

# Giuseppe Gabbione

Revue de presse  
Press review

Artist features

## Giuseppe Gabellone



Through his practice, which combines several mediums, Gabellone created the basis for his synthesis of the surreal, the classical and the baroque. His work is characterized by strict formal research and constant experimentation with different mediums and their idioms and materials, resulting in an analytic reflection on the use of space.

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All images Courtesy by the artist and Zero, Milano

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Since the beginning of the 2000's, he has been investigating different types of wall sculpture, reinterpreting traditional Italian wall relief. The work investigates the dialectics between two and three dimensions, and between representation and ornament. "Trying new things is the driving force", he henceforth explains. He has thus set aside the production of photography of sculptures (certainly the most well-known facet of his work) to invest frontally in the sculptural field. Each new project gives way to material experimentation.



Giuseppe Gabellone  
Untitled, 2018  
Paper, acrylic resin, fiberglass, pigments, bamboo, wood, cotton rope.  
60 x 188 x 168 cm  
© The Artist. Courtesy of Zero, Milano  
Photograph: Roberto Marossi



## Les énigmes de Giuseppe Gabellone

La première exposition personnelle de l'artiste italien chez Art : Concept, à Paris, reflète son goût pour l'expérimentation des matériaux et son souci de la mise en espace, explorés avec constance depuis les années 1990.

CAMILLE VIÉVILLE

21 novembre 2019 14:00 BST



Modelée en étain, une petite sculpture qui représente une chaussure éventrée (*Ex Scarpa*, 2018) est posée directement sur le sol. Doter la galerie d'une atmosphère domestique en faisant mine de s'être déchaussé à l'entrée, voilà l'astuce trouvée par Giuseppe Gabellone pour s'appropriier les lieux avec humour. Mais la forme disloquée du soulier qui, en s'ouvrant, tend vers l'abstraction, et la matière dense et froide qui le compose provoquent un sentiment ambigu, non dénué de mystère. L'ambition de l'artiste ? Suggérer une réflexion sur le passage du temps, mettre à dis-tance le spectateur et jouer avec les faux-semblants, diverses propositions qui, ainsi condensées dans cet énigmatique objet de métal argenté, constituent le cœur de son travail depuis vingt-cinq ans.



Giuseppe Gabellone, Untitled, 2017, cyprès, corde en chanvre, acier galvanisé. Courtesy de l'artiste. © Daniela Molajoli

### Un guide

Né en 1973, Giuseppe Gabellone fait, à l'Accademia di belle arti, à Bologne, une rencontre déterminante, celle d'Alberto Garutti, enseignant charismatique qui sensibilise avec pédagogie et talent ses étudiants à la création la plus récente. Dans un monde académique italien alors peu perméable à l'art contemporain, celui-ci fait figure de guide. Plus encore, sa propre pratique, fondée sur le dialogue entre les arts plastiques et l'espace public, marque durablement l'esprit de Gabellone, pour qui les rapports entre l'œuvre, l'architecture environnante et le site où elle est montrée s'avèrent primordiaux. Le jeune homme, accompagné d'un certain nombre de ses camarades, suivra Garutti après sa mutation à l'Accademia di belle arti di Brera, à Milan; généreusement accueillis dans la grande maison du maître, ils se réuniront dès lors en une bande informelle connue sous le nom d'« *il gruppo di via Fiuggi* » («le groupe de la rue Fiuggi»).

l'ambition de l'artiste ? Suggérer une réflexion sur le passage du temps, mettre à distance le spectateur et jouer avec les faux-semblants...

## L'art et le temps

À en croire Gabellone, les orientations de son travail et les jalons importants de son parcours, à l'exemple de son premier solo show au Studio Guenzani, à Milan, dès 1996, de ses participations précoces à la [Biennale de Venise](#) <sup>↗</sup> en 1997 et en 2003, de son installation à Paris au milieu des années 2000 ou de sa collaboration avec la [galerie Perrotin](#) <sup>↗</sup>, se sont imposés à lui, en toute simplicité. Ainsi, l'adoption de la sculpture comme principal champ de recherche s'est faite « *naturellement* ». Quant à la thématique du temps, omniprésente, elle est apparue petit à petit : « *Je ne l'ai pas choisie, mais elle est là et elle me plaît* », explique-t-il dans un sourire. Cette thématique se manifeste dans les motifs eux-mêmes : souvenons-nous de la chaussure usée, dans la sélection qu'il fait des matériaux, certains éphémères - tabac, branches de cyprès (*Untitled*, 2017), verre, etc. -, d'autres plus durables - argile, poudre d'aluminium, acier galvanisé ou encore tissu (*Grande viola*, 2012) -, mais aussi dans l'exécution, lente, de ses pièces.

## Images mentales

Parfois, Gabellone recourt à la photographie et immortalise certaines de ses sculptures, qu'il détruira ensuite (*Periodo*, 1997; *Untitled*, 2007). Il s'intéresse également au bas-relief (*I Giapponesi*, 2003; *Irò, irò, irò*, 2012). Ces médiums constituent des compromis fructueux entre les productions en volume et la représentation en deux dimensions. Par ailleurs, l'usage de la photo lui permet d'être au plus près de l'image mentale surgie de son esprit et de ménager la prise de recul nécessaire à la contemplation des énigmes que, souvent, elle contient.

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Chez Art : Concept, Gabellone expose un petit nombre d'œuvres, moins d'une dizaine, toutes inédites, parmi lesquelles deux de ces *Ex Scarpa* (2018) et quelques bas-reliefs, transparents comme des fenêtres, réalisés en résine polyester, fibre de verre et cadre en aluminium (*Falsa finestra*, 2019). Cette parcimonie est le reflet de son processus créatif, qui se déploie très progressivement, pendant plusieurs semaines voire plusieurs mois. Elle fait écho à l'approche raisonnée, comme on le dirait de l'agriculture, de la galerie, voulue par son directeur Olivier Antoine, à l'heure de l'industrialisation croissante du marché de l'art et de son devenir toujours plus spectaculaire. Réside probablement là une partie de l'héritage de l'[arte povera](#) <sup>↗</sup>, perceptible dans le travail de Gabellone depuis ses débuts.

