

Who wants to be a Perdigiorno?

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Your upcoming show at Istituto Svizzero aims to showcase your multidisciplinary practices—which range from drawing, animation, video-making, photography, and sound production to sculpture and performance—in a parallel, yet distinct way: two friends meeting for a chat, exchanging stories and opinions. Can you tell us what you are working on? Do you have a title for your show?

Beatrice Marchi

I am simultaneously working on a new video, a series of paintings and sculptures that are related to a fictional character—with a long photographic lens which I call *The Photographer*.

Mia Sanchez

I am currently working on a group of sculptures consisting of photo collages, high-rise buildings that I have photographed over the past months. I will also show three videos addressing different approaches to public space.

Gioia Dal Molin

Perhaps I can add something here to the title of the exhibition—*La Città e i Perdigiorno*. The title draws on the inputs of Mia and Bea and was conceived in a Google Doc. And I like it very much. *Perdigiorno* is a wonderful, somehow poetic Italian word that is hard to translate into other languages. It reminds me of the characters that appear in the works of the two artists, people that roam the city, that 'lose themselves in the day'. In English, the closest word could perhaps be *day thief*. Such characters somehow escape the strict rhythms and guidelines of our current, normative, capitalist society.

GDM

Well, Istituto Svizzero's artistic programme has a sharp focus on artists who have a connection to Switzerland. At the same time, however, it is also our concern to strengthen the ties between Switzerland and Italy. Against this backdrop, in the future I want to set up a double exhibition once a year, with an artist from Italy and one from Switzerland. To connect the scenes, to think together and to develop projects together.

that Mia and I were working together on the show in Berlin, but then everything suddenly changed, and we were forced to readapt our production to different cities. I have been stuck in Italy for six months, so I've tried to turn this unexpected situation in my favour by involving my family members and some local friends with whom I could have never collaborated, had I stayed in Berlin. I am happy that, even in hard conditions, I was able to shift the production possibilities. At the same time, though, it is unfortunate that the dialogue with Mia had to be developed remotely.

MS

I agree with Bea, the current situation has forced us all to deal with our immediate environment. Fortunately, we managed to use this situation to our advantage. In Berlin, I photographed and filmed a lot in the public space. I have often wondered how time-specific these shots will be in the future, or whether certain items and objects will continue to be part of our everyday life. Do images maintain value only in relation to the time they were taken?

GDM

I can add here that the pandemic and all the experience and rules that came with it have a great impact on the working conditions in the field of art. The questions of how we want to and can work are insanely important. The closure of theatres or museums for months has aggravated the precarious working conditions of many artists. Moreover, the discussions about opening ski resorts or fitness centres have also shown the importance of art in society. We have to be sensitive to these issues. We have to stand up for adequate remuneration for artistic work. And we need to talk about the relevance, perhaps even the healing power of art in today's society, especially in difficult times. At the same time, it goes without saying that artistic and curatorial work is evolving. We learn to develop common ideas on Zoom and look differently at the things that immediately surround us. While I have been able to do actual studio visits with Mia, getting to know her and her work in real space, the connection with Bea has so far only grown through the shiny screen of my computer. And that works, too. How tall am I, she asked me the other day.

AFF

Gioia, how does the show fit in the context of Istituto Svizzero's programme?

AFF

I am interested in framing the show as something in progress and from the perspective of its production—as you have been working on it between Milano, Basel, and Berlin, readapting and changing its possibilities and conditions. How has the current situation and travel restrictions impacted or shaped your process?

BM

The three cities you mentioned are emblematic in the process of producing this exhibition—since plans have changed many times the possibility of being able to work in one location or another. Initially, it seemed

AFF

Mia and Bea, you are both interested in the potential of fiction and narratives. Beatrice's characters carry us to surreal environments unfolding through humour and subversion of everyday stories—whilst

melancholically reflecting on the human condition. Mia—instead—relies on friends and peers to construct specific characters, such as the female detective, to defy conventional behavioural patterns and observe the structures that define everyday urban life. Can you tell me more about it?

