

DIRTY DANCING

Olga Migliaressi-Phoca

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Glowing pink in an Eighties font that's uncannily familiar with cinematic nostalgia and teen romance, the word DIRTY's heavy associations are remixed with levity as the rose-tinted aura of its rendering in neon spills glowing through the galleries with unsettling implied commentary. Quoting from the 1987 film about social norms and abortion written by Eleanor Bergstein, this headline work of Olga Migliaressi-Phoca's exhibition *Dirty Dancing* immediately locates us within the realm of pop culture — a high-low field in which life meets illusion — a shiny man-made world beset with human flaws and endless folly: the dance.

Through a new multi-series sequence of signature mirror works, Migliaressi-Phoca takes us into a disorientating hall of unanswerable questions and irresolvable contradictions using the powerful punk and postmodern tool of collage. By rearranging everyday symbols into her mirrored frames, the artist repurposes well-known signifiers with meanings of her own. The established language of every sign she employs, whether actual words or the visual language of fonts and branding, is understood yet undermined by its new context within her work. Sometimes this directly generates instant new meanings, and at others it conjures more of an unnerving sense of something strangely familiar yet inexplicably different. Implications are layered and provocations slanted via the nuance-layered prism of these witty, ironic compositions.

Migliaressi-Phoca quotes from across the broad spectrum of a globalised mainstream iconography we all know. She co-opts the luxury branding of Chanel and Givenchy, the headline font of Vogue magazine, and the tourism slogan "I love New York". Chanel becomes Change; Vogue becomes Vague. These twists both confront how much meaning we all inadvertently invest into brand associations and encapsulate how language itself works. Beyond being amusing, this pithy wordplay functions by revealing the absurdity of established social priorities, undermining the gloss of projection that gives luxury its mirage and lends cultural symbols their power.

While actioning their important business of reflecting and re-inflecting the cultural tropes within society, these artworks nevertheless possess their own unapologetic glamour, employing the endless seduction of the mirror and eliciting the same sense of desire that's cultivated by the iconography they quote and reframe. The CHANGE triptych proposes a triple structure for reflection in relation to the human units of self, family, and society. Each of the three works within it features the word Change in the Chanel logo font, against hand-drawn illustrations of concentric circles, a single house, and multiple rooftops, overlaid onto gold and silver. The simultaneously personal and vast notion of change spirals outwards from our introspective private experience, through the intimate containers of our homes, and into the wider world. We grasp that change must come from within through the kind of lean concision possessed by the most potent of pop art works as the trio embodies just how moving the artist's aphoristic method can be.

Pop culture's pervasive language is a milieu so familiar to us that its symbols are akin to contemporary gods; ever present and revered. Migliaressi-Phoca's diptych of twin works SOMETIMES YOU WIN and SOMETIMES YOU LOSE, borrows the Nike swoosh back from the brand's adoption of the ancient goddess' name from Greek mythology in a pair representing success and failure. The artist's rendering of the swoosh here mimics, respectively in each piece, a smile and a scowl, riffing on the theme of success in sport and in life, Nike being the goddess of victory. The lightness of the work — its illusively mirrored surface, quotidian insignia and low-tech organic paint patterns, appears casual, counterintuitively serving to emphasise the richness of its comment as it echoes through the gallery and subsequently in the mind.

BRITTA RETTBERG

To make her mirror works, the artist employs professional glass techniques, creating a new patina across each mirrored panel using acids and a dose of chance, before scratching and engraving the glass to paint the iconography. Although varying, each piece is produced over about a month, sometimes sitting for longer as the series around it develops. Their handmade character seems to draw out the sympathetic texture and human vulnerability wrapped shinily in each work's symbolic adage.

Today's exhibition looks both backwards and forwards in time, referencing and reworking historical and timeless symbols that echo through our collective psyche, while also indicating ahead to a future in which we might wonder how much has really shifted. In new iterations for her VAGUE COVER STORIES sequence under the pertinent title THE FUTURE IS VAGUE, the artist makes this most clear by quoting from the now-dated but much-loved Flower Power movement, as Allen Ginsberg called it. Lyrics of popular songs from the Sixties and Seventies resurface tweaked, throwing their newly warped statements out into the ether where they hang liminally between bitter irony and resilient idealism: The Beatles wonder, "Is love all you need?", while the romance of David Bowie's "'Heroes', just for one day" is amplified by its everlasting relevance. These poignant phrases are the cover stories inscribed across giant issues of Vague magazine dated 2067 and 2077, each 100 years after the iconic songs were released. Bob Marley's "No cry" on the 2074 issue vibrates densely with the endless depths of female suffering described in the original song, speaking to the empathetic feminism and relatable narrative foregrounded by the original Dirty Dancing film. As she synthesizes these vintage references into searing works for today, Migliaressi-Phoca confronts some of humanity's unavoidable truths, smoothly using humour, surface and depth to bear witness with a wink.

Text by Kasia Maciejowska

Kasia Maciejowska is an editor (e.g. Sternberg Press London, Para Site Hong Kong, Onassis Foundation Athens) and writer (Financial Times, Wallpaper, Apollo, Monocle, Vogue, i-D). She is the author of *The House of Beauty* and *Culture design history book* published by the Institute of Contemporary Art and has taught at the University of the Arts London.