

Théodora Domenech: *Le grand paysage (pour un jour) is your second solo exhibition at the Jérôme Poggi Gallery after C'était le contraire d'un voyage, in 2012. What did you want to highlight most?*

Vittorio Santoro: I wanted an exhibition where each piece has its own language; the language that is most "congenial" to it. Because some pieces need a narrative language and others need a more conceptual language that's more condensed and anti-subjective. These different atmospheres are like the facets of a single prism. I wanted the pieces, while still being autonomous and heterogeneous, also to play together like a choir.

TD: Can you give us an example of a narrative piece?

One of the pieces, *Poète Public (Public Poet)*, uses a wire security cart (also called a roll container), from which have been hung two framed poems about exile. I placed an order with a street poet, asking him to write about the theme of "exile", but suggesting that he shouldn't actually use the word in the poem. Next to it there's a screen print on aluminium showing a fragment of *The Charioteer of Delphi* holding the metal reins in his hand. In the relationship between the chariot, which is invisible, the young man's screen-printed hand, and the cart here, there's a narrative dimension.

TD: And what would be a more "conceptual" piece? A piece where the procedure, like in the time-based text works, forms an integral part of the work?

Like many of my pieces *Four Speaker's Corners* involves an idea of movement, *real-time activity* – journeys of various kinds.

TD: Can you describe the procedure?

In this particular case, I stood on street corners in different places, but always on a corner, making a reference to "Speaker's Corner" in Hyde Park in London. If you want to say something in a public space, you have the right to stand there and say something, but if you stand on a street corner, or anywhere else, then people think you're nuts.

I went to different street corners in New York (where I was when I conceived the piece) to recite some phrases aloud – once, twice, three times. Someone came with me and photographed my legs and the street

corner during these short performances. I printed these photos and then I went into a photo booth. In a photo booth there are always four shots. I made a rough estimate of the time between shots, and then lifted up the photo. It was this unorganised shot that decided on the framing of each photo. So it's pure chance that decided if you see the original photo or not or if you only see a part of the photo. Including this chance element, these moments of instability, is an important element in the piece. The four photo booth strips were then framed and hung on different walls of the exhibition, then linked together by adhesive tape on the ground. They form a space within a space that evokes a stroll, which the viewer, seeing the similarity between the frames, reactivates by going from one to the other. The viewer too is doing a *real-time activity*.

TD: The term "activity" and the act of reciting something in the public space, makes one think of a form of "activism." What place do you give to the political commitment of artists or to the political content of a work?

Among the other pieces in the exhibition, the wall installation presented as a tribute to P.P. Pasolini addresses just this question. Pasolini, who was convinced of the "revolutionary" potential of art is for me one of the last truly politically engaged artists – he was highly involved in Italian society. But is the figure of an artist like Pasolini still possible, appropriate or even desirable in our society today?

I found an issue of the French magazine Telerama with the front page that reads "What is Pier Paolo Pasolini's legacy?" The magazine is still wrapped in cellophane, as if the person the magazine was addressed to wasn't even interested in reading it. It's a metaphor for the lack of interest I feel today for the specific figure of an ideologically committed artist.

TD: You seem to oppose the "public" and "exile"; interventions in the public space, the victory of the charioteer, the political commitment of Pasolini, on the one hand, and the marginality of the artist, the fact of being misunderstood or not finding a place in society on the other. Can you tell us about this dichotomy and what it means for you?

VS: The artist, for me, is never marginal "a priori"; his voice, his subject matter, can still have a real impact on our daily lives – what interests me is to ask what this impact is. By exhibiting his work the

artist becomes public by definition. The only decisive question is whether this "becoming public" is part of a dialectical approach or a "virtuoso" approach, even though I think both are legitimate.

The majority of pieces in the exhibition have something to do with the figure of the artist – his poetry, his strength, his ambitions, his missed opportunities, his failures and their potential impact on society. All this may be abstract or personal, theatrical or authentic. The "big landscape" of the artist is his vision, but it can be seen at the same time as a big isolation.

TD: The dialogue with the public is focused here on the participation of the viewer in the "real-time activities" that you mentioned. But our interview, the discourse around the works, the descriptions of the procedures, are also involved. What value do you give these narratives?

I really like to speak about intuition, the genesis or the goals that I'm looking for in each piece. I have no problem in sharing the plan or the procedures. I find it harmful to interpret them and impose a reading. How can I impose a reading when you're basing yourself on something that is completely intuitive? Intuition is above all an experience. When you conceive a piece, the moment you try to "give" a meaning to it is the sign that you should stop there; it's up to intuition to make all the choices.

If I had an ambition, it would be that the viewers should have their own intellectual experience. I want the viewers to walk, think and take possession of the pieces, either by immersion or simply as passers-by.

TD: Yet you can understand that viewers don't see the same thing before and after they're told the stories about the earlier stages of the work. Would you say that without these stories, your works function as enigmas for the viewer?

VS: No, I don't think you can define my works as enigmas. I would like to define them only as machines that facilitate experiences. I would like to make pieces that allow, and also allow me, to experience a sense of imbalance; to experience failure, but failure that I see as a success. If you stand up straight with your feet on a plank and someone pulls the plank away, what happens to you? You fall. This fall forces you to take

up a new position; you come back to a situation where you see things differently, maybe better than before.

I still have the illusion that art can make a small scratch in our society and it does this by attacking our need to understand.

TD: If the exhibition focuses on the figure of the artist, what are you expecting from your position as an artist?

To be tomorrow where I didn't expect to be yesterday. I'm not an activist, I think art isn't well adapted to strategies of propaganda, especially when it is exploited with slogans. But I like to explore the space between the centre and these edges. That's the vortex where I find the humus that I want to dedicate myself to. I believe in the power of ideas, I believe in art as a pretext for a conversation. A pretext for a moment of delight. A pretext to see how people relate to me, and to an almost organic extent, how I look at the world.

English translation of a French original email conversation (Nov. 2014).