BM

The narratives I work with are attempts to transform my experience into a feeling that can be shared with others. I don't know if I want my characters to be comic, honestly. I don't want to make people laugh. I guess laughter is probably a reaction to embarrassment? Or maybe an identification with someone's story? At least that's what I hope.

MS

Someone once referred to my work as “fiction of fiction”. In this respect, I am particularly interested in the grid our lives are built on, and in how we move along these lines. The video you are referring to was a way to think about the public space, how we move through the city, the architecture that we are surrounded by. What access is granted for whom, and who claims these spaces? The video flirts with some conventions of crime narratives. Through fiction and re-articulation of notions, dominant discourses can be explored and challenged.

GDM

I like your thoughts and explanations. I also believe that fiction and storytelling, perhaps at times fabulation, have a lot of potential. Maybe it is also about a kind of alternative storytelling, unusual perspectives. The question raised by Mia, for example, on who has access to the (public) space, is after all also accompanied by questions on who tells, or can tell, a corresponding story from which perspective, and who we listen to, who is listened to. And perhaps it is also a matter of giving space to other stories and other forms of narration.

AFF

In the book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam proposes the idea of failure as emancipatory practice. Failure, she argues, can offer a more creative, cooperative, and surprising way of being in the world and finding alternatives to conventional understandings of success in a heteronormative, capitalist society. What is your take on this?

MS

Failure is a constructed concept that can only exist within a certain framework. Within a capitalist system, the directions are set quite rigidly. The common idea of success is defined by economic growth followed by social status. Social relations are often thought of in a vertical system, in categories of an upper and lower classes. At the same time, there is the supposed idea of a “social-elevator”, promising everyone to have a chance to climb the social ladder. This idea (—unfortunately—) is a misconception, and probably serves more to keep people going and to soothe the

consciences of others. Ideally, defining success for one's own is something deeply personal, and a constant pondering between personal values and the systems we are embedded into. Subverting the conventional understanding of success can liberate oneself from prevailing norms and offer the potential to produce new truths.

BM

I find Mia's point of view interesting. At the same time, I don't want to see failure as the extreme opposite of success. I'd rather read it as the natural process of falling. In this meaning, I agree with the idea that it could also be experienced as an emancipatory practice to escape from social constructions. I like Jacques Lecoq's clown theory that explains how displaying one's vulnerabilities can connect us to one another. Success is a toxic myth which is far from describing life. It is a self-sabotaging act creating dissatisfaction to make us want more and more.

GDM

I think it's important that we rethink the connotation of 'success' and 'failure'. The idea that the connotation of success has grown in a, as mentioned, capitalist and heteronormative society is relevant here. I also think that the field of contemporary art in particular is very much shaped by these norms. As (female) artists and curators, we can question these rules, perhaps break them up. For me, it's also about looking closely and, for example, using a knowledge that is 'sociological' in the broadest artistic sense, to ask and understand who is successful and why. And then perhaps looking even more closely. I'm interested in artistic strategies that grow in exchange and collaboration, that are also uncomfortable, that ask more questions than hold clear answers.

AFF

The exhibition invites visitors to adopt an errant gaze questioning their position of viewership. Beatrice's character of the *Photographer*, who dysfunctionally takes pictures with an impractical long lens, and Mia's high-rise sculptures and depiction of the public space, offer alternative cognitive strategies to navigate our hyper-capitalist urban environment and structures. Both series were developed independently, but somehow follow up on one another by suggesting perspectives that can be read as a parallel to the visitors' experience, thereby offering possible points of access to the exhibition.

BM

Yes, there is a strong connection between Mia's work and mine.

