

## Gothic Kaleidoscope

The exhibition space has always a determining influence on the shows, serving as a background, as a surface or as a structure, so as an integral element. There's a direct relationship between the containing-place and the works displayed in it. As for De Vleeshal, all of this is made exponential by the gothic characteristics of its architecture. Its identity is in fact based on the contrast between a strongly connoted structure and the present artistic experimentations. The very place, meant as a starting point, is a constant in the numerous exhibitions realized through the years in this space and Riccardo Previdi, with his solo show "Fraktur", also follows this line.

But this time the place, that formerly used to be a meat market, isn't just a cumbersome architectural presence or a stylistic invasion of the contemporary experimentation, but rather the pretext to start a series of reflections on Gothic. The space is the starting point still, but this time is being read in a cultural-historical perspective, more so than in the dimension of the aesthetic of its architecture. Riccardo Previdi approaches all of this through the analysis of Arnold Hauser's *Social History of Art*\*, in which is highlighted "the dualism of Gothic age", the period of transition from Antique to Modern, comparison and collusion between two antithetical visions of the world leading to a real split in the medieval society.

Searching for a confluence, for a meeting point between Gothic's complexity and a possible translation into Contemporary, the artist realizes a double register: on one hand he shows the space's own (hi)story, on the other, the space itself. This binary structure finds its amplification in the parallelism grafted on the rhythmicity of history and the repeating of aesthetic and structural elements in the wide hall. Previdi plays with the rigid symmetries between social context and cultural climate made by Hauser's modernist gaze, but also with the recovery of both tragic and joyful Middle Ages, as, for example, what we can read about in the *Heraldic Trilogy* by Italo Calvino, where Agilulfo Emo Bertrandino dei Guildiverni\*\*, with his empty white and black striped armour, moves through a bogus Middle Ages. So the analysis and the references suggested by Previdi for a new lecture of the contest itself are swinging between Gutenberg's Bible and Hauser's *History*, between the manifesto for a Gothic Futurism's by Rammellzee\*\*\* and the manifold declensions of the gothic imagery in contemporary age. Through a discontinuous historical analysis, on many a level, the space is fragmented, deconstructed. Having been dismantled the various elements of its identity, new elements are created, and they are merging together into a newfound aesthetic dimension, it's like the effects of a kaleidoscope.

Even the concept of History, like often in Previdi's works, is deconstructed.

Putting historical documents and elements from contemporary popular culture in a relation between each others, the artist looks for a new plot. The metaphor of the space as a framing gives in to the one of formatted space. The translation of the Vleeshal in a printed page turns out to be a possible reading key of the show. During his search for a contact point between the Gothic's complexity and a possible translation of Contemporary, Previdi rereads the complex architectural space through a series of works: *Fraktur* (2008), a great banner-flag made with 28 triangles of black and white striped fabric which reminds and kind of breaks (up) the black and white floor; *Illuminati* (2008) consists of some self supporting structures made up with burnished and varnished aluminum pipes, mirror-like as though they were spear blades, but playful like Mikado sticks at the same time; and finally the sculptures named *G* (2008), boards made of MDF and mirroring foam, shaped as several fragments from the letter "G", leaning on the perimeter walls of the space, "ripping" up the building's "skin". The objects realized by Previdi measure the room by a series of transpositions structure, from text to environment.

Along his research on the return of the Antique during Renaissance, Aby Warburg\*\*\*\* demonstrates that the recovery of forms and elements from the past often happens through their surviving in parallel channels. The same way, Riccardo Previdi, taking and stealing from the most disparate sources, can't help but confirm this theory. Through a stratification of recycled linguistic elements and periodic revivals, Gothic shows finally as a living shape.

So the time gap which divides us from Gothic age becomes a continuity, a succession of lectures and reinterpretations. A dynamic, mobile space in which light elements slide on the squares of an imaginary chessboard, on the idea of composition-combination between game and language.

The rules are there. All the elements are derived from a trajectory the artist picks up from the space and time double perspective.

Lorenzo Benedetti

\* Arnold Hauser, *Social History Of Art*, Volume 1: From Prehistoric Times To The Middle Ages, 1<sup>st</sup>. Original edition 1951

\*\* Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente*

Oscar Mondadori, Milan 1993. Original edition 1959

\*\*\* Rammellzee (or RAMMΣLLZΣΣ, pronounced "Ram: Ell: Zee", born 1960 in Far Rockaway, Queens, New York), is a graffiti writer, performance artist, rap/hip-hop musician and sculptor from New York. Rammellzee's graffiti and art work are based on his theory of Gothic Futurism, which describes the battle between letters and their symbolic warfare against any standardizations enforced by the rules of the alphabet; his treatise, "Iconic Panzerisms", details an anarchic plan by which to revise the role and deployment of language in society.

\*\*\*\* Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike. Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Literatur. Hrsg. von Horst Bredekamp und M. Diers. Bände. [1932]. Berlin 1998.

Translated by Luca Andriolo

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