

52 *formazione di forme..*

Alighiero Boetti, Aria Dean, Taro Masushio, Samson Young

Curated by Matilde Guidelli-Guidi

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The exhibition features works by Alighiero Boetti, Aria Dean, Taro Masushio, and Samson Young, chosen for their distinct approach to form-making.

Alighiero Boetti

Before getting to Afghanistan and to the collaborative production of tapestries in March 1971, Boetti made works that established themselves in tautological relation to the language of industry of postwar Italy. Debuting in Turin in 1967, sculptures made by stacking mass-produced units of industrial materials, monochrome paintings that state the trademarked name of the factory color in which they are coated, and reprints of technical manuals, for instance, all deploy what is commercially available basically untransformed and to different degrees also declare their own making. At the turn of the Seventies a shift occurred in works that posed instead a dialectical relation to industry while reinscribing the hand of the artist in the process of production. This turn was accompanied by a broadening of Boetti's horizon from Italian society to international geopolitics. Two bodies of work best illustrate this shift, namely *Il Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* (The Contest of Harmony and Invention, 1969) and *Dodici forme dal 10 giugno 1967* (Twelve Forms from June 10, 1967, 1971), both based on the simple procedure of hand-tracing printed matter with a pencil. For *Il Cimento*, Boetti took sheets of gridded paper and drew over the matrix of squares, edge to edge. The resulting drawings present an all-over pattern animated by slight modulations in pressure and trajectory of the pencil mark due to individual decision or error—messing up at work. For *Dodici forme*, Boetti traced, from the front pages of the newspaper *La Stampa*, the changing outlines of territories torn by political conflict between June 1967 and March 1971. Each jagged form is twice inscribed in the rectangle of the column grid and in the rectangle of the sheet itself, which matches the newspaper's layout and dimensions. The recursive framework sees form as a factor of international geopolitics, design conventions, and blind contact.

Aria Dean

Unlike Dean's recent films and sculptures, that are digitally designed and fabricated in ways that detach the artist from the works' materialization, the bell sculptures are motivated by the desire for a direct engagement with contextual history and materials. The bells were conceived over a residency in Puglia, Italy, in 2023, as part of an exhibition that took animal husbandry as theme—mare, sheep, and wolves as a focused episode in Dean's evolving thinking about heterology, base materialism, identity politics, and form-making. "Bells" is a shorthand as they are not a reproduction of reality but invent reality from examining it. Taking their shape from generic shepherd's bells and worked into sculptures through conversations with a local blacksmith, they are rough-wrought and nailed to the wall in a confrontational manner while the brass plates they conceal are preciously hand carved. The joke might be that they are mouth-like but mute and hold on the tip of their lost tongue an elegant sentence that is garbled. LUPU, pooled, poulet opal, Lei lopes opaque, loop loop loop, goes one word cycle. There is both coherence and semantic excess in these sculptures that point at the dissonance between sound and image—an antinomy and an undoing of their own authentic making. Like a voice over that annotates the exhibition, Dean writes: "She lay on the floor and-not-quite cried thinking about how all productive processes are conscripted toward the production of the image of production."

Taro Masushio

Masushio took the Untitled (Youth) pictures in San Francisco in the early aughts, at a time of youthful infatuation with the aesthetics and techniques of formalist photography. He shot the SoMa scene through that lens: analog camera and the zone system, the body flattened and closely cropped in black-and-white symmetries. Finding those negatives in his archive last summer arose feelings of embarrassment toward his puppy love days. An embarrassment that he worked through, coming face to face with that innocent attraction to formalism, and by extension to a younger self, that is akin to kink. So that in the printing process, he treated the negatives to further heighten the compositional elements in ways that replay the darkroom devotion of his youth. Masushio said: “Vis-à-vis my personal history, I want to propose a provocation of (modernist?) aesthetics and the taboo of being a formalist, which I thought was kind of kinky. (A kind of parallel between concept/ form vs norm/ taboo). But there is always a bit of embarrassment about making these kinds of (po-mo) gestures, too.” The form/ affect dyad shifts valence from attraction to embarrassment to kink in the reception of these works. Which is real? This fractal approach to the archive is typical of his overall method. An earlier body of work emerged from fortuitously finding, in a temporary lodging, a box of prints and recognizing them as the work of the late Jun’icha En’ya—an elusive figure and one of the earliest Japanese photographers of homoeroticism. A visit to En’ya’s environs in Osaka generated Masushio’s works: photographs of pencil-traced snapshots that he furtively took in En’ya’s archives, and still-life pictures of the objects that En’ya owned or that he might have. Between Masushio and the En’ya “idea” there is no articulated relationship of influence. Form escapes filiation there: the pressure of the archival materials and the pencil pressing against paper.

Samson Young

A shift in atmosphere is felt upon entering Samson Young’s studio, which is located in a colossal industrial building in the Tsing Yi area of Hong Kong. Orderly and focused, simultaneously material and immaterial—digital projections, 3d printers, vintage paperbacks, ground pastels, and minimal music coexist as a web of perceptual registers that call to mind contemporary innervation. There are two main activities ongoing at the time of my visit. The 3d printing of polyhedrons, and drawings made in the process of reading. Both productions stem from involved research into the period in European history when science, art, and magic separated. The polyhedron as emblem of this epochal shift is being deployed as sculptural form. The project is driven by the artist’s longstanding interest in transmission and the contemporary (in)ability to relate to others: “being in one’s head” in contrast with the rationality associated with the polyhedron as form. 3d printers are fed instructions to draw the facets of the platonic geometry from brightly colored nylon thread. Each object materializes with “support structures,” unpredictable supplements that are then discarded or employed elsewhere. The drawings, instead, spur from the artist reading and assist his assimilation or comprehension of complex ideas. As such they are performative of hermeneutic processes. At once studied and improvisational, glyphs and blurs and stencils deliver an overall look of scores or maps or landscapes. Each drawing is both a record of internal, mental images elicited by the ideas in the books, and of external, conceptual schemata employed to organize those ideas. As such they uphold two modernist drawing traditions, “automatic” (involuntary, unconscious) and “diagrammatic” (rational, machinic), posing the artist at the intersection of signal, symptom, and impulse. The printer and the artist both transmitter and receiver, the physical dimension of drawing deployed to articulate meaning. Form both sensed and imagined.

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Resources

Boetti

Alighiero Boetti, Dodici forme dal 10 giugno 1967, 1971. Plate 13: colophon. Etching on paper.

Alighiero Boetti, Il Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione (quattro ore di un pomeriggio), 1969.

Pencil on squared paper.

Jason E. Smith, "Giving Time to Time: Boetti and Italy's Creeping May," in Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012

Dean

Aria Dean, "Black Bataille," November 1, online, 2022

Aria Dean, "Wolves," press release, Progetto, Lecce, July 2023

Pollock, Tess. "Infinite, Fragmented Anguish: Interview with Aria Dean." LARB online, August 15, 2024

Masushio

Press release for "Rumor Has It," Empty Gallery, 2020

Masushio, Taro. "Nick Relph," in Artforum, 2016

A story from Terayama Shuji's Crimson Thread of Abandon

Young

A photocopy of the "Mystics" chapter in Iris Murdoch's book

Picture of the polyhedron

Sections from his essays