

## CASTIGLIONI

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### LA STANZA DEI FIGLI 22.06.2023 - 15.07.2023

Curated by Giulio Bonfante and Alessandro Carano

“Instead of being afraid of the evening shadows – noted a celebrated Berlin intellectual – cheerful children take advantage of them to amuse themselves”. When Walter Benjamin transcribed this motet found in a playbook from his childhood, he referred to a rather accurate moment: the fever’s juncture, a hushed interval where things softly change their status. There is, however, an underlying theme running through Benjamin’s text.

That is, when the routine becomes jammed and time can finally wrap around itself, the relationship between things undergoes a slight but substantial mutation. Even if we dispense with Benjamin’s theoretical supervision, it is easy to grasp how the child, namely an individual in the most inclusive sense of the term, when left alone before, tries to shape his being himself. He does so, first, to cheat boredom. Then because, in his own way, he is a curious being, a demanding collector and a cautious accumulator. Perhaps he is desirous or even worse, terrified by obsessions that he prefers to relegate to chasms that the gaze cannot reach. In any case, we can assume that he is serenely restless, prey to that restlessness that lays down lightly on things, as an expert monster would, crouching between the slats of an old bed. The mechanism is elementary: faced with the unknown, one reacts by acting and sometimes creating in an iterative, pseudo-engineering, documentary, mocking, tender or cryptic manner. Of this hovering contour, whoever makes (the artist?), like the child, benefits by playing with it. That is, by sublimating (or parodying), what awakens the imagination into a ductile material, a pretext for declarations of intent, but also for nightmares and rhapsodies.

This is why the children’s room resembles a Chinese shadow theatre or a mirage. It has little to do with plans, confidential registers, and litmus tests: it simply stands collective, sometimes breathless, between imagination and material culture. On closer inspection, the room resembles a bizarre axonometric view. Its object and the game as an inventive phenomenon are tenfold and confused: it is like a snout that smiles while whimpering. In a frame teeming with ancient stories, the inhabitant (there they are again, artists) is stubbornly absent. Of them, however, everything speaks, and, above all, everyone whispers. One inevitably becomes a guest from a specific moment in the children’s room. Guests who are sometimes nostalgic, seldom tireless, and often caught up in an unnecessary embarrassment. Moreover, the inscrutable card appears scarcely playable: there are the hosts, the slightly dusty objects, perhaps legitimately irritated, ready to sing.

The so-called “oculist witnesses”, who are at once thing, gesture and tale, scatter clues. Among them are pictograms of minor, unpronounceable incidents that lurk in the memory swiftly mocking. Thoughtful compositions that gratify the pleasure of doing with care and exquisite skill. Surfaces that play with layering and perception offering what only the frame, a repository of secret subtleties, can reveal. Sculptures that dawdle about pretending to be furniture components or trinkets and then ogle with Polyphemus’ eyeball or feral gaze. Sculptures claim their right to invite play or to resemble toys. Structures that tickle the search for a point of view, enlivening the stranger.

Drawings of pleasant microcosms caught on the brink of becoming three-dimensional dioramas. Photographs become stratified animation in space and sense or vociferous devices of romantic mechanics. Presumptive objects that exhibit swallowing, bringing to shore a rebus from a deep time. The children’s room, some would say, is a riddle, not necessarily to be solved.

Valentina Bartalesi