

The starting point for Elvira Bättig's installation *The Apple of my Eye* was a trip to Turin, more specifically a visit to the *Museo della Frutta*, located on the first floor of one of the buildings of the Institute of Natural Sciences of the University of Turin, in Via Pietro Giuria. This monographic museum is dedicated to the work of the ceroplast (wax modeler) Francesco Garnier-Valletti (1808-1889), whose artistic and written legacy forms the core of the collection, including over a thousand artificial fruit models he created. These perfectly reproduced models – apples, pears, cherries, grapes – have been on permanent display since the museum opened in 2007, presented in a scientific-didactic order: classified, numbered, systematised and conserved behind glass in custom-made, dimly lit display cases.

On entering the *Café des Glaces* in Tonnerre, the first thing you see are the untreated backs of large, unmounted canvases hanging loosely from the ceiling in a rectangular formation. Walking around and entering the structure, which is closed except for a small opening, reveals a cabinet-like interior in which painted images of colourful fruit come into view: excerpts from Garnier-Valletti's fruit cabinet in Turin, translated into painting. Elvira Bättig used photographs she took of the museum's display cases during her visit as models. But unlike Garnier-Valletti, her aim is not perfect imitation but recognisability: her loose brushwork evokes a memory of what was seen rather than a faithful reproduction.

The installation of the canvases is also a reference to the *Museo della Frutta* – materially, through the velvet ribbons from which they hang (echoing the velour-lined display cases in the museum), and formally, through the staging of the painting as an installation: a space (or cabinet) within a space.

Before turning to scientific ceramics and pomology as an autodidact, Francesco Garnier-Valletti had worked as a confectioner and producer of artificial decorative fruit and flowers for a prestigious international clientele. His change of direction around 1848 and the associated orientation towards an academic audience marked a clear break: from then on, Garnier-Valletti pursued radical realism rather than artistic invention. Nature was no longer idealized or ennobled in this context; rather, its «slavish imitation» – even at the expense of beauty – was the goal, as the agricultural journal *Der Teutsche Obstgärtner* already noted in 1794.¹

As a cereoplast Garnier-Valletti succeeded like no other: his deceptively lifelike fruit models, accurate down to the smallest detail (even the weight, it is said) set new standards. Essential to his success was a technical innovation in wax modelling, while the decisive formula was revealed to him in a dream: «Frutti artificiali si devono fare con polvere d'alabastro mescolata con cera, colofonia e resina dammar... Scoperta fatta il 5 marzo 1858 durante un sogno notturno.» («Artificial fruits must be made with alabaster powder mixed with wax, colophony, and dammar resin... Discovery made on 5 March 1858 during a nocturnal dream.»)²

A ceramic fruit basket from northern Italy, the decorative object from the 1980s shown in the Tonnerre exhibition, gestures towards the boundary between utilitarian object and work of art, which also invokes the spectre of *kitsch*. Hypernatural, non-idealised representations – be they wax figures, automatons or decoys – have long been regarded with scepticism in aesthetic theory. Deception alone is not considered art. It may dazzle the eye, but it lacks spirit, idea and creative depth. As the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer polemically observed: «Wenn das höchste Ziel der bildenden Kunst Täuschung wäre, so müssten Wachsfiguren den ersten Rang einnehmen.» («If the highest goal of the visual arts were deception, then wax figures would hold the highest rank.»)³

In Tonnerre, what once seemed outdated, gains renewed relevance: to the natures mortes – in the most literal sense – Elvira Bättig adds a subtle sensory component. Her canvases are infused with scent, using so-called *Single Notes* from the *Demeter Fragrance Library*. In perfumery, these «pure» components serve as the building blocks for complex fragrances. The marketing strategies of Demeter mirror the logic behind Garnier-Valletti's collection: cataloguing, classifying and systematising – the positivist ideal of order. *Asian Pear*, *Barbados Cherry*, *Golden Delicious*, *White Sangria*. These scents are heightened, stylised, artificial – an illusion of vitality, a synthetic echo superimposed on nature. As a relic of an impasse in artistic thought and a bold contest with nature, one might ask whether such a discourse can be culturally overcome.