**«Giuseppe Gabellone», 12 octobre-23 novembre 2019, [Art : Concept](#) <sup>↗</sup>, 4, passage Sainte-Avoye, 75003 Paris.**

## La luce-scultura in una stanza. Giuseppe Gabellone a Torino

By **Claudia Giraud** - 8 maggio 2018

Quartz Studio, Torino – fino al 30 giugno 2018. Per la seconda mostra della stagione nello spazio non profit torinese, l'artista brindisino di stanza a Parigi propone una scultura-lampada che invade completamente l'ambiente. Modificandolo.

Essenzialità, rigore e concretezza. È ciò che si prova varcando la soglia dello spazio-vetrina Quartz Studio che, dopo il progetto fantasmagorico dell'artista lettone Ola Vasiljeva, propone, per la sua seconda mostra della stagione, sempre organizzata grazie al sostegno della Fondazione Sardi per l'Arte, la solidità di **Giuseppe Gabellone** (Brindisi, 1973).

Un ritorno al grado zero della scultura per l'artista brindisino di stanza a Parigi che, nella sua struttura-lampada in acciaio concepita per invadere completamente l'ambiente e cambiarne i connotati ostruendone gli spazi, ha eliminato la componente pittorica e materica del fare scultura presente in lavori precedenti, a favore di un minimalismo delle forme, poeticamente umanizzato dalla luce. *“Volevo che la scultura si estendesse il più possibile nello spazio. Come se qualcuno aprisse le braccia più che può per impedire agli altri di avvicinarsi o di entrare”*, racconta Gabellone. *“La scultura è lunga quattro metri per un metro e settanta circa. Ci sono quaranta lampade e questa sarà l'unica illuminazione dello spazio”*.





## Giuseppe Gabellone ZERO...

For this solo show, Giuseppe Gabellone chose an off-site space, installing three works (all Untitled, 2018) at the Fonderia Artistica Battaglia, near Zero's former location. The two large rooms in a stark, unfurnished industrial space seemed well suited to the extremely sober, almost minimal works that are the artist's most recent creations. The large windows, moreover, allowed them to be seen in natural light, in keeping with the artist's usual practice.

Interested in the signifying relationship between a work and its surroundings, Gabellone often inserts his sculptures into the void of expansive spaces in order to activate viewers' reactions, including physical ones, to the maximum possible extent. In the first room, a large yellow canvas was periodically lowered from a slender metal structure hanging from the ceiling like a curtain that, once entirely drawn, divided the space into two. In its slow descent and ascent, the work functioned as a dynamic element that also introduced a strong chromatic component into the neutrality of the industrial environment.

Next to this work, which played with ideas of verticality and incorporeality, was a piece based on ideas of accumulation, of densification at floor level, and of the

lowering of the gaze. A pile of sheets of paper cut into irregular shapes, some with large holes, had been soaked in resin and pigment. Thus solidified, they rested atop one another on a low base, a sort of grid made of bamboo reeds intertwined with ropes. The rigid sheets seemed like letters in some archaic alphabet, while the bamboo structure brought to mind the skilled craftsmanship of some past culture.

The third work, installed in the adjacent room, stood out in dialectical contrast to this evocation of the past. Extremely high-tech in comparison, it was the only piece illuminated by artificial lights, which were an intrinsic part of the work: A pole balanced diagonally on a tall metal tripod supported a row of shining lightbulbs. Although the structure brought to mind the shape of a seesaw, this luminous bar was not mobile but fixed in place. Of course, the work could be observed from numerous viewpoints—visitors could move around it as they could around any other sculpture. But the mobility of the viewer was the only thing that modified this piece, which is not the case with some other works by Gabellone. (Perhaps here, in this adherence to convention, the artist applied the same logic that moti-



View of "Giuseppe Gabellone," 2018. Foreground: Untitled, 2018. Background: Untitled, 2018. Photo: Roberto Marossi.

vated an earlier group of works: large color photographs of structures built for the sole purpose of being photographed and then existing as two-dimensional icons, as striking as they are ambiguous.) For many viewers, this exhibition probably made its strongest impact through the frontal view of this bright and twisted work, framed by the door of the adjacent room. It exuded a certain sense of sacredness—and yet in an absolutely profane way, which made it no less intense.



## L'alfabeto non decodificato di Giuseppe Gabellone. A Roma

By **Fabio Massimo Pellicano** - 7 giugno 2017

Fondazione Memmo, Roma – fino al 15 ottobre 2017. Le scuderie del cinquecentesco Palazzo Ruspoli ospitano la prima personale a Roma dell'artista brindisino, da anni di stanza a Parigi. Opere inedite, scelte dal curatore Francesco Stocchi, in un ipotetico dialogo con quelle esposte, in contemporanea, da greengrassi a Londra.



Giuseppe Gabellone, *Untitled (Orange)*, 2017, photo Silvia Iessi

Metabolizzata l'eredità dell'Arte Povera degli esordi e archiviate le più recenti sperimentazioni di wall painting, **Giuseppe Gabellone** (Brindisi, 1973) realizza una breve esperienza di installazioni site specific, scarna e asettica, dove la collocazione delle opere impone un abbassamento dello sguardo, fino al radicale sovvertimento delle prospettive ordinarie, nell'ambito di una riflessione sul tempo e sul deterioramento della materia.

Dalla scultura in stagno a forma di mandibola della prima sala, stridente sul pavimento in travertino, passando per le forme di carta stratificate e adagate su incerti bambù (*Untitled Black, Untitled Orange*, 2017), il memento mori trova il suo apice nella coppia di cipressi sospesa e distesa, inerme, quasi prigioniera di un reticolo di spago, incapace di trattenerne i detriti (*Untitled*, 2017), i quali diventano, a loro volta, appendice consapevole dell'opera.

