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JULIET

Angiola Gatti. You touched me

By Emanuela Zanon, November 8, 2017



“Untitled (Senza titolo)” 2013/2017, ballpoint pen, pencil, oilstick, rapidograph on unstretched canvas cm 247×210 (left) “Untitled (Senza titolo)” 2014/2017, ballpoint pen, pencil on unstretched canvas cm 240×157 (right) courtesy CAR DRDE Bologna, Photo by Carlo Favero

In 1946, Lucio Fontana was the first to use the ballpoint pen as an artistic material while he was in Buenos Aires, where a few years earlier the Hungarian László József Bíró, who fled Nazi persecutions in Europe, had patented the definitive prototype of his invention. In the 1950s and 1960s artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Jean Dubuffet, Agnes Martin, Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik, Yayoi Kusama, John Cage, Cy Twombly and Louise Bourgeois experimented in their work the potentialities of this modernist instrument, which, in the decades later, was definitively absorbed by the art world to become the primary tool for making also some large-scale works. In 1973, Alighiero Boetti was helped by dozens of aids to fill sheets of blue solid ink in the 11 panels that made up the *Ononimo* series (1973), while Jan Fabre in 1990 culminated a series of pen-ink works entitled *L'Heure Bleue* transferring his drawings on the facade of the Tivoli castle near Mechelen until it was completely covered and transformed into an immense drawn surface.

This brief historical digression contextualize the artistic research of **Angiola Gatti** (Turin, 1960), which since its inception has identified its privileged field

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of action in a border area between drawing and painting, two related but usually distinct expressive modes. Her pictorial and graphic experimentation, which was born at the beginning of the 90's on of common A4 sheets, over time expanded to embrace very large surfaces, which find their maximum common denominator in her body and in the extension of her arm, materializing the inseparable unity of gesture, space and time that constitutes the deepest reason for its existence. By alternating phases of rigorous monochrome at times when the need for color pushes her to expand the range of her media to include pencils and oil stick, the artist flips on the naked surface a dense plot of signs that cross the pictorial plane to settle in a mental elsewhere of which the work is intermediary and existential passage. Reality is fluent, varied at all times, and the unstable perceptions generated by the encounter between the outside world and the intimacy of the artist form a complex emotional vocabulary that diversifies each sign from the other by distorting the unmistakable impartiality and uniformity of the minimal instruments that she utilizes.

The rhythm of Angiola Gatti's work supports the emergence of thoughts and moods, it is sensitive to environmental and luminous conditions, it changes according to her personal experiences and at every juncture of everyday life. There is a starting point that defines itself in the process of the matter until it is almost carved or engraved by the strong pressure of the pen on the paper, but sometimes the long execution times cause the initial suggestion to be overwhelmed by the assumption of other more urgent impressions and it becomes a backward thought that emits from the bottom its faint but persistent emotional frequency. The motion of the graphic gesture is harmonious in its discontinuity: there are stoppages and shots, meditative pauses and sudden blossoms, reflections that blend in the density of the chromatic substance, temptations that become cluttered of passionate signs while others only underneath in a space left free. There are always new clues and unexpected sense openings, in constant tension between sharpness and noise of the world, between calm contemplation and instinct, between full and void, between the endogenous brightness of the chemical ink and the compact white of the paper. Each work engages the author and the spectator in the same pendulum movement that arises from the need to move away from the canvas to grasp its overall structure and the contemporary and opposite desire to approach it as much as possible to try to disentangle the sedimentation of the lines and pursue the path of a single sign.

The exhibition *You touched me* presents an eloquent concentrate of the artistic

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production of Angiola Gatti which includes three large fully painted canvas by pen signs, smaller paper drawings where the sign takes on intense three-dimensional tangle and a series of photographic recently conceived and realized works that depict ephemeral compositions of glass, metal and clay fragments assembled without glue.

Particularly impressive is the diptych composed of the two works that ideally open the exhibition, two *Untitled* side by side that create an open and bright space electrified by linear pulsating nuggets that are compact from far to the point of detecting shades, gradations of planes and mysterious shapes of shapes, and complex at a close glance, where the independence and uniqueness of every sign seem to compete with his fellows to affirm its own unrepeatable existence. The effect is to be immersed in an enveloping garden of signs in which a multitude of evanescent but indelible possibilities. The stratification of the lines creates an irregular plasticity such as the changing intuitions of the human mind, determines depth and spatiality that find an elusive perspective junction point beyond the painted surface, describes the consistency of reality by detecting its underground energy loads showing the beauty of the world and its innate aspiration to transcendence. The dominant color in both, in fact, is blue, the color that appears when the night ends and the day begins to rise, always in art a perceptive bridge between what is material and the spiritual and the imaginary.

