

Keitelman Gallery

GABRIELE DI MATTEO

METRI QUADRI

DI QUADRI

04.04 – 31.05.2014

OPENING (6-9PM) THURSDAY 03.04.2014

TUESDAY - SATURDAY 12 TO 6PM

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Gabriele Di Matteo, in the exhibition *Metri quadri di quadri*, adds a new tactic to his set of methods for subverting art. For twenty years now he has been developing his own artistic system, which rudely shakes the established order, allowing us to see how fragile it is.

Through reproduction, duplication, movement and repetition, he reinforces the idea of painting as a maze of images. He shows that, as Leonardo da Vinci said, ‘the spirit guides the hand’ and that art is created to free our senses, not to make walls for them. Di Matteo plays with the possibility of a moving subject in paintings. Paintings can be infinitely repeated, if the artist has the patience to copy them, or to make use of a copyist painter (one who does reproductions of original paintings) as he has done time and time again. In actively integrating a series of commercial paintings into his œuvre with the Neapolitan copyist artist Salvatore Russo in charge, Di Matteo explores questions of authorship and ownership of images, and of authenticity and value (artistic and economic). He breaks norms of conceptual art even by the simple fact of having a copyist at hand.

You can see this method at work in the display of a Velazquez reproduction, a reworking of one of the most famous paintings in the history of art. The artist breaks the masterpiece down into 16 elements and downgrades its grandeur, at least in one version where he calls it anonymously *Quadro di famiglia* - ‘family portrait.’ The other reproduction is done in black and white and is turned round as if we were looking at its reflection in the mirror. Calling it *Riflettendo Velasquez* brings further ambiguity as the verb *riflettere* has many possible interpretations, like ‘to reflect’ or ‘to think’.

The artist also relies on a play-on-words in the general title. He repeats the same term *quadri*, the unit of measurement for surface area (‘metres squared’), as well as talking of the material reality of colour, canvas, and picture frame (as *quadri* also means ‘paintings’). He also makes reference to the measurements of the painted surfaces themselves, as the titles of his works indicate: *0,277m² of Saint Luke, painter of El Greco* or *0,313 m² of The Tempest by Giorgione*. Equally, a possible interpretation is some reference to the vast quantities of a product available in a commercial shop. Di Matteo alludes to the experience of the Italian artist Pinot Gallizio, whose industrial paintings were sold at the end of the 1950s by the square metre, like a common material or fabric.

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The exhibition introduces a series of close-ups from reproductions of famous paintings by the greatest painters in history: Goya, Lorenzo Lotto, El Greco, Giorgione and again Velazquez. It is a brief history of art that uses life-size details from paintings arranged on display walls in a way that respects their original positions on the famous canvases.

What strikes us most in this work is its *particularity*. To see it, you have to move, walk around and look from different angles. Only then you can get close to the surface and break free from your general sense of perspective. Every visitor to the exhibition will have to position themselves differently than they would in a normal viewing: maybe looking upwards or maybe crouching until their wide vision or their view from afar no longer exists.

The details of things always hide surprises, even in paintings that we thought we knew well. These details answer the needs of the historians and lovers of art, who want to observe works of art with more care and attention. Now they can, if they move their body and lean towards the art.

The reliance on details has expanded with photography; it is intimately linked to new techniques of reproduction and investigation and founded on new departures. Didi-Huberman says that details constitute 'a second elaboration' in that they give a different mobility to ideas that are channelled through different movements of the body. This new mobility invades and destabilises the certainties of the history of art. One discovers, for example, a Morandi in a Velazquez ; it mixes up epochs and styles, making all established artistic categories seem much less fixed.

Is art 'in the details' ? Probably, or at least we might say that details can be used as a new way of creating a maze of images. On this occasion, Di Matteo invites into the maze not just with our minds but with our bodies as well.

Marco Bazzini
Art critic