Un percorso, dunque, forse eccessivamente sintetico e mentale, che non manca, tuttavia, di suscitare suggestioni e rinvii; non ultimo, quello sull'antitesi artificiale/naturale, enfatizzata dall'incontro tra la luce esterna del patio e la luminosità fredda e asettica degli interni.

– *Fabio Massimo Pellicano*



Giuseppe Gabellone, installation view, 2013

## Giuseppe Gabellone

Sculpture is a good starting point to examine ideas around reproduction, not only because it's often editioned but also because, for millennia, certain sculptural forms have been perpetuated through replicas. Even in our digital world, the snow-white profile of a classical statue is an image capable of time-travelling without losing its power. Since he first started exhibiting in the mid-1990s, Giuseppe Gabellone has defined himself as a sculptor, even when exhibiting only photographs – usually of his sculptures – which he dismantles after the shoot. The artist has consistently, almost stubbornly, explored the relationship between sculpture and transience. He has experimented with all sorts of materials, from tobacco to glass; for the series 'I Giapponesi' (The Japanese, 2003), for example, he translated fragments of Japanese ukyo-e woodblock prints into reliefs made of polyurethane foam. When reproduced as copies of lost originals, Gabellone's sculptures

revert to an almost immaterial state, made to inhabit the viewer's imagination and memory instead of the exhibition spaces. I've always found this deferral of tactile pleasure slightly sadistic, or possibly just defensive; an effective way to control and dictate the public's accessibility to his works.

In Gabellone's exhibition at GAMEc – which was curated by Alessandro Rabottini – any safe distance was abolished. All of the works were made specifically for the show. Viewers were greeted by Grande Viola (Big Purple, 2012), a soft purple quilt, in cotton velvet and acrylic padding, sewn by the artist's mother, which covered a large section of the floor. Visitors had to walk across it to get into the gallery; imprinting it with their footprints, they also risked tripping, thus messing with the elegance of the drapery (another echo of classical sculpture). At the far side of the gallery, another quilt, Verde acido (Acid Green, 2012), guided viewers to a smaller side room, where it crawled up the wall into a knotted tip. On the opposite wall, Gabellone had installed a pair of small reliefs in bronze and aluminium (both Untitled, 2013), made from lost wax casting; their wavy surfaces mirrored the folded blanket. In the main room were three large high-relief casts in industrial epoxy resin, pigmented in flashy colours: yellow for Proteggi Giuseppe (Protect Giuseppe), black for Mr. Mother, and brick red for Irò Irò Irò (all 2012). The titles spell out the text inscribed in each work; the letters unfold over the surface in meandering ribbons, overlapping each other like the flourishes of an oblique, idiosyncratic calligraphy. These casts are, again, reproductions – the originals, formed in grey clay and presented as black and white photos in the catalogue, never left Gabellone's Paris studio. The epoxy resin's fine texture was both matte and shiny under the gallery's bright neon lights; it's hard to capture the radiance of the resin, expanding as a glowing halo, with a camera. The exhibition combined works in complementary colours: yellow and purple, red and green, while the black Mr. Mother stood alone.

I suspect that autobiography, which Gabellone usually keeps at bay, was partially responsible for the unusual warmth, playfulness and immediate proximity of these elegant works. Not only was the exhibition a sort of homecoming (it was his first in an Italian public museum since he moved to France a decade ago), but it's tempting to read the influence of family life in the titles. If Proteggi Giuseppe is obviously a self-portrait, Mr. Mother could be a reference to his wife or parenthood more generally, while the childlike iteration of Irò Irò Irò evokes the presence of his young son Romeo. It's obviously too intimate a world to share with pictures.

Barbara Casavecchia is a contributing editor of *frieze* and a freelance writer and curator living in Milan, Italy.

First published in Issue 156, Jun – Aug 2013

# THE BLOGAZINE

## Giuseppe Gabellone at GAMEc



Giuseppe Gabellone (b. Brindisi, Italy 1973, works and lives in Paris) is probably one of the most celebrated member of the Italian scene of artists and friends known as Il gruppo di Via Fiuggi (the group of the Fiuggi street); young authors from the late 90's, who actively work for the re-definition of contemporary art in Italy, giving new meaning and developments to the hard heritage left by the Arte Povera and conceptual art. The absolutely independent artistic research carried on by Giuseppe Gabellone first focused on the crossing of sculpture and photography. With a particular analytic and incisive approach in regard to the media, he initially created visual enigmas made of sculptures, which couldn't survive without the distance achieved only through the photographic reproduction.

Strange shapes that seem to refer to recognisable and functional objects and places, were actually reproductions of shapes, which alluded to the reality, but deprived of their physical status and natural context, photographed and then destroyed to add further obstacles to their understanding. Among them: a cactus made of wet clay pent-up in a garage; curvilinear streets of down tree that never leads to any places; flowers and plants scaled down and apparently out of order, plus objects set into heavy armored structures. From this first approach suspended between sculpture and photography, Gabellone moved to a new series of works where matter is represented through the form of bas-relief. Characterized by the use of unusual materials, which contrasts with the tradition of their shapes, these sculptures create ambiguity whilst surprising the viewers by referring to exotic imaginaries.

For the exhibition, expressly thought for GAMEc space, and after a long absence from the Italian artistic scene, once again, Gabellone created original works that analysed the sculpture as main media, but this time focusing on high relief. To do this, the artist put themes like color, surface, and contrast between vast and master to the centre of his research, producing intense chromatic juxtapositions, which remind drawings made by children with crayons. This strange promenade made of stuffed fabric guides the path throughout giant components that remind the "movable type", hypothetical letters that seem to compose only meaningless words, which don't allude to anything specific, but maintain their conceptual potential, both striking and puzzling the viewers.



Giuseppe Gabellone, *Proteggi Giuseppe*, 2012, epoxy resin, 88 1/5 x 65 x 15 3/4".