MS

I guess both our practices try to reconfigure perspectives on

My last body of work explores my personal crisis in relation to visual images. For the new video *The Photographer and The Friends (Nel Mondo Parallelo)* (2021)—premiering as part of the show—I used the famous Kurt Cobain’s *Unplugged by The Friends* live concert, shown at *MTV Unplugged* in 1993, as a starting point to reflect on spectatorship and its research of image authenticity. The character of Kurt Cobain, as the outsider and the refuser, is to me a symbol of the process of appropriation by pop culture and, in particular, by a generational medium which is MTV. The protagonists of *The Photographer and The Friends* play and sing in lip-synch a song I have composed—mimicking a certain approach to the simulation of live performance. What is real? I wanted to reflect on the image as a means of consumption that leads us to seek emotions through authenticity (and, by the way, what is this mania for authenticity?) Our control over personal images is rooted in domination, similarly to the practice of colonialism. “*These documentaries are so hypocritical...*” wrote a couple weeks ago about Britney Spears on Instagram. “*I’ve had waaaaayyy more amazing times in my life and unfortunately my friends... I think the world is more interested in the negative*”, on she goes. On the other hand, the image is a powerful mean of exchange that allows us to feel part of a group and to act collectively. This tendency is visible in social media, starting from Tik Tok to Instagram and their power to inspire social and cultural revolutions that would not happen if we were disconnected.

everyday events or our personal environment through a shifted or detailed view, be it a “zooming in” on a situation—as with Beatrice’s *Photographer’s* lens, or a “zooming out” to get an overview—as with the high-rise sculptures.

The visual codes that Beatrice refers to allow an individual to visibly become part of a group or to clearly distinguish themselves from others. In cinema, when working with specific genres, a set of standards are employed. On the one hand, these are economic principles; on the other hand, they refer to cultural values and ideas. Genre-conventions also serve to fulfil certain expectations—or not. I’m a big fan of filmmakers like Kathryn Bigelow, for example, who takes on the genre-etiquette and tries to explore its boundaries by incorporating personal viewpoints.

MS

That’s an interesting question, the S.I. as a group that stands between the conflicting demands of art and politics which—in the end—led to the group’s break-up. I find the different strategies they used to appropriate public space, for example, to be remarkably interesting and intriguing. At the same time, it raises the question of who has the privilege of wandering aimlessly through the urban landscape. The key figures of these games are quite specific. Will Self’s book *Psychogeography* (2007)

describes them as: ‘[...] middle-aged men in Gore-Tex, armed with notebooks and cameras, stamping our boots on suburban station platforms [...]’

GDM

I like the idea of ‘dérive’ (drift) as an unplanned journey through a landscape, especially the moment of the unplanned, perhaps random stray is promising and precisely a movement strategy that eludes a progress that is always goal-oriented. At the same time, I also believe what Mia says. The possibility of *dérive* comes with a privileged position. The day thieves, the ‘perdigiorno’ are also marginalized characters. And it is also up to us, in this sense, to work for a world in which these very things are possible.

BM

An engineer friend once told me: “You can get smarter if you change your route to go to work everyday: by changing your point of view, you keep your brain trained”. The practice of *dérive* suggests a similar form of intellectual training, like playing games in the adult world. After all, this is what artists do, but without precise indications. I love being a *perdigiorno*, even if it makes me cry often because it doesn’t make me earn enough money! In Agnes Varda’s film *Lions Love* (1969), I admire the determination with which the protagonists waste their days playing and behaving like eternal children without feeling guilty. In an interview with Varda and Sontag, a television reporter called these characters ‘grotesque’, making Varda furious. It is uncomfortable to identify oneself with the child because it denies an existence based on the vicious cycle whereby you work to pay for the car that brings you to work. The city is where we meet the main aspects of capitalism and class division, but it is also the place where we find protection from the sexual prejudices of the province. If we compare our relationship with cities to the way we deal with people, mass tourism would be like crowds around a celebrity, gentrification would be like the exploitation of prostitution and wandering would be similar to making love. Can you imagine a whole city in love? However the Situationists methods are no longer practical, considering the costs of living in cities in 2021! Providing new methods for reinterpreting the places we inhabit could, perhaps, help us to trigger a respectful attitude for the environment and others. And lastly, if i can add a quote of the great Franco Battiato, who sadly passed away just yesterday: “Evolvendoti farai del bene anche agli altri.”

