

DAMIEN & THE LOVE GURU

Emanuele Marcuccio
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A few days before the opening, a passer-by is trying to peer through the plastic sheeting covering the large plate-glass window of the gallery Damien & The Love Guru. They walk down the road, to the bar at the corner, where Emanuele Marcuccio is having a drink.

- “Are you the artist?”
- “Yes.”
- “Is it a show of videos?”
- “No, why?”
- “Because the gallery is filled with big screens!”

And indeed, upon entering, we, the visitors, are facing a screen, or the shape of a screen. It is produced in powder-coated steel, its two plates riveted together in neat rows, with aluminum brackets holding it in suspension in front of the wall. I look into the dark grey center of this artwork, which has become a void, or a site of projection. I suppose I am meant to animate this object with the images from my own imagination.

In the back gallery are artworks produced with the same materials and methods, emulating familiar image signs – a basketball backboard and two Josef Albers paintings. Emanuele describes their employing a Claes Oldenburg effect, but I think of Jasper Johns’ flags and targets. Either way, we both recognize a Pop-Art strategy of using familiar images as ciphers or props for material to move and act through. The works aren’t about basketball or its cultural signification, nor are they about the empathic color relationships in Albers’ paintings, although I suppose someone could also find those. The products that Emanuele has created operate adjacently to these referential image objects, and solidify them as industrial icons.

If I could take these objects Emanuele has made out of the realm of art, and imagine that the room we are in is not an art gallery per se, but just any nearly-bare room, I am reminded of Rafael Horzon’s so-called “Wall Decoration Objects”. Horzon, a well-known figure in the Berlin art and culture scene, explicitly calls himself not an artist but an entrepreneur. As one of his many business ventures, he offers this unique category of products to the mass-market at the price of 600,000€ for one, or for two the special price of 1,200,000€. As Horzon describes, recounting a conversation with the artist Anselm Reyle, they “...looked not only a little but, to be honest, exactly the same as Anselm Reyle’s stripe paintings.

“That may be true,‘ I (Horzon) said, ‘but of course you know that they aren’t art but wall-decoration-objects’.

Reyle saw the sense in that. ‘Totally,‘ he said, ‘because if you call them wall-decoration-objects instead of art, then they are obviously not art, but wall-decoration-objects!’”

The newer screens operate differently than Emanuele’s past works, because the TV screen in and of itself opens up a much wider set of associations. When I see a real flat-screen TV as a wall-decoration-object, I am usually in some anonymous hotel, or the airport, or the waiting room of the Foreigners Registration Office. Essentially, I am in the depressing interstices of my so-called interesting life. All of my friends working in the fields of art, music, fashion, or any supposedly glamorous profession are familiar with this feeling. The sense of emptiness after the excitement of the “job”. Say, a fashion photographer has just been on set with beautiful models and bright lights, or a DJ has just played to a crowd of 5000 people in an enormous pulsating night club. They go back to their hotel room and are completely exhausted, displaced, and alone. They try to call various close friends far away, and failing at that, they turn on the TV set, the largest beckoning presence in the room, and attempt to absorb some of its animating force.

The series of photos Emanuele presents on the wall across from his television screen is a carefully constructed mise-en-scene of the above-described displacement. After having long worked on set as a photography assistant to make a living, now he has finally claimed the mantle of Art Director. Crediting Marc Asekhome as the photographer, Emanuele instead controls all the other aspects of the image production through the conventional hierarchic working relationship of commercial photo shoots. The only role missing is that of the stylist – the model is posing in his own clothing. He is in a minimal set with two unpainted walls, lying on a bed made up of just a piece of foam. Emanuele describes how the location is meant to emulate a sort of squat – but the affect and lighting put him squarely in a fashion ad. In each picture, the main actor is really the TV screen which is the model’s only companion besides a small round makeup mirror, the brightest object in the photos. We watch him lying on the bed, watching TV, glassy eyed, absorbing the cool glow which is not actually emanating from this object. The photos are mounted on a pale-green sheet of paper, also roughly pointing to the sensation of a screen’s glow.

We are caught in a loop of desire, wanting to be animated by this young model’s alive-ness, but being pushed back. Turning around, the riveted metal screen faces us again, awaiting our mental images to bring it to life.