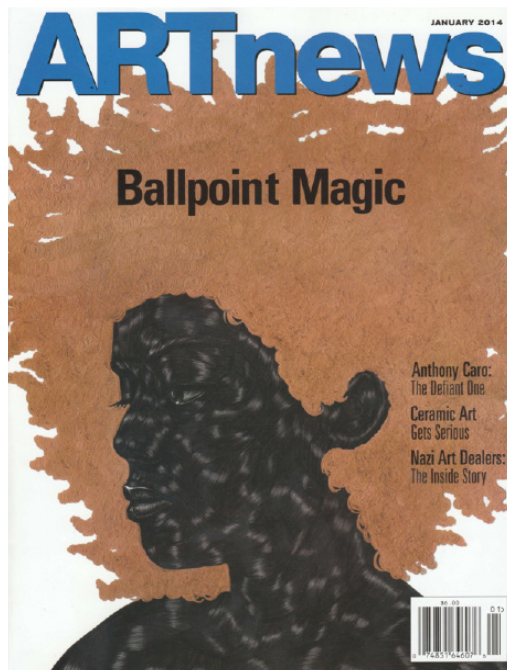
At first glance, it is difficult to understand the conceptual intersection between this type of work and the photographic images placed on the opposite wall, but a prolonged overview let emerge subtle analogies between the translucent edges of the glass pieces, their projections on the back wall beneath shapes of shadows that can be assimilated to segments of sign and the transparent darkness of the insisted pen overlaps that, even though they strive to calm an anxious vacuous horror, can always emanate space and light. What the artist seems to experience, in this case from two opposite and complementary points of view, is the possibility to generate spatial planes from the void and infinitely expandable three-dimensional spaces from a saturated space by exploring the evocative and sculptural potential of vision and its ability to transform the pure optical data into mental environments.

Info:

Angiola Gatti. *You touched me.*
2017, September, 23 – November, 11
CAR drde
Via Azzo Gardino 14/a Bologna

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Angiola Gatti, *Untitled (Senza titolo)*, 2012, ballpoint pen on canvas.

Like Lee, Italian artist Angiola Gatti, who had her U.S. debut at New York's Ryan Lee gallery last fall, scrawls with ballpoint to form abstract masses and voids. Gatti says she works on a "corporeal, one-to-one" scale, drawing on vertical canvases that are roughly the size of her body. She likes how intimately close to the artwork ballpoint brings her, and sometimes she presses the pen so hard that the "canvas is nearly carved."

Marlene McCarty, who shows at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. in New York, also draws on large surfaces, but her work is highly figurative and psychologically charged, populated by sexualized adolescent girls and great apes. To her, the blue ballpoint pen reflects what high-school girls use for homework and for "doodling on their notebooks," and it's the preferred tool for "primate fieldwork." However, McCarty is not as romantic as Gatti when it comes to the physicality of ballpoint. "For the scale of my drawings, it's a horrible, tedious, painful medium," she says. "Ballpoint is unforgiving. It can't be corrected. I draw on the wall. Unless the pen is held at just the right angle, it stops working. The pressure required to keep the ink flowing causes shoulder injuries."

"Ballpoint-pen drawing can be extremely labor-intensive and time-consuming because the mark it makes is linear," says Dawn Clements, who shows at Pierogi in Brooklyn. "I can't make tonal drawings, so my drawings often take a very long time." Clements describes her patched-together panoramas of the inside of her home and movie sets as life-size "sketchbooks." As with McCarty, the medium mirrors the content in Clements's works, which can run more than 40 feet long. Ballpoint is, she says, "a common domestic implement used to express my experience of

domestic life and melodramatic movies that depicted domestic familial situations."

The domesticity of the pen helps explain its mass appeal as an art material. "All of us touch a ballpoint pen practically every day," Klein says. There are now photorealist draftsmen from outside the art world whose pictures have gone viral on the Internet, such as Samuel Silva, a Portuguese lawyer living in London. Though, inexplicably, the curator adds, the Aldrich exhibition might be the first museum roundup of ballpoint art, and that show featured only eleven artists in a 1,400-square-foot gallery.

