

DUBLIN

Vittorio Santoro

OONAGH YOUNG GALLERY

In a 1969 interview, Vladimir Nabokov declared that teachers of James Joyce's *Ulysses* should ignore "the pretentious nonsense of Homeric, chromatic, and visceral chapter headings" and instead "prepare maps of Dublin with Bloom's and Stephen's intertwining itineraries clearly traced." For Nabokov, "any ass" could assimilate

a book's general ideas. It was the "sensual spark" created by a text's uniquely combined details that truly mattered.

Swiss-Italian artist Vittorio Santoro shares something of this zeal for literary detail. The minimal forms and elliptical content of his drawings, actions, and installations have often been inspired by decisive moments in canonical novels or triggered by a fanboy's enthusiasm for pinpointing the specific places where major writers lived. A fastidious but eccentric analyst of text and context, he has, for instance, used everyday household fittings (doors, window frames) to stage oblique sculptural distillations of scenes from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. In Paris

(where he currently lives), he has undertaken journeys to the former homes and haunts of Beckett and Joyce, producing drawings and engravings based on routes taken during these psycho-geographic pilgrimages. Santoro is fascinated by the spatial peculiarities of narrative scenarios and with the precise urban settings of influential literary endeavors. But his eager, offbeat lit-crit scholarship tends to deepen narrative and biographical mystery, rather than (as it might initially seem to promise) add clarification.

Santoro's recent exhibition at Oonagh Young (a small, well-programmed gallery that sits on the map of Dublin not far from where the itineraries of Bloom and Stephen intertwine in the Nighttown scene of *Ulysses*) centered on three-dimensional representations of elements from the opening chapter of Kafka's *The Trial*. *In/Voluntary Movement Diagram (Josef K)*, 2014, proposes to plot the movements of the novel's ill-fated protagonist as he shifts from room to room following his sudden, inexplicable arrest. On the floor, a continuous black line traced Josef K's agitated displacements, its zigzagging pattern punctuated by numbers marking a total of forty changes in position. Hanging above, pinned to two gray-painted walls and spanning a wide corner area, white electrical cables supported five bare lightbulbs, further demarcating the gallery into zones of possible drama or significance. In combination, the pared-back elements of this scenographic model created an engaging, optically puzzling installation. In a partner piece, *Window I (Josef K's Relation Diagram to 17 of the Characters in F. Kafka's The Trial)*, 2014, pencil marks and twists of cable were used to create a diagram denoting the relations between all the book's characters. Follow the many-angled lines of this sculptural drawing and you'll find they terminate at a lightbulb suspended behind the hinged pane of an open window: The result is a concentrated, precarious combination of newly singled-out details from Kafka's constrained world.

To a degree, the room-dividing white lines and hanging bulbs that modestly dominate Santoro's work hint at correspondences with both Brian O'Doherty's "Rope Drawings," 1973–, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's light-string sculptures. But if Santoro doesn't quite achieve the Conceptual tension of the former or the romantic openness of the latter, his diagrammatic reductions of plot developments and character relations nonetheless reach out to the body of the viewer, much as these earlier artists' work so powerfully does. As we are drawn into Santoro's mapped spaces, we might, of course, become a little like Josef K: anxiously positioned within a set of confusing circumstances, where the rules and meanings are far from clear.

—Declan Long



Vittorio Santoro, *Reasoning Is Faultless (But Wrong Nonetheless), II*, 2015, four concealed objects, acrylic on canvas, cord, plywood, 31 ¼ × 31 ¼ × 2 ½".