
ICONISMS

The term “icon” is now used to define those symbols allowing us to access social networks, apps, and smart TVs. However, it was born in the context of paleochristian art to indicate those often anti-naturalistic images that were meant to act as an open window on broader horizons and a mean to support faith and the possibility of visualizing or coming into contact with a world or dimension different from that of everyday life.

The theme of our relationship with reality, its representation, its fruition, and the world of theology crosses visual arts since their beginning and is here interpreted by widely different artists. Bidimensionality and tridimensionality, copy and original, abstraction and reality converge in artworks dialoguing by contrast or through silent references with means ranging from sculpture to photography, painting, and videos.

Giuseppe Gabellone starts from reality, using photography as a point of intersection between a sculpture’s materiality and its deriving image, presenting itself as the final artwork in place of the sculpture portrayed in the photo. When inverting this operation, we find the basis for Priscilla Tea’s artworks, which give physical and pictorial shape to images created in virtual reality. The relationship between the original and the copy also emerges from the linguistic choice of the titles for Isabelle Cornaro’s artwork, *Homonymes*. Here, mushroom casts substitute the originals, and the apparent formal similarity gives no reason for the object’s identity, telling the tale of reality’s transformation into artistic practice.

The process of image rielaboration is Josh Tonsfeldt’s main research point. He works by incorporating and hybridizing previous works with images of the surrounding reality, focusing on cautions and questions about the statute of the visual arts. On the contrary, Iva Lulashi collects images that catch her attention because of their ambivalence and ambiguity in the infinite online flux of bodies and figures. She then elaborates them through the pictorial means, reflecting on themes revolving around the body, intimacy, and desire. Finally, Rochelle Goldberg metaphorically creates a framework for the whole room. In fact, her metallic structures are mirrors and doorways, frames and barriers, underlining the porosity and the ambivalence between the represented and its representation, between the real world and the transfiguring world of Art.

Isabelle Cornaro (Aurillac, 1974 – lives and works in Paris and Geneva),
Homonymes, 2009

Isabelle Cornaro’s research themes are linked to western society’s history and culture. Accordingly, she borrows a variety of manifestations, such as sign systems and different media historically used in academies and avant-gardes, to perform an analytical deconstruction. Her interest aims to investigate the relationship between us, other objects, and their images in an effort to deconstruct our gaze. *Homonymes* calls the term “homonymy” into question: “in linguistics, it is the phenomenon for which two words with different etymology and meaning share the same sound or, at least, spelling”. Stationary, immobile, the mushroom casts created by the Artist are a copy that becomes the original; her artistic act constructs and deconstructs the Image, inspiring a critical reflection in the viewer.

Giuseppe Gabellone (Brindisi, 1973 - lives and works in Paris),
Untitled, 2007

Giuseppe Gabellone’s works explore the relationship between sculpture and photography, bidimensionality and tridimensionality, and images and their physicality, leading the photographic *medium* and the concept of Sculpture into new language planes. The typical process of Gabellone’s work is to conceive and realize structures, sculptures, and objects that only exist as photographic images. The very idea of Image as a construction that lies somewhere between abstraction and reality puts into question the concept of photography as a form of mere registration of reality in favor of an Invention of reality itself. Moreover, new forms of relationships are created between photography and sculpting materials, based on both media’s ability to record and preserve traces of the passage of time, respectively, through light impressions and surface sensitivity.

Rochelle Goldberg (Vancouver, 1984 - lives and works in New York),
Struttura, 2017

The metallic structure here exhibited used to be part of an environmental installation created by Rochelle Goldberg in 2017. Placed in the Museum’s Spazio Zero, *No Where, Now Here* was inspired by Giovanni Bellini’s renowned painting *Madonna del Prato* (1505 ca.). The sculptural reworking presented by the Artist on that occasion was composed of elements destined to change over time. Among these, Chia seeds placed on the floor, sculptures made of unstable tangles of snakes assuming

the shapes of pelicans and 24-hours briefcases, and a composition of metallic structures, the only stationary elements in a representation aiming at presenting itself as fluid and in constant transformation. The structures were also meant to articulate the space by offering visibility and establishing points of view. Just as the tonal painting in Bellini’s artwork suggests the perspective and the sequence of planes, so Goldberg’s frames sequence the space, identifying a series of planes and delineating edges and discrete spaces, although destined to be crossed by the figures inhabiting them.