As for which brand of pen is best, it depends on who you ask. "Joanne Greenbaum uses Schmidts that are made in Germany," Klein says. Crotty likes the Swedish Ballograf. Odutola and Clements both use Paper Mates. Lee says he formerly favored Paper Mate but noticed changes in the "chemistry of the ink." Lately, he's been on a Bic kick.

Gatti goes for Bic, Staedtler, and Pilot, while Orara imports his Pilots from Japan. McCarty prefers the blue Montblanc that is designed for "signing important documents." However, she adds, "they are too heavy to hold upright against the wall for hours at a time, so I take a Montblanc ballpoint refill, force it into a cheap lightweight plastic Bic pen handle, tape the whole thing together, and use that."

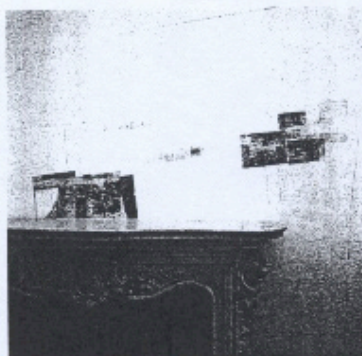
Peter Saul, who has been drawing and painting his funky, freaky, cartoony characters for over half a century and now shows his work at Mary Boone Gallery in New York, says, "I only use black, and I never pay attention to the brand." And Yoshitomo Nara claims that when it comes to drawing his Kute Kulture figures, "I'm fine with the kind of pen you find on your hotel desk." ■

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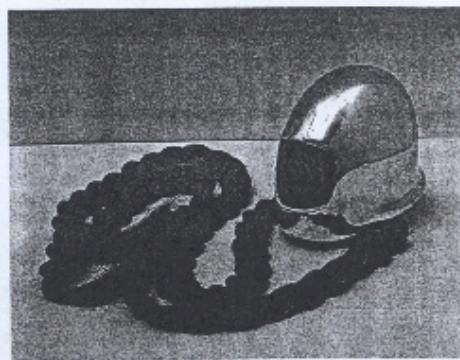
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ARTFORUM

October, 2004



Angiola Gatti, *Solstizio d'estate* (Summer solstice) (detail), 2001, ballpoint pen on wall, dimensions variable.



Marisa Albanese, *Emeneghida*, 2000, aluminum and synthetic hair, dimensions variable.

two heads can be seen: "one of a white man resembling a colonialist explorer and the other of a turbaned North African." Each covers his mouth with his finger, signaling silence. In French it reads "Tais toi!" (Be quiet); in addition there is a text in Arabic that most likely means the same—or does it? Furthermore, López Cuenca has added words taken from a fashion magazine: "Un vrai choc par la fluidité du tombé, la discrétion raffinée des tons et le choix des matières" (True luxuriousness, thanks to the fluid way it falls, the refined subtlety of the hues, and the choice of fabric). Of course, "the fluid way it falls" alludes ironically to the severed head, while also calling attention to the Europeans' propensity to attribute such refined cruelty to North Africans.

Other works do not possess this visual and semantic complexity, instead settling for clichés. For example, one shows a Western woman sunbathing on a beach where two North Africans covered by veil and djellaba walk; juxtaposed with this image is a black-and-white photograph in which a female immigrant, probably drowned, is laid out in the sand next to a Spanish policeman. The Maghrebis are doubly victimized—in their own land and in their attempts to escape it. The irony is maintained in the text that accompanies the work, taken from the early-twentieth-century writer Isaac Muñoz: "I have lain down like a dead man upon the Arab tapestry and opium, the sacred, emerald green venom, has taken me to the regions of a fanciful country." And it is clear that for many immigrants who risk their lives crossing the strait, Spain is an idealized fantasy that does not correspond to reality.

Sadly, these two neighboring cultures barely manage to see each other.

—Juan Vicente Aliaga

Translated from Spanish by Michelle Sargent.

TURIN

ANGIOLA GATTI THE BOX

Angiola Gatti is a self-effacing painter from Turin who has been working for years without much notice. She deserves more attention for her novel investigations of abstraction, achieved by saturating the entire surface of her large canvases with interwoven patterns of ballpoint-pen or colored-pencil strokes. The resulting sequences of marks create fields of variable density, areas of greater or lesser concentration. Sometimes there are spirals, forms that expand outward from an energetic inner core. Or the marks may accumulate in heavy, motionless rectilinear figures that alternate with or are superimposed over areas that are characterized by more fluid and dynamic drawing.