AFF

The Situationist suggested through psychogeography and the *dérive* alternative topographical relationships with our urban space as a tool to imagine new social behaviours and settings. Do you envision the act of wandering as a political strategy?

A conversation between Attilia Fattori Franchini, Gioia Dal Molin, Beatrice Marchi and Mia Sanchez to introduce, prepare for, reflect on and perhaps accompany the artists' exhibition *La Città e i Perdigiorno* at Istituto Svizzero, Milan, from May, 28 to July, 9, 2021.

Attilia Fattori Franchini (1983, Pesaro, IT) is an independent curator and writer based in London and Vienna. Working on the creation of experimental contexts for the production and display of contemporary practices, her work deals with technology and power structures, moving image and the cinematic, materialist feminism, late-capitalism and the creation of alternative forms of subjectivity and representation. She is director of Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna, and curator of BMW Open Work by Frieze for which she has realised solo presentations by Madeline Hollander (2020), Camille Blatrix (2019), Sam Lewitt (2018), Olivia Erlanger (2017); Curva Blu, a residency project on the island of Favignana, Sicily; and the Emergent section of miart Milan. She contributes essays and reviews to international catalogs and publications such as Mousse, CURA., Flash Art International, Camera Austria and is co-founder of the nonprofit platform Opening Times (otdac.org).

Beatrice Marchi (1986, Gallarate, IT) lives and works between Milan and Berlin. After graduating in Milan at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, she obtained an MA at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (HfbK). Among her recent solo shows: Sandy Brown, Berlin; Casa Masaccio Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea, San Giovanni Valdarno; Riverside, Bern; Collezione Iannaccone, Milan; Hester, New York; Exo Exo, Paris; Fanta, Milan; Gasconade, Milan. Her work has been shown in various exhibitions, including: MACRO, Rome; Museion, Bozen; Palazzo Reale, Milan; Performance Space, New York; Mambo, Bologna; Galerias Municipais de Lisboa (Boavista), Lisbon; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; *Altri tempi, altri miti*, 16th Art Quadriennial, *Ehi, Voi!*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; PAC, Milan; GAM, Milan.

Mia Sanchez (1988, Sevilla, ES) lives and works in Basel. She completed her MA in Arts at the Institut Kunst in Basel. Before that, she studied at the Hochschule der Künste Bern (HKB) and spent a year as a visiting student at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (HfbK). Her work has been exhibited in various group and solo shows, among others at: Salts, Birsfelden; Der Tank, Basel; Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich; Kiefer-Hablitzel Price (Kunsthaus Glarus); Arsenic, Lausanne; Milieu, Bern; Plattform (Fri-Art Fribourg); Golden Pudel, Hamburg; Stadtgalerie, Bern; or Wallriss Fribourg. Mia Sanchez has been nominated for the Swiss Art Award in 2020 and was rewarded with the Basel-Berlin Stipendium from Akademie der Künste Berlin in 2020. Since 2015, she is co-initiator of the off-space Riverside.

Gioia Dal Molin is Head Curator and responsible for the artistic programme at the Istituto Svizzero since January 2020. She studied Art History and History at the Universities of Zurich and Rome and received her PhD in 2014, with a thesis on the promotion of the visual arts in Switzerland. From 2015 to 2019, she directed the Cultural Foundation of the Canton of Thurgau. As a freelance author and curator, she writes art historical texts for various publications and has realised numerous exhibition and performance projects as well as artist books. She is further co-initiator of the Zurich exhibition and discussion format *Le Foyer* and has worked as an external expert and mentor at various art academies. From 2016 to 2019 she was a jury member of the Cantonal Commission for Art in Public Space of the Canton of Aargau.