Iva Lulashi (Tirana, 1988 - lives and works in Milan),
Piccola fonderia della carne, 2022

Iva Lulashi’s artworks suggest situations suspended in time, evoking something that occurs yet remains undefined. The intimate ambivalence between a desire, shown yet not focused, and the nakedness, not provocatively exhibited, short-circuits in the pictorial touch, which is just as mysterious and elusive. With as much emotional detachment as possible, starting from low-resolution video frames rummaged in the continuous flux of the Web, the Artist chooses image fragments, which are then furtherly sectioned to exclusively select details of bodies and color spots. The boundaries between the political and social spheres and personal histories become mixed so that the distance between the starting video and the final artwork nullifies every narrative component. The works’ titles add an additional level, as they are assigned through an analogously random process. The Artist extrapolates words and sentences from literary texts that share no relationship with what is represented in the artwork. Iva Lulashi’s pictorial elaboration overlaps the collective cultural memory and the individual experience, putting at the center of its “anthropological” reflection the centrality of the body, of the desire – intended as an assertion of our personal free will – and of erotism as a vital dimension expressed through the link between the body and the environment. Although Lulashi’s artworks usually include nudity merging with more widespread rurality, in *Piccola fonderia della carne*, the title itself evokes the particular setting in which the bodies are portrayed: here, nature’s shadows are enclosed in the tub-oven, as if it was brooding it.

Josh Tonsfeldt (Independence, 1979 – lives and works in New York),
Untitled, 2014

Josh Tonsfeldt’s work, through his evident economy of means, multiplies the images attenuating their boundaries with the context from which they are extrapolated. The month-long period of work in Bergamo to develop the *Mississippi* exhibition – the winning project of the VII Edition of Premio Lorenzo Bonaldi per l’Arte – inevitably influenced his production through mild associations running through the created artworks.

The paintings of Jacob Kassay, who had preceded him during his stay in Bergamo, are incorporated in *Untitled*. These are filtered through the suggestive photos taken by Tonsfeldt during that same period. The image is printed on a transparent vinylic adhesive on which two polystyrene panels, found among the museum’s waste materials, are overlaid. Although barely visible, motorcycle and scooter tire tracks can also be noticed on the image, while an orange hunting vest is placed on its backside. Thanks to the sensitivity with which he documented his experience and the surrounding environment, Tonsfeldt paradoxically manifests his skepticism toward the images.

Priscilla Tea (1983, Milano – lives and works in Milan and Los Angeles),
Islands of space, 2007

Priscilla Tea’s art explores the remote landscapes and the atemporal virtual spaces properly spatial of the Internet, transporting them through painting into the dimension of Reality outside the monitors. Her paintings seem abstract, yet this appearance vanishes as soon as we get closer to her *modus operandi*. The Artist intends to explore a new concept of landscape, spotted through virtual windows representing her primary source of inspiration. The scenarios of *Virtual Worlds*, which originated from Second Life or other online 3D worlds starting from the early 2000s, unfold on large canvases. In its traditional practice, painting allows us to transfer and crystallize beyond their boundaries – the “monitor” – our infinite peregrinations through imaginary online worlds. Like *screenshots*, extensive, ethereal, and soft-colored backgrounds sediment virtual experiences and everchanging impalpable images in the pictorial gesture and in the colors’ and canvas’ physicality. The backdrops are often characterized by two gradients – one for the sky and one for the land – dilated and hollowed by time.