extensive and multifaceted (ranging from “almost abstraction” to paintings that can be considered as landscapes), but always focused on an unplanned image, an unscheduled project which includes different approaches, materials and techniques - spray paint, collage, sketched or scribbled paper, or monotype paper. At times, he reaches a figure, an object recalling the reality, as an indication of a possibility and final trait of the pictorial process. Guerzoni too is a painter, since the beginning of the Eighties, when he fine-tunes his particular way of “operating” on the surface, by subsequent stratifications which confer the painting a strong and material thickness, in which, ideally, images hide or reveal their presence as findings through an excavation made by the artist on the support, a process of subtraction and new additions of color and matter.

However, *Hidden in plain sight*, is not a paintings’ exhibition (I do realize I have spent many words trying to explain what the exhibition is not, but I did it in order to retrace the exhibition’s construction process, the dialogues, the thoughts, so as to further involve the viewer). The only exception is Modica’s painting LA CHACHA, which originates starting from a very distinctive fabric – as it often happens with him, who almost never starts from a white canvas – a tablecloth with a printed starred pattern, which Modica has painted with free and animated brushstrokes that seem to light up that sky or get lost in it, and stem from or tangle around the female figure at the center of the photocopy clipping on the surface.

Moreover, the exhibition includes a work by Guerzoni dating back to a transition period between photography and painting, a tormented period during which the artist feels his research around photography is coming to an end – across the Seventies and the Eighties – with the series Spie: a photograph, a small face similar to a fragment of an

ancient fresco, emerging from the narrow crack of a chalk plate, a plate which sees the surface as a sort of wall; in that face there are therefore the spying eyes of an hidden image, underneath, visible through the crack in a wall and preserved in its material creases.

Spia also translates some of the suggestions made by the exhibition, *Hidden in plain sight*: despite the thin crack from which it emerges, that face/spy cannot hide and its presence powerfully fills the exhibition space (inviting the viewer to come closer to the work), starting from a landscape of thick materiality.

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I met Lorenzo Modica a few months ago, when Giulia Biafore introduced me to him during one of his exhibitions in Rome. That first meeting immediately showed several points of contact between his way of painting and my way of looking at his art (and indeed the conversation was incredibly informal). For both of us, words such as figuration and abstraction are porous categories, with borders that become evanescent when describing a painting; the predilection for a stuttering, provisional, fragmentary figuration, which can momentarily stabilize in a score of heterogeneous things; the idea that the emergence of the figure is inevitable or a possibility which has to do with the surfacing and the sinking from/in a tangible landscape, only after a series of composite gestures made on the support.

It is precisely on this level, that of a problematic relationship with the figure, whose presence in the paintings emerges but is mixed or compromised by the material evidence of the work, that the dialogue between Modica and Guerzoni takes place. *Hidden in plain sight*, for instance, suggests this particular feature of a figure hiding in the material creases of the artwork, which becomes part of it while remaining inevitably present. The title was suggested by Lorenzo, it is the title of one of his past works, later given to the exhibition and Franco has welcomed it with enthusiasm.

Hidden in plain sight is, therefore, an exhibition of images that sink and emerge once again, intermittent and fragile, syncopated and unstable. Just like the images included in *Rêve Néolithique* by Franco Guerzoni, where a series of papers of different size, drawn with graphite, charcoal and wax, engraved and scratched, worked on both sides, even crumpled and pinned on the wall by two chalk elements, reproduce liquid and animated, irregular and slightly blurred shapes, that seem to derive from a desire of the hand to follow, abandoned, ancestral, primitive geometric patterns, similar to those in ceramic and rock belonging to remote ages.

On the opposite wall, *Untitled (vetrina)*, is a work conceived by Modica exactly for the space of the gallery: a score that develops on three plexiglass plates placed on the wall, a composition/constellation of images on paper, a spectrum ranging from monochrome copy paper and carbon paper to digital printing, from photography to spray painting and simple scribbling, in a continuous movement of affirmation and denial of the figure within which the viewer's slight reflection on the mirroring surface is an image between the images.

Davide Ferri