## BERGAMO

Giuseppe Gabellone  
GAMEC - GALLERIA D'ARTE MODERNA E CONTEMPORANEA DI BERGAMO  
Via San Tomaso 53  
March 8 - May 5

An enormous purple cotton carpet greets visitors as they enter the first of two rooms of Giuseppe Gabellone's current exhibition. The expansive floor covering, *Grande Viola*, 2012, stretches throughout the space and commands respect, making it difficult for one to overcome an onset of embarrassment when left with no choice but to tread upon it. Alternatively, the ratio of walking room to covered floor could persuade one to go barefoot, allowing for other senses like touch to grasp the nonvisual properties of the velvety exterior and its acrylic stuffing. Also in this room, three epoxy resin pieces are installed on the surrounding walls and act as steady anchors to the consuming presence of the amorphous work below them. Featuring swirling letters, *Irò, irò, irò*, *Mister Mother*, and *Proteggi Giuseppe*, all 2012, seem to signify their onomatopoeic potential rather than any applicable literal meaning.

To the right of the first room, two arched passageways lead to another space where a second carpet has been placed. *Verde Acido*, 2012, though similar in texture and size, is here slung over a wall as if thrown over a shoulder, with most of its neon green material spilling onto the ground. Additionally, two untitled sculptures from 2013 have been installed on the wall that separates the gallery's rooms. The first work is a bronze slab that appears as dry as the crust of a darkened loaf of bread; the second, made of aluminum, undulates in ripples

that liken the shimmering texture to sea waves. Both appear to be the result of Gabellone's analysis of the unexpressed potential of each variant material, the matte bronze as organic and the iridescent aluminum as optical. It seems that this exhibition addresses media and their inherent qualities, and more specifically their ability to translate space as well as the experience of the inhabiting viewer.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— Marco Tagliaferro



## Synthetic Fossils: Time, Form and Material in the Work of Giuseppe Gabellone

Alessandro Rabottini

"I am very interested in the work of those artists who continue to open up, destroy and bend the idea of sculpture."  
(Giuseppe Gabellone)

I first encountered Giuseppe Gabellone's work in 1997 and, despite the fact that I have had the opportunity to write about and exhibit it, it took nearly sixteen years for us to set up a project together for a solo show. This long autobiographical interlude is not meant as a personal affectation but is probably the simplest and most direct way to introduce what is a key dimension of his oeuvre, one that reverberates in all the works presented at the GAMEC in Bergamo: the dimension of time.

In his photographs and sculptures – the two main media around which Gabellone has developed his language, forcing conventions and possibilities in both – time acquires forms that, despite the sharpness of his images, cannot be grasped readily. It is a time that is at once specific (precise, we might say) and foreign, an absolute and present time that nevertheless goes beyond contemporaneity, a time anchored to experience yet transcending that experience.

For his solo exhibition at GAMEC, Gabellone has created a series of brand-new works that make time a dimension of sculpture and space, creating an intense chromatic and tactile landscape: dense, thick, packed.

The exhibition is centered around three large wall-mounted works that, from a typological standpoint, hark back to the technique of high relief, although they are not the outcome of a sculptural process based on hollowing a surface but are epoxy resin casts of sculptures Gabellone previously made in Plastiline. At first glance, these casts look like strange, coarsely worked knots, along with thick, rounded lines. Here and there we find fat leaves, table lamps, huge snails, the outlines of a breaking wave. The titles of the works allow us to untangle the surfaces – *literally* – so that our eyes find the expressions "Proteggi Giuseppe", "Irò, Irò, Irò" and "Mister Mother". In fact, these are the words that, with great difficulty, we can recognize if we gaze at the tortuous turn of the forms, in an operation that would be hard to define as "reading". This secret language, like a primitive but involuted arabesque, exists as a visual and formal datum rather than on the level of verbal understanding, taking its time and possessing the deep sound of a litany expanding to infinity.

The forms of low and high relief are not new to Gabellone's production, if we think of the series entitled *I*

*Giapponesi* (p. 112) (shown at the Venice Biennale in 2003) and the series *La Giungla* made the following year, both characterized by the almost total saturation of surfaces, of dense, intricate signs, volumes and figures that continuously vacillate the boundaries between image and object, two- and three-dimensionality, fixity and narration.

This form of oscillation between painting and sculpture is what defines the uses made of bas-relief in various historical eras, from the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Europe. In fact, bas-relief marks the space in which decorations – both botanical and geometric – coexist with the narration of complex scenes. It forms a bridge between representation and space, bringing into the dimension of architecture the sequence and unfolding of events, often necessarily crowded, within which the figures are forced into unnatural profile poses. In short, the bas-relief is the space in which the dimensions of the visual collide: abstraction, figuration, decoration, narration, painting, sculpture, architecture, scale and perspective. The origins of writing as a precursor of words can be traced to incision on clay, and this implies a three-dimensionality of language at its very beginnings, its volumes and existence within the very life of materials.

*Proteggi Giuseppe* (p. 79), *Irò, Irò, Irò* (p. 91) and *Mister Mother* (p. 92) have a specific formal quality: all three absorb different moments within a closed unit, articulating the diversity of the images and materials, yet they prove to be utterly uniform, compact and uninvolved with differences because they are composed of a single, synthetic material: resin. In many of the passages composing these high reliefs we find coarse and almost brutal modelling, open like a still-evolving form in which gestures are equivalent to traces, a mark left by a work interrupted as it was being made, as if we were looking at the fossil of a contemporary Pompeii. At other points these sculptures – like magnets – seem to have abstracted and assimilated objects present in the space of the workshop, like wooden planks and table lamps. The idea of form as the result of the accumulation of daily objects alludes, in part, to Dada collage, the assemblages of Nouveau Réalisme and Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines:" the experiences that, by absorbing real objects into the painting, have explored the ambiguity between *things* and images, between representation and space, and between experience and simulation.

However, there is something that links all of these historical precedents yet is absent from Gabellone's work, if not radically negated: the experience of the realism of objects, meaning *things as they are in reality*. These three high reliefs are made of a single plastic material yet, despite the fact that this resin

is able to hold and simulate not only the shiny surface of a light bulb but also the porousness of a wooden plank and the freshness of newly modelled clay, here the realism of the materials is suppressed, instead favouring an abstract and monochrome structure, where difference and homogeneity, purity and imitation, continually intersect.