With *The Apple of my Eye*, Elvira Bättig creates an essayistic space composed of image, object, scent and memory. The installation becomes a walk-in still life in which the apple is not only a symbol of desire (as suggested by the English idiom «the apple of my eye», referring to something dearly cherished), but also a vehicle for a multifaceted discourse on imitation, perception, materiality and cultural practice. Nature emerges as a culturally constructed image: the apple is made of wax or ceramic, the leaf is pigment, the scent is synthetic. Through artistic transformation, the natural object becomes a carrier of meaning, an epistemic object – for Garnier-Valletti and the history of science, for art's struggle with reality, and for a lost biodiversity of fruit varieties. An attempt to

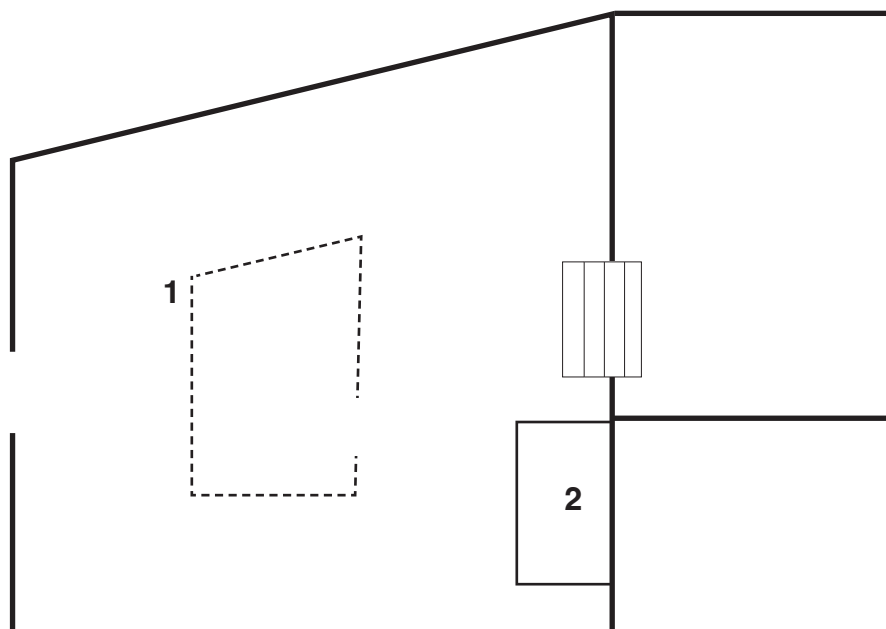
grasp nature through representation, both in Tonnerre and in Turin. Illusion may be sweet, but the truth it reveals is what is truly precious. Garnier-Valletti's dream formula might be broken down into four ingredients – but not so the essence of nature itself.

Eleonora Bitterli
(translated from German)

¹Johann Volkmar Sickler, *Der Teutsche Obstgärtner: oder gemeinnütziges Magazin des Obstbaues in Teutschlands sämtlichen Kreisen*, Weimar: 1794, p. 163.

² Francesco Garnier-Valletti, mentioned in: Giacomo Agostinetti & Tiziana Busca (eds.): *Museo della Frutta. Storia di un frutteto di carta, cera e gesso*, Turin: 2007, p. 48.

³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Leipzig: 1891, p. 454.



1. *The Apple of my Eye*, 2025, variable dimensions

Oil on linen, velvet, Demeter «Asian Pear» cologne spray, Demeter «Barbados Cherry» cologne spray, Demeter «Golden Delicious» cologne spray, Demeter «White Sangria» cologne spray.

2. *Untitled*, 2025, 20 x 45 x 20 cm

Italian ceramic fruit bowl from the 1980s

Elvira Bättig (b. 1997, Adligenswil, LU, Switzerland)

Graduating with honors from the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste with a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Arts (2021), she was assistant artist to Vera Marke (2021-2022) before co-founding manytwo exhibition in Lucerne with Jack Pryce in 2022. Her artistic practice combines installation, curatorial and collaborative projects, and has been presented in group shows such as THINK BEFORE YOU PRINT (Munich, 2023) and zentral! (Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2022). Exhibitions include Stiftung Binz39, Zurich (2023) and Museum im Bellpark, Kriens, (2023). Her work is part of public collections, including those of the Museum im Bellpark and the Canton of Lucern.