

Francesca Comisso and Marzia Migliora, *A Conversation about Vita Activa*. Marzia Migliora, *Forza lavoro*, Arti Grafiche Bianca e Volta, Truccazzano, 2016

FC: You could say it all started with powder... the carbon black that Pinot Gallizio used in 1963 for his last environmental work, the *Anticamera della morte* (*Antechamber of Death*). This was a piece of furniture with wooden shelves placed at an angle, like a personal archive in which, rendered uniform by a monochrome coat of paint, a coffeepot, a pharmacist's mortar, a wooden plinth, a herbalist's herb-cutter, a pulley, a skull, two glasses, a dagger, a decoy duck in wood, and more besides, all exist side by side.

MM: Going back over the traces that inspired the *Forza lavoro* exhibition, carbon black is what got the whole project started. It was actually an idea that came from the *Anticamera della morte* that led me, a few months after I saw it in Alba, to the Palazzo del Lavoro. The initial spark of inspiration came in August 2015, when a fire broke out inside and I saw the pictures: in my mind's eye I suddenly made a connection between the carbon black, the Palazzo as a symbolic object, and the state of employment in Italy.

Even the word "antechamber", with its overtone of waiting, and of a prelude to something in the making, a double identity captured in transit, is an important aspect of my project. A moment of transition that is to be found in the blackened objects in the "antechamber of death" – instruments that can potentially be used to perform a task – or in those that I found at the Palazzo del Lavoro, which were waiting to be removed. I turned some of them into pinhole devices that, in a series of photographs, captured visions inside the Palazzo: objects such as an electric control unit or the control box of an escalator were transformed from real, motionless, idle tools into *witnesses* – into potentially live, creative elements.

After years of neglect, the Palazzo del Lavoro is now waiting to become a luxury shopping centre. In the video shot inside the Palazzo, with all its immense emptiness and debris, the cellist Francesco Dillon plays an improvisation based on a chord from Mozart's Requiem in D minor, K626, and then goes on to "play" the architectural elements and objects he finds in the building. Through the musician's actions, the various abandoned objects acquire a new sound dimension and the "concrete sounds" that emerge from their percussion ends up changing the setting of the building they are in. The musician reclassifies the space and the worn-out remains of its history in a systematic musical and artistic process.

FC: This action reminded me of a video you made many years ago (*Efi*, 2002). In that case, you were cleaning the deck on a large ship abandoned at sea. This gesture of care also conveyed a strong sense of stubbornness and resistance at the end, while in *Vita Activa*, the end – the death of a place and of the values it symbolises – coexists with something that is very much alive and of sumptuous beauty. Something that endures and resists for both utility and consumption. A sort of cycle...

MM: There's a passage in *Too Loud a Solitude* (1968), a wonderful book by Bohumil Hrabal, in which the protagonist observes that the *progressus ad originem* responds to *regressus ad futurum*. This can also be seen in *L'ideazione di un sistema resistente è atto creativo* (*The Design of a Resistant System is an Act of Creation*), an installation in which 6300 pressed charcoal briquettes form a stylised ceiling panel of the Palazzo del Lavoro. They refer back to the idea of a ruin, of something about to disappear, but also to the foundations of something that has the power to rise upwards.

FC: In these years of economic crisis and with the rise of new forms of exploitation and social injustice, you've devoted many works to the theme of work, often pointing out the human and social costs of a development model on which the need for constant production and growth is based.

Here I'm thinking of the shows *H317-Può provocare una reazione* and *Capienza massima meno uno*, a collective performance at MAXXI in Rome, which acted as a public appeal to put into practice the many meanings of "employment" and, more recently, of the talk performance entitled *Un caso*, which you've staged again for this exhibition, here in the gallery.

MM: It's a subject I began paying particular attention to with regard to data on deaths at and for work, starting with *From here to Eternit*, a 2009 project on the problem of asbestos. The more recent *Un caso* deals with the issue of failure and its cultural, social and psychological significance. I worked with the author and biographer Elena Pugliese on the true story of Isidoro Danza, the owner of a machine shop in Voghera that was about to go bankrupt. In order to continue working and to pay his workers, Danza put on a wig, took his bicycle and robbed nine banks with a toy gun. After three years in prison, he told his story from the stage of the Teatro Gobetti of Turin, in a conversation with the anthropologist Alberto Salza, which shifted our attention towards distant lands, where poverty is the norm and the parameters for looking to the future do not go beyond an analysis of the present.

FC: I was thinking that when the Palazzo del Lavoro was being built, Gallizio shared with his fellow Situationists an idea of the future as "liberation" from work. In 1958 – the year when Hannah Arendt brought out *The Human Condition* (published as *Vita Activa* in Italian), in which she distinguishes work from labour, which enables us to survive, Gallizio was showing his industrial painting, which undermines the idea of painting, but also that of machines and production...

MM: Art does indeed continue to question the *pensée unique*... Asserting that the world we live in is the only possible world is an idea that needs to be refuted. Is economic value really the only discriminating factor between what is right and what is wrong, what has a right to exist or to disappear?