It will be helpful to consider how casting techniques – central to Gabellone’s three-dimensional works – can be placed in relation to his use of photography. In fact, his photographic works portray the sculptures the artist has designed and made, but which end up existing only in the space of the photographic image, and thus in a mediated space, just as these forms of sculpture are “mediated”. The expressiveness of the imprints left on modelled Plasticine, the coarseness of certain materials and the organic quality of others: all of these perceptual data have been distanced and transferred, almost as if they had been shuttled elsewhere, where the representation of things replaces their pure existence.

Gabellone called a similar process into play in *Pianta* (p. 132), a sculpture from 2001 depicting a houseplant, a broad-leaved type set in a low brick planter. Here as well, both the plant and the building materials were made of the same polyurethane resin and of the same color, almost as if, once again, this were a fossil with a surreal and synthetic appearance. Indeed, wasn’t it the Surrealism of René Magritte’s views and Max Ernst’s petrified forests that introduced into the modern imagination this form of extension of the single material – preferably stone – to the different parts of the same image, establishing not only an osmosis between the domain of nature and that of civilization, but also pre-figuring the coexistence of the present and archaeology, banality and ruin, the quotidian and eternity?

This motif of time that, like a loop, absorbs and rejects the distinction between past, present and future has also been intrinsic to Gabellone’s work from the very outset, regardless of whether it is about photography, sculpture or installation, and problematic as it may be to perceive the separation among the media within his production. I am referring to *Periodo* (p. 137), for example, a photographic work from 1997 showing a winding wooden structure that could be part of a spiral staircase ending nowhere but also the spiral helix of DNA. While the title of this work bears an immediate reference to the dimension of time as a fragment, module and structure, the formal motif of torsion recurs in another work, untitled, from 1999, in which what seems to be the interior of an industrial building has been made impracticable because there is a wooden structure with a cement foundation that occupies the entire construction, resembling an undersized roller coaster. Here again, we are facing the image of a loop, of movement

that shuns linearity to return to itself constantly, in a twisting structure that evokes the contorted language we find in the three large wall-mounted works presented in Bergamo. The clarity that distinguishes these two early works is countered by the exuberant forms of *Proteggi Giuseppe*, *Irò, Irò, Irò* and *Mister Mother*, prefiguring the advent of a Baroque, primitive, Mediterranean, brutal and dazzling style, suited to the sentiment of private, contemporary, and mysterious worship. The modulation of each surface is crossed by slow-moving figures, coiling images that indicate cyclical motion, and the sequence of forms of vegetal and natural life: we find gigantic snails, waves that allude to traditional Japanese painting, and coarsely carved thick leaves, as in a frieze with botanical motifs from a civilization that has forgotten classicism.

This perception of a slow time – to the point of immobility – is enforced by a form of visual sensitivity we find in many of Gabellone's works, some recent, others older, including the wall-mounted works exhibited at GAMEC, regardless of whether they are plastic casts or smaller metal castings.

This new series of works brings us to the prosaic monumentality of certain images by Carlo Carrà and Mario Sironi, to the solemnity we find in their painting, the point of encounter between the quotidian and the mysterious, urban civilization and primitivism. Gabellone shows that he has fully absorbed a visual culture that moves back through the history of relationships between present and past, and within which we can recognize the gaze that, in his early years, Giacomo Manzù turned to Donatello, just as we find the formal tension with which Marino Marini re-contemplated the language of monuments. We are talking about a form of disquiet, of anti-modern resistance, that arises with the revival of monumental figuration by artists such as Thomas Schütte and Hans Josephsohn and, more recently, Thomas Houseago.

In these works, in which sculpture is literally nailed to the wall, words become an arabesque: they are unfolded and entangled like a ribbon, developing their own grammar that exists like a pure visual field. Theirs is a language that moves through the field of images and reminds us of the lightness with which Alighiero Boetti toned down the distinction between writing and decoration because, as he himself asserted, "Writing with the left hand is drawing".

This language, which withdraws into a cave like a contemporary hermit and articulates messages bordering on the incomprehensible, seems to echo the hollow sound of Bruce Nauman's neon work *My Name as Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon* (1968), a work that, not coincidentally, explores the dimension of sound through a purely visual datum.



The idea of unity – be it formal or linguistic – that does not open itself to immediacy but needs attentive action in order to reveal itself, one of slow actions bordering on rituality, is something we find in previous works, often formally distant from each other: for example, there is the sculptural group entitled *Figure d'Alluminio* (p. 47) (2009), in which two large figures, which look like huge metal origami, face each other in a mute dialogue. In this case, sculpture does not stem from a gesture of addition or subtraction, but from the articulation in space and materials of something that appears to have an almost two-dimensional quality (like a sheet of paper or drawing) and that seems about to open up, only to return to describe the figure, thanks to a light and knowing gesture.

In another untitled work from 1997, Gabellone introduced an alternating gesture of closing and opening within an object that, if closed, acquired the scale of sculpture, but once opened, occupied an intermediate space between installation and temporary architecture: a sort of gusseted tunnel made of aluminum and synthetic fabric, and mounted on small wheels.

The device of the sculpture that occupies a space in an alternative, mobile and retractable way returns in *Grande viola* (p. 94) and *Verde acido* (p. 82) (both dated 2012), the two works that complete the exhibition in Bergamo and take the form of enormous quilts. Through their presence, Gabellone mutes the rigid geometry of the exhibition space, thus slowing down our pace and literally making it muffled, and covering almost the entire floor with color, producing the effect of a becalmed sea, of chromatic surf shining under neon lights. In the softness of a volume resting on itself, *Grande viola* and *Verde acido* amplify a relationship between form and space already present in an untitled work from 1996 (p. 120), a raffia cube that the artist has shown alternatively open and closed, an unstable sculpture that exists intermittently and holds all the potential of a gesture that is slow and ever the same, like that of one who develops a geometry, only to fold it up and put it away ad infinitum.

