

MAI 36 GALERIE

The Chimera Complex

Vernissage: Thursday, March 30, 2023, 6pm
Exhibition duration: March 31 - May 27, 2023
Opening hours: Tues-Fri 11am to 6:30pm, Sat 11am to 4pm

When the antiquities of the past begin to re-emerge in the Renaissance, it is not only a concept of beauty made up of harmony and order, proportion and pleasantness, purity and a desire for elevation that comes back to life. No: along with the great classical masterpieces, also the grotesques, wall decorations from the Roman imperial period designed to adorn the most prestigious houses, the most famous of which is Nero's Domus Aurea, also re-emerge. They call them grotesques because these dwellings were at that time buried, and it was necessary to descend underground to admire the paintings. Grotesques are representations of monsters, fantastic animals, chimeras, decorations in which the eccentric and the deformed are configured as the hidden face of the Renaissance and which are greeted with a mixture of wonder and suspicion by the artists of the period.

When we dig into our depths in search of treasures anything can resurface. For us Italians, the underground world is a reference universe rooted in the mists of time. The Etruscan civilization was able to worship and represent it like no other: chthonic forces were at the center of its rituals and art – just think of the statue of the Chimera of Arezzo, unearthed just in the 1500s. There is something so contemporary about this. I have always perceived the internet explosion of the last decades as a kind of resurfacing of an endless ocean of informations, data, memories, images, not only of the present but also of the past. A kind of excavation into human knowledge in which everything is retrievable. But excavations into the deep also release our ghosts, our fears, our perversions. The Internet is both archive and subconscious, and the level of its contents overflows at a speed infinitely greater than that of the seas and oceans.

Beauty today can only then be something very much like the grotesques, an unstable and metamorphic material in which the bizarre becomes the norm, and in which nothing exists as a given and stationary entity but presents itself as continuous hybridization. When everything coexists and everything touches, when everything communicates by transcending physical and temporal distances, inevitably everything becomes infected and contaminated. And perhaps this is beauty in its truest essence. Because beauty is something difficult to define, but it always takes the form of the construction of a meaning endowed with its own internal restlessness, with a destabilizing force of all our certainties, of all our fixed points: always. And I want to use this term - “beautiful” - without fear, without guilt, because I still firmly believe in the beautiful, because I know that it still has its own strength, it has its own meaning; it is not something outdated.

The beautiful is to be understood as diametrically opposed to “pretty”: there is nothing pretty and pleasant in the truly beautiful, nothing comfortable and reassuring, nothing that comes to give us confirmation and pacification. The beautiful must frighten, albeit covertly, or beautiful it is not. And this is especially true today, when it seems that art should not and can no longer raise problematic aspects, as if the society wanted to save us from something too strong for us, making us feel like individuals not yet adult, not yet ready for pure truths, the deeper ones, the ones that hurt. As if we could only deal with a diluted, homogenized, simplified truth, administered in homeopathic mode, from which every shadowy side, every ambiguity, every mystery, every monstrous side has been stripped away.

That is why we wanted to bring a load of lava material from our land to Switzerland.

MAI 36 GALERIE

JACOPO BENASSI

Jacopo Benassi began photographing as a self-taught photographer. Over time, the range of languages he uses expands to include sculpture and installation, performance and painting, sound research and the artist's book. His body and his life are the main subject and the generators of each work of art. In his latest works, the exaggerated use of flash and his black and white (his two main signatures) are declined in assemblages of different photographs, held together by straps, in which he retraces his photographic archive between repurposing, short-circuiting, dialogue and censorship, moving photography to a sculptural plane that allows him to give images, frames, even glass, a living and battered body in constant evolution. Over the years, his highly recognizable physical image and the various attributes that have become inseparable characteristics, such as the slippers to which he is fetishistically attracted, have caused his practice to slide into that artistic territory - made up of illustrious precedents such as Urs Lüthi or Luigi Ontani - in which the "persona" becomes an icon and the main material of choice.

BENNI BOSETTO

I met Benni Bosetto many years ago at a solo exhibition of hers. She was exhibiting large drawings of bodies, mostly female I seem to remember. They were living lines moving through space with the energy of witches around a fire. I immediately thought I was facing one of those artists whose sign is scalpel and pen, magic wand and a syringe capable of giving and taking life. The life I felt in those works, in those lines, returns in the form of fluids in the subjects of his works. Tubes run through them and join transmitting fluids from one to another. They are often in vitro worlds of which it is difficult to tell whether they are attempts to give and preserve life, or places of detention and torture. Bodies are the protagonists, not so much as individual units but as sets of organs, sometimes dismembered and scattered. Calligraphy often accompanies them, albeit in an unreadable form, as if it were only the drawing of writing. There is always something alien in these figures, something not belonging to our world despite being composed of elements recognizable to us, and that also returns in her sculptures, installations and performances.

CHIARA CAMONI

Chiara Camoni presents three works created especially for the exhibition and part of two crucial series of works in her artistic production in recent years. The *Sister of Scraps* is a large terracotta sculpture with anthropomorphic features. It calls to mind a sylvan entity, whose sympathetic and mocking expression seems to hide something not always benign. The neck and head part is shaped like a vase, an element that often returns in Chiara's works. The part that descends from the neck to the ground, on the other hand, is a mass composed of many small sculptural elements, again made of terracotta, resembling flowers, small bones, little stones, held together in long necklaces of different but ordered colors, which are then twisted to obtain sculptural and plastic masses capable of adapting in ever different ways, dialoguing with the environment in which they are installed. In his lap he seems to carry votive offerings made of salvaged objects. The archaic and arcane aspect always straddling the natural world also returns in the silk works on which the artist paints figures through the application of plant elements and a long process of working.

GIULIA CENCI

Giulia Cenci's sculptures, while appearing at first glance to be extremely contemporary in taste, materials, and making process, carry within them a classical soul. The starting point still remains in the Duchampian practice of taking an object or element from reality, either literally or in the form of a cast. But the artist has managed to move beyond such an exhausted artistic mode as the ready-made to find her own voice firmly anchored in statuesque, formal/stylistic and representational research. Her sculptures are hybrids in which the boundaries between the human, the animal, the mechanical world and the architectural space blur once and for all. Casts of human heads are grafted onto a crown of legs and bones that go to form a kind of spider, reminiscent of Louise Bourgeois' works. At other times they connect to dog heads and decomposed limbs in an autopsy dance reminiscent of Hans Bellmer's images, but encased in a battered, trembling surface as in the works of Alberto Giacometti. These are profoundly existential sculptures that are sometimes not afraid to quote painting.

MAI 36 GALERIE

DIEGO GUALANDRIS

Diego Gualandris is the youngest artist in the exhibition. He paints, and it is almost always figurative painting. In him, painting forcefully reappropriates its visionary capacity, its having always been one of the vehicles for the creation of vision and imagination. Painting reaffirms itself as the capacity to build new and alternative worlds, in which the rules of our reality disappear, while maintaining a strong contact with the latter. Gualandris is unafraid to draw from areas with which high art does not usually converse, such as the “fantasy” or the world of videogames. Here then pop up medieval knights and three-headed dragons, giant hands dismembering chunks of flesh and fantastic animals. The settings have their own painterly, almost abstract autonomy, and may recall strange nebulae captured by astronomical telescopes, desert surfaces of distant planets, or hidden places inside human bodies. Colors are very strong, exaggerated, and light appears as one of the main protagonists, often giving the idea of being generated by an explosion of some kind.

Antonio Grulli