

Michele Ciacciofera

A chimerical museum of shifting shapes

Exhibition: 8 december 2018 – 7 february 2019

Vernissage: 7 december 2018 | h19

Conversation with the artist: 7 december 2018 | h18:30

VOICE gallery is pleased to invite you to the private view of Michele Ciacciofera's exhibition, *A chimerical museum of shifting shapes*, on Friday, december 7th, 2018.

Michele's artistic practice is intimately linked to his origins. Born in Sardinia and brought up in Sicily, he is deeply immersed in the culture of these islands that he uses as starting point for his research.

His interest for memory stems from the idea of identity as history of previous generations, written and told by tangible systems and symbol imaginaries representing them.

Michele Ciacciofera has been working for some time on ancestral and contemporary relationships, a form of « immemorial imaginary », a mysterious past inscribed in our memories and escaping our cognitive.

For years, the artist has been collecting fossils, stones, fragments of earthenware, and using his collection as part of his work process. These found objects operate as archival elements able to catalyse a memory, as well as starting point for the reconstruction of forms linked to our childhood. *“Like Beuys, Michele Ciacciofera is a good example of homo ludens rather than homo sapiens. Both Jung and Nietzsche associated our childhood world of play with that of the mature artist. This instinct helps to set free the power of the imagination which is our human birth-right in our childhood. I regard Michele Ciacciofera's work as a most serious and insightful exploration of the reality of a world which our materialistic world tends to ignore. At the heart of his serious endeavours, there is a spirit of playfulness which causes all his art works to have the mysterious attraction we associated with our childhood”*.¹

Whilst mixing ancient found objects and contemporary creation, Ciacciofera transforms and transcends temporality. A communication is therefore established between these different elements, and a new language with it, inviting the viewer into a questioning rather than providing answers. He explains that for him, « *memory is a mosaic enabling us to manipulate time and reach beyond the limits of human spirit* ».

This interest for the past enables Michele to play a game of temporality, similar to an overlay of levels of understanding that would build themselves according to the others as well as influence one another. Bonaventure Ndikung explains that « *Michele Ciacciofera's artistic practice is an epitome of how one can look at the particular, the specific, the detailed, and at the same time analyze and portray complex historical temporalities, as well as situate the particular within an extended and flexible concept of time. (...) In Ciacciofera's practice, the process of unravelling plural temporalities starts from the peculiarities of a particular geophysical and social space—the Mediterranean Basin [...] One cannot speak about the Mediterranean Sea without considering that, from time immemorial, its basin has been a point of intersection between Africa, Europe, and Asia.* »²

From this research on temporality the artist induces a coming closer together of geographies. The Mediterranean basin operates as a point of intersection, giving us « *an opportunity to listen to the echoes from the hidden corners, just as it gives us the possibility of connecting histories and geographies on a spiritual*

and transcendental level ».³

In this exhibition, the artist succeeds in establishing consistency whilst spanning geographies through the different works presented: Tamgrout ceramics (Zagora region, Morocco), Kuba fabrics from the Oriental Kasai region of the Congo, papers from Asia. Through piecing together, he creates temporal layerings, both geographical and anthropological. « *Ciacciofera seeks to find in very particular spaces evidences that narrate wider histories of both the Mediterranean and the world at large, opting for the perspective of the longue durée* », ⁴

Kuba Shoowa fabrics are collective works made of raphia, first woven by men and then coloured and embroidered by women. This production process in different steps can also be found in Sardinian culture. Elaborated from natural materials, these fabrics are linked to the concept of language through a representation as well as a symbolic communication within an ancestral culture.

Similar processes can be found through Michele's reappropriation of symbols incorporated in the works, bringing forward a personal as well as universal language inscribed in the imaginary ceramic books of the artist. Michele Ciacciofera's cultural heritage is also expressed through his use of materiality.

« *A scholarly spirit and an ingenious experimentalist in his craft, Michele Ciacciofera has acquired various different skills deriving from both the natural sciences and traditional and craftwork techniques. In this way he places value on the visual and sensual potential of materials. His works combine mineral, organic and vegetable elements and everyday objects. In heterogeneous styles that evoke the baroque manner and a return to an original dimension, he experiments with established codes of contemporary work, subtly offering a subversive and ambiguous tone* ». ⁵ This particular work on matter is also linked to the fabrication and use of earthenware in Sardinia and Sicily: this special relationship with the soil / matter that enables the direct imprint of hands on the material, making the link between man's intervention and nature. A cosmic and mystical nature linked to rituals and spirituality.

A cosmic and mystical nature linked to rituals and spirituality. « *These intersections between materiality and spirituality, histories and geopolitics enable a collapsing of space and time, as well as the bridging of various temporalities* ». ⁶ With these metal frames supports, used as many threads for coded woolen objects Michel Ciacciofera draws inspiration from the « Domus of Janas » myth, also archeological site, referring to an ancient popular custom as well as to fantastical dimension of history. The legend of Janas was such that fairies living in these constructions would leave messages for humans. This « mythical society » would be mainly matriarcal and would enable the artist to look closer at « the central role of women in Sardinian society whilst putting forward their decisive role in the preservation and transmission of memory to future generations. » The artist uses wool, a weaving material, as link between myth and humanity, elaborating abstract shapes as inspiration for a multitude of tales.

*text by Cassandre Gil

¹ RICHARD DEMARCO, *Michele Ciacciofera - Fragments of nature and other stories*, 2017. p. 5

^{2, 3, 4, 6} BONAVENTURE NDIKUNG, *Emisferi Sud - Sneaking into the limbo of time*, 2017. p. 22- 23 ; 28 ; 23; 27.

⁵ AMI BARAK, *Emisferi Sud - Universal Sardinian questions in the work of Michele Ciacciofera*, 2017. p. 73