Yet *Grande viola* and *Verde acido* do not rely on the binary alternation of the two works I have just mentioned (the tunnel made of metal and fabric, and the raffia cube). In fact, *Grande viola* and *Verde acido* occupy the space more generously, thanks also to the way the visitors' movements and footsteps will alter their arrangement, structure and integrity over time. The accent placed on a form of experience that passes through tactility and posture, but also through the sense of sight, amplifies an implicit dimension in this work: the sense of a gesture that is almost parental, that expresses a need and a feeling of protection. Indeed, upon closer examination, despite their enigmatic nature, the words composing the three large bas-reliefs suggest an atmosphere of

intimacy and a close rapport: while the spell evoked in *Proteggi Giuseppe* (“Protect Giuseppe”) reverberates almost explicitly when reacting with the softness of the blankets and with the gestures they imply, *Irò, Irò, Irò* is a more difficult expression to interpret. It could be a sort of incitement, a hymn pushing towards action and a look towards the future. Nevertheless, its pure musicality evokes the gesture with which a child rhythmically leaps into the air and remains there, suspended for moment, only to land again, but also the initial phases in which one learns a language, when syllables are still music and have not yet become words, and their repetition is a game, joy, exploration and excitement.

Closing this conceptual circle we find *Mister Mother*, the ideal image of the fusion of male and female gender that, as single entity, absorbs the distinction of the sexes and the determination of parenting. While *Irò, Irò, Irò* and *Mister Mother* seem to be related to the origins of life as a form of separation, of individuation and determination, *Proteggi Giuseppe* amplifies the image of distancing, perhaps that of the artist as an individual facing the world and for which a celebratory invocation is required.

Gabellone almost seems to imagine his own very personal genesis and an equally individual apocalypse, within which language reverts to its original status as an image, and the human existence means separation from the world and the search for shelter.



ART REVIEW  
 April 2010  
 Barbara Casavecchia

REVIEWS: EUROPE

Giuseppe Gabellone

Studio Guenzani, Milan  
 21 January – 27 March

In Giuseppe Gabellone's photographs, the difference between a mental image (that is, of something that doesn't exist) and a memory image (of something previously experienced) is subtle. The artist carefully builds and stages his subjects – ad hoc sculptures – but destroys them immediately after the shooting, so that what remains for the viewer to experience are only images anyway. They are like ghosts, uncanny objects that can revert from an actual to a potential status, and thus travel from the present tense to the past and the future.

In the chapter 'Operator, Spectrum and Spectator' (ie, photographer, subject and viewer) in his *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes writes that 'the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any *eidolon* emitted by the object, which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.' The Brindisi-born, Paris-based Gabellone has travelled along these lines for some time. In 1999 he produced *Untitled*, a photo of a complex, fragile meandering structure in plywood, calling to mind a rollercoaster and appearing made to measure for the space it sat in: a claustrophobic industrial interior flooded with chilly neon lights. A previous *Untitled* (1996) photo depicted an underground garage with a car parked among big cactuses in brown clay, while his *Untitled* (2002) series, shown at Documenta 11, portrayed various stems of giant coarse blue flowers resting their weight on shelves, analogous to the posing stands and head clamps once needed for daguerreotypes. Although empty, nondescript and postindustrially anonymous, the landscapes used as backgrounds in these tableaux are all from Puglia, the region of Southern Italy where the artist spent his childhood, as if carrying an echo of personal memories locked in the past.

The series of eight relatively small (52 x 35 cm) *Untitled* photographs presented at Studio Guenzani (and first exhibited last summer at the *Beaufort 03: Art by the Sea* triennial, in Ostend, Belgium) has a similar setting. At the centre of each image – but more upfront than usual, so that the urban landscape of Paris's *banlieue* becomes less conspicuous – Gabellone has positioned a metal frame anchored to cement blocks. It holds a cloth banner silk-screened with old found photos: the closeup of a lunar rock, some kids playing, a foundry... None of these has any direct autobiographical connotation, but their shared 1950s/60s aesthetics seem to voice a longing for another era, more carefree and future-friendly. Moved by the wind, the fabric becomes a sail, so that the image (in black and white, but also in richly saturated colours such as orange or magenta, yellow and green) suddenly acquires volume and freely floats beyond the geometric boundaries of the grid. It's a photo of a sculpture of a photo, the spectrum of a Barthesian spectrum, lighter than air, unexpectedly happy. *Barbara Casavecchia*



*Untitled*, 2009, digital print, 52 x 35 cm.  
 Courtesy Studio Guenzani, Milan



## IN PRIMO PIANO



che giocano/lottano. Poi, è come se una scena avesse generato quella successiva, e questo, in effetti, può dare l'idea di una narrazione, anche se una storia non c'è. L'atmosfera di questo lavoro, tra il nostalgico e il macabro, è nata anche dall'accostamento tra un'immagine e l'altra: le rocce generano mostri, che sono generati a loro volta dal gioco che si riversa nella colata incandescente, che forse ha dato origine a tutte queste cose. Questo gioco di sequenze sarebbe potuto andare avanti all'infinito.

**DB:** Come una specie di scarabeo visivo, un'immagine ne crea un'altra. Mi viene in mente anche la "cura Ludovico" di Arancia meccanica, forse perché queste sculture in un certo senso ci obbligano a guardare le immagini. Stanley Kubrick era noto per la cura maniacale dei dettagli. Mi sembra che il tuo modo di lavorare sia molto simile. Anche tu operi sempre una precisa coreografia delle varie componenti nelle tue opere e mai nulla sembra essere lasciato al caso.

**GG:** Il confronto con Kubrick mi sembra esagerato, anche se è vero che tendo a controllare tutto. Lo sforzo necessario alla realizzazione di un'opera fa parte del lavoro stesso, diventa in qualche modo il suo apparato anatomico.

**DB:** Tempo fa, durante una visita nel tuo studio, ho visto che stavi assemblando delle forme poligonali di cartone per le sculture di specchi. In

questo caso è tramite modelli come questi che generi le forme? È sempre importante per te immaginare in anticipo come sarà il risultato finale?