The wall painting and two large canvases included in this exhibition revealed new developments in Gatti's work. On the canvases—*Oscillazione* (Oscillation), 2000, and *Mixing Memory and Desire*, 2001—color has become an autonomous element in relation to the marks. Light, delicately colored patches float against the backgrounds and convey a luminosity that sets the paintings' emotional tone. The interwoven marks, on the other hand, with their structural variations, layer the surface with allusions to perspectival openings, to

irregular and multiple spatial constructions with many vanishing points in which light or color is trapped. With their superimpositions of ethereal membranes, the paintings evoke shifting mental landscapes, projections of psychological states.

The wall painting didn't give quite this same impression of delicacy. Rather, it was studded with structures that seemed to have become preemptory geometric figures. Conceived specifically for this exhibition, *Solstizio d'estate* (Summer solstice), 2001, filled all four walls of one room, accentuating the emotional value of the ephemeral artistic act as opposed to the stable and salable object. The intervention in real space also emphasized another of the work's quixotic aspects—namely, the use of subtle pen or pencil marks instead of brushstrokes to make such a large-scale painting.

Gatti treated the four walls of the room as intersecting surfaces in a spontaneous ensemble and gave its various areas distinct rhythms. In this work, too, zones of great density alternate with more fluid passages. *Summer Solstice* emerged out of the artist's encounter with underlying aspects of the physical context—for instance, the roughness of the wall, which, treated like a sheet of coarse drawing paper, led to varying thickness in the strokes—or even in response to the music coming from the nearby conservatory, which provided a rhythm. Thus the viewer was able to reconstruct the genesis of the work and its different tempi, whether the slow and meticulous pace of the overall structures or the lightning-quick speed of the marks that traversed the walls like flashes of energy.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shove.

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Art in America

December, 1997

TURIN

Angiola Gatti at The Box

For her first show at this recently opened gallery, Angiola Gatti, a Turin-based artist in her 30s, showed three large paintings made with the most banal implement imaginable: a black-ink ballpoint pen. Measuring roughly 6½ by 8½ feet each, the unstretched, unframed canvases (all 1996) were stapled to the wall. This unpretentious style of presentation, which Gatti has used before, accords well with her ascetic medium.

Working obsessively, Gatti builds her paintings out of tiny, repetitive scribbles. Like a marathon doodler, she scratches the pen back and forth, over and over again, covering the canvas at a snail's pace. By varying the spacing between the marks and by use of rhythmically overlapping lines, Gatti is able to achieve a remarkable variety of effects from her strictly limited means. Despite

the obviously considerable amount of time and effort that must go into every painting, there is never a feeling of heaviness in her work. The ballpoint pen markings expand gently across the surface of the painting.

From a distance, the viewer perceives the forms on Gatti's canvases not as individual marks but as a veil of gray. As one moves closer, the marks become differentiated and distinct. Sometimes they almost totally cover the canvas, as in *Appaiono le Figure* (The Figures Call), but the compositions are never purely all-over. In *Appaiono le Figure* the lower part of the canvas is covered with a fairly regular pattern, but about two thirds of the way up this changes to a series of darker rectangles, which gradually fall away into mostly blank canvas as one reaches the top of the painting.

In *Rumore Sordo e Lontano* (Noises Deaf and Distant), dense marks form a thick horizontal band across the middle of the canvas. Floating within this river of markings are numerous rectangular and circular forms created by overlapping scribbles. A larger circle lies half in and half out of the horizontal band. Neither the band nor the rectangular forms within it are perfectly aligned with the edge of the canvas. This is also true of *Giorno Azzuro* (Blue Day), where the horizontal band stretching from one side to another is slightly tilted.

The effect of studying Gatti's highly detailed work is to feel admitted into the artist's flowing consciousness. The paintings offer, in Gatti's own words, "an accumulation of energy, an elevation, an exuberance, a crossing, a search." With her everyday medium and obsessive technique, Gatti seems to have found a fragile balance between the tensions of everyday life and the realm of the spirit.

—Tiziana Conti

Pravdolib Ivanov: *Between Thoughts and Talks*, 1996, photo installation, 124 by 122 inches; at XXL.

