

Anri Sala

September 2 — October 7, 2023



Anri Sala, *Legendia Aurca Inversa (VII, Fragment D)*, 2023.
Photo: Francesco Squeglia. © Anri Sala/ADAGP, Paris (2023).

Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism¹—Giorgio Agamben

Galerie Chantal Crousel is delighted to host Anri Sala's sixth exhibition at the gallery, featuring a body of unprecedented frescoes. The artist is pursuing his research into composition and chronology of the narratives, developed among others through his films and sound installations. With a mounting process, he rearranges temporal spaces and reverses our cognitive and visual perception.

Anri Sala's frescoes, conceived with the *al fresco* technique, combine different geological and historical temporalities. Each composition is divided into *giornata*, corresponding to what can be accomplished in a day of work while the medium, called the *intonaco*, remains fresh. Once it is dry, the pigments are bound to the worked surface and changes are no longer possible. The artist's every gesture affixes the material like a temporal imprint, fossilizing the color and creating a form of contemporary archeology.

Pieces of marble embedded in the flat surface of the works are reminiscent of missing fragments of fresco, worn away over time. They are traditionally covered with raw plaster, accentuating the lacunae, or are restored by applying new shades of color to distinguish the recent conservation from what once was. Juggling with the geological references and mineral qualities of the various materials he uses, Anri Sala switches out some parts of the *giornata* with stones formed over the course of millennia. Sedimentary accumulation bridges the gap with present time and intermingles in the works that punctuate the gallery space.

The series *Surface to Air* derives from photographs taken by the artist of clouds seen from up in the air. These nearly abstract representations bear witness to a shifting, elusive reality. The undulating movement of the clouds harmonizes with the sharply delineated veins of the marble, a witness to a tangible and immutable temporal reality. With this series, Anri Sala juxtaposes elements of an ostensibly opposite nature, arranging them into a subtle visual continuity. The artist harnesses the suspense that arises from this unexpected encounter and opens up a latent, plural state of things.

The cycle of frescoes Piero della Francesca made for the Bacci Chapel in the San Francesco d'Arezzo basilica in Tuscany acts as a starting point for the *Legenda Aurea* series. This mid-fifteenth century cycle depicts the *Legend of the True Cross* recounted by Jacques de Voragine in *Legenda aurea*, his anthology of hagiographic legends. The images Anri Sala takes from this work are subjected to a process of reversal, in which the positive becomes negative, the dark areas become luminous, the skin tones blueish. This highly novel shift enables the artist to transpose the modern process of colorimetric negative, which only exists in photography, onto the fragments of a Quattrocento masterpiece. The eye is thus struck by the dissonance of this encounter between two techniques having distant temporal and spatial realities.

Working from reproductions, Anri Sala removes details to create a photographic painting whose tight framing offers a glimpse of a narrative outside the frame. In *Legenda Aurea Inversa (VI, fragment 1ii)*, two hands are holding a rope connected to an action, which is only partially visible, leaving a space for the gesture's potential future. With *Legenda Aurea Inversa (VII, fragment 1)*, *Legenda Aurea Inversa (VII, fragment 4)*, and *Legenda Aurea Inversa (VII, fragment 2)*, all of which were inspired by the same scene, it no longer entails a linear narrative sequence but rather a fragmented one, with the story's ellipses giving way to geological time. The successive slices of marble from a single block inject the works with another chronology. "When we think about looking or reading, whether it's a figurative painting, literature, or even film, we get the sense that the past, present, and future unfold before our eyes in a directional way. Even if time proceeds consecutively from a geological point of view, it's the cutting angle of the stone, however, that slices through events, proposing a unique narrative²."

In this series, the marble, volcanic stone, or even mother-of-pearl replace certain parts of the frescoes, playing on the geological qualities of the chosen materials, erosion, and the juxtaposed layers resulting in “strata of time²” Reproducing a bullet shot on the Bacci Chapel fresco, a discreet witness to the Napoleonic Wars waged in Tuscany at the turn of the nineteenth century, the work *Legenda Aurea (II, 1799/1800)* achieves a balance between figuration and abstraction, by exploring the meanderings of history and superimposing time intervals.

Below the glass roof of the gallery, Anri Sala is showing *Tracing Vista*, a series of works on paper made from the tracing paper used to transfer the drawings onto the freshly applied *intonaco*. Along the line traced by the artist, pieces of plaster stick to the sheet when it is removed. Inverting the narrative reveals a stratification process that continues onto the paper, beyond the mineral elements and various temporalities comprising the fresco: an ultimate extension of geological time. *Fragmentarium III (Afternoon Slightly After)*, made up of *intonaco* fragments from the structural cracks formed after the completion of a *giornata*, belongs to this same archeological process. Akin to artifacts and buried vestiges uncovered in an archeological dig, these “shattered days²” are so many fossils preserving the memory of an image in the process of being made.

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1 Giorgio Agamben, “What is the contemporary?” In *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford University Press, 2009), 41.

2 Artist’s quotes.

Born in 1974, Tirana, Albania.
Lives and works in Berlin.

Anri Sala constructs transformative, time-based works through multiple relationships between image, architecture, and sound, employing these as elements to fold, capsize, and question experience. His works investigate ruptures in language, syntax, and music, inviting creative dislocations, which generate new interpretations of history, supplanting old fictions and narratives with less-explicit, more-nuanced dialogues.

Anri Sala has been awarded a number of prizes during his career, such as the The Vincent Award, Den Haag in 2014, and the Biennale di Venezia (Young Artist Prize), Venice, in 2001, among others.

His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Fondation Pinault, Paris (2022); GAMEC, Bergamo (2022); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz (2021); Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, Houston (2021); Centro Botín, Santander (2019); Mudam, Luxembourg (2019); the Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2019); Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2017); the New Museum, New York (2016); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2014); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2012); Serpentine Gallery, London (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Miami (2008); ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2004). He has also participated in major group exhibitions and biennials internationally, including the Fifty-seventh Venice Biennale, Venice (2017), documenta, Kassel (13) (2012), the Twenty-ninth São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo (2010), the Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2007), and the Fourth Berlin Biennale, Berlin (2006). In 2013, he represented France in the Fifty-fifth Venice Biennale.

He has been included in group exhibitions held by important institutions such as: GAMEC, Bergamo, (2022); Luma Foundation, Arles, (2021); Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing (2020); MO.CO., Montpellier (2019); Pinault Collection, Punta della Dogana, Venice (2019); Kunsthaus Graz (2018); Venice Biennale, Venice (2017); Yokohama Museum of Art, Kanagawa (2017); Taipei Biennial, Taipei (2016); MUCEM, Marseille (2016); Busan Museum of Art, Pusan (2016); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2015); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2014); Museo Jumex, Mexico D.F. (2013); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Mexico D.F. (2012); Mudam Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2011); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2010); Beirut Art Center, Beirut (2009); Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen (2007).

Anri Sala's works have joined the collections of MMCA, Seoul, Korea; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A.; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, U.S.A.; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, France; Fonds municipal d'art contemporain de la ville de Paris, France; Dallas Museum of Art, TX, U.S.A.; De Pont museum of contemporary art, Tilburg, The Netherlands; MAC VAL, Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine, France; Musée des Beaux Arts de Nantes, France; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; FRAC Île-de-France, Paris, France; Tate Gallery, London, United Kingdom; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, Zurich, Switzerland.