**GG:** Sì, per visualizzare un certo risultato realizzo molti disegni e modelli. Mi capita di utilizzare soprattutto il disegno quando lavoro sulle fotografie — forse perché questo mi aiuta a tenere sempre in mente l'inquadratura —, ma anche per queste realizzazioni dei modelli sommarli per capire quanto spazio occuperanno i vari elementi nell'immagine. Per le sculture, invece, lavoro su modelli fin dal principio, facendone di sempre più elaborati fino ad arrivare a un prototipo.

**DB:** Nella scultura Figure d'alluminio (2009) sembra davvero che la forma sia stata concepita piegando dei fogli di carta, poi assemblati tra loro mantenendo un senso di leggerezza, nonostante la specificità del metallo. Se non sbaglio, è la prima volta che una tua scultura è composta da due figure, quasi come fosse la scena di un incontro. Oppure si tratta di uno scontro?

**GG:** Mi piace che ci sia questa ambiguità. Mettere una figura di fronte a un'altra è un gesto talmente essenziale che quasi non saprei commentarlo. Tra le due presenze si crea subito uno spazio importante, come se nel vuoto tra loro si giocasse la tensione del lavoro. Sono partito piegando dei fogli di carta e dando origine a delle figure cave. Il risultato finale sono due esseri

Da sinistra: L'Assettato, 2008. Ferro, ferro zincato, 200 x 112 x 112 cm. Courtesy Galerio Emmanuel Perrotin, Parigi. Foto: André Morin; Figure d'alluminio, 2009. Fusione in alluminio, 190 x 198 x 60 cm. Courtesy greengrassi, Londra. Foto: Marcus Leith.

in una posa congelata, quasi delle armature. Il loro fronteggiarsi è silenzioso e insieme loquace e il rivolgersi esclusivamente l'uno all'altro li chiude in una formazione inattaccabile anche agli sguardi di chi gira loro intorno.

**DB:** Negli ultimi anni la figura umana ha conquistato nelle tue opere sempre più spazio. Come pensi evolverà questo incedere di figure nei prossimi progetti?

**GG:** Molto lentamente, visto che questo soggetto mi porta a essere prudente. Ora mi interessano le figure che compiono azioni emotive di base: piangere, ridere, arrabbiarsi. Ogni tanto ho la sensazione di educare la mia sensibilità verso gli esseri umani attraverso il mio lavoro. Poi mi viene il dubbio: anche con la figura umana è solo rimanendo in superficie, nella sua pelle, nella storia della sua rappresentazione, che riesco a stabilire un vero contatto con essa e farne qualcosa. ■

Davide Bertocchi è artista. Vive e lavora a Parigi.

Giuseppe Gabellone è nato a Brindisi nel 1973. Vive e lavora a Parigi.



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## Giuseppe Gabellone Enigmas, paradoxes and riddles: photographs of sculptures and sculptures of photographs



Untitled, 2008, digital print, 62x77 cm.  
 Courtesy: greenstreet, London

Italian artist Giuseppe Gabellone has built an elusive, swiftly evolving body of work that can drive one to distraction with worry over the ongoing viability of sculpture as a medium and its legitimacy as a cultural term. These, one will note, are issues Rosalind Krauss grappled with in her 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'. Krauss' concept of the 'expanded field' (which she famously charts, but also defines as an 'historical event with a determinant structure') exposed and exploded the recognized boundaries of sculptural practice. Three decades later, in an eerily analogous fashion, Babellone seems to be renegotiating sculpture's relationship to a set of material and historical referents – monument, site, architecture, landscape – that simultaneously compel reductive interpretative strategies and question their relevance.

Babellone effects a crucial displacement in sculpture via photography, which enables him, and us, to view it with a differently focused eye. His 2009 exhibition at Galerie Emmanuel Perratin in Paris included actual sculptures – a pair of powder-toned fugitive human figures on stainless steel open grid pedestals, titled *L'Assolato* (The Thirty One, 2008), previously shown at London's greenstreet – and a related untitled series of colour digital photographs from 2007. *L'Assolato* refers to a work by the Italian figurative sculptor Arturo Martini, who polemically declared sculpture a dead language in 1946. Babellone's figures, their features and contours worn driftwood-smooth, feel cryptically familiar and yet impossible to pinpoint, like statuesque materializations of *shijū vu*. In a 2008 interview, he explained his interest in allusions to pre-existing images and objects: 'The possibility of using these references – that are emptied of content *par se*, without specific historical, ideological or affective ties – just in a formal way, generates an ambiguity that interests me.'

Babellone pursues this formal ambiguity in a related series of untitled digital prints of rusted abstract human morphologies perched on architectural plinths fastened to horizontal grates, which he laboriously transported and photographed on roofs and in vacant lots of warehouses and railroads on the outskirts of Paris. The resulting

small-scale images, which are uniform in composition and similar in local range, pose the question of site, monument, architecture and landscape in one fell swoop, while flattening everything out into two dimensions. These a priori site-less sculptures assert their autonomy in the foreground of the picture plane, yet are still firmly anchored in the scene. If the logic of a monument is to mark a site, Babellone's photographic perspective in this case reveals sites marking sculptures as much as sculptures marking sites, neither of which are specific to the other.

This is not Babellone's first marriage of photography and sculpture. In fact, several early sculptures exist only as photographs. A spiral staircase that leads nowhere (*Perioda*, *Period*, 1997); a sinuous wooden racetrack, like an oversized children's toy, crammed into a concrete garage-like space (Untitled, 1999); and stalks of baby-blue cast Styrofoam flowers rising from arid, non-descript landscapes in his native Puglia (Untitled, 2002) are amongst those works built only to be photographed and dis-



Untitled, 2007, digital print, 42x28 cm.  
 Courtesy: greengrassi, London

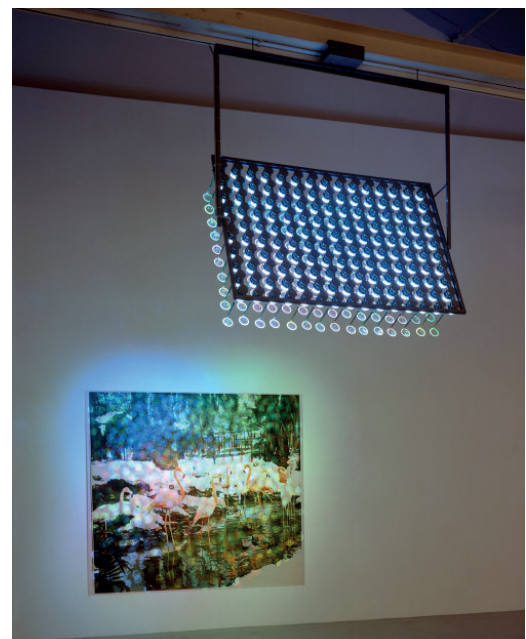
troyed. Here, however, sculpture and photography are locked in a mutually dependent embrace, with each testifying to the other's existence.

From 2003 to 2005 Gabellone explored the potential of wall sculpture in a number of figurative bas-reliefs based on pre-existing images. A series entitled 'I Giapponisi' (The Japanese, 2003) comprises cantilevered slabs made from compressed and moulded yellow squiggles of polyurethane foam, the top portion of which fold over into the viewer's space like stunted canopies. The mottled green and red polyurethane panels of La giungla (The Jungle, 2004) grip the wall on low horizontal plinths, while the silvery-hued Untitled (2005) series of T-shaped steles of tobacco, aluminium powder and vinyl glue are ceremoniously hung on the wall. Far Eastern domestic scenes, foliage and geometric shapes emerge from the friable ersatz plaques, whose substances situate them in the present, but whose forms hark back to sculpture's decorative, architectural origins. These are confidently frontal works, and their reliance on mimetic, synthetic reproduction contests our lingering attachment to archaic 'originals'.

Gabellone works slowly and deliberately through one idea, usually for a minimum of one year, before embarking on the realisation of another, but his is not a linear process. For this year's 'Belgian Triennial of Contemporary Art by the Sea', Gabellone proposed a new series of untitled portrait-format photographs that delineate another shift in his practice: images of cloth tarpaulins mounted on vertical metal grid structures that are weighted down with cement blocks and printed with found photographs.

When transported outdoors, the wind and elements distort the fabric and the images warp and buckle. Gabellone stops the motion with a click of the shutter, lending a rudimentary, cinematographic quality to the pictures. At once visibly linked to the preceding works, they seem to have shaken off their literal, historical and sculptural burden. One suspects this is only a temporary liberation.

1 Giuseppe Gabellone interviewed by Frédéric Paul in Giuseppe Gabellone, *Domaine de Kerguêhenec*, 2008, p. 7



Untitled, 2006, digital print, metal and L.E.D's, dimensions variable. Courtesy: greengrassi, London

Vivian Rehberg, «Giuseppe Gabellone», in *Frieze*, n. 124, juin - août 2009, p.163



## Unique Forms of Continuity in Time

François Piron

*Ubik*, one of Philip K. Dick's most complex science-fiction novels, and one of the most harrowing books ever written about the perception of time, describes a reality that gives way under the feet of the book's characters, caught in a time-frame that is breaking up and reverting to the past. The objects around them are deteriorating and seem gripped by a kind of reversion of matter, a collective hallucination and "phantasmagoric counterpart" of the real world, engendering general suspicion towards it.

This is the kind of feeling we get when looking at Giuseppe Gabellone's works: the sensation of a reality giving way, like a rug suddenly pulled out from under the onlooker's feet. Their unusual, heterogeneous quality, combined with the use of technical procedures (at times old-fashioned and craftsmanlike, at others extremely sophisticated, which nevertheless remove any manual trace or sign of virtuosity and ultimately suggest things that seem always to have existed) leads to a loss of landmarks and references, and to the question of knowing in what precise way these works are "contemporary". Where do they come from? Francesco Bonami refers to their "unknown origin"<sup>1</sup> and, in fact, one of their qualities is that they are strictly "undatable", and have an extremely aloof relationship with present time – the time of the viewer's experience – and a calculated defiance where interpretation is concerned.

Gabellone's works are sculptures, even though a good number of them are only made visible by way of imagery. They are made for a specific place and viewpoint, and are then photographed and destroyed. A one-off image then emerges from this procedure. However, they share no common ground with activities related to Land Art, where the image documents a more or less ephemeral work undertaken in a given space, and acts as a record or certificate of existence. Quite the contrary,

in fact. Gabellone's photographs may offer few clues about the places where they are taken, but they likewise leave few hints that would enable us to establish any date or specific time. They have to do with presence rather than representation, and their challenge seems to be not so much duration as permanence – not time passing, but time being frozen. A presence, but one radically separate from the viewer's presence, in which they reject the relationship of co-existence between one being and another – a relationship that marked the heyday of Minimalism.

Their rare and to say the least, laconic titles nevertheless offer a few keys. *Periodo*, one of the earliest works in Gabellone's 1997 output, shows the model of a spiral staircase, painstakingly constructed and rendered, as if held in mid-air in front of a blind wall obliterating the view of some landscape or other; the *idea* of a staircase, its scale vague, leading nowhere, whose title implicitly invites us to read it as a symbol of time rather than in terms of space. A spiral-shaped temporality, involving a combination of permanence and evolution.

It is difficult to describe Gabellone's works, so complex is their production, originating as they do from slow, layered processes, and so hard do his representations try to maintain a sort of opacity. A recent (2007) series of photographs shows anthropomorphic sculptures, perched on impressive metal structures, like plinths built by Gustave Eiffel and set on the Paris rooftops. The viewpoints are not used to create illusion, and they leave certain contemporary details visible, but they nevertheless show the Paris of the nineteenth century, overlooking railway tracks and industrial buildings. The sculptures, for their part, are indefinable figures, gnawed by rust and as if eroded and rounded by time; one of them, a leg raised in a display of bellicose determination that looks more like a painful effort, evokes recollections of Boccioni's famous Futurist sculpture, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), whose angular forms are thickened, the spirited representation of its movement transfixed, frozen for eternity. Other figures call to mind Art