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GH0ST !

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present the installation Go Ghost !, 2021

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*The trash collectors
of the future had looked
at the Constructivists:
Francesco Finizio's promise*

Géraldine Gourbe

|— 18 p. —|

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*Interview with
Francesco Finizio*

Alice Malinge, Etienne Bernard

|— 25 p. —|

THE TRASH COLLECTORS
OF THE FUTURE HAD
LOOKED AT THE
CONSTRUCTIVISTS:
FRANCESCO FINIZIO'S
PROMISE

GÉRALDINE
GOURBE



folded in half on the floor, a scratchy cream bath towel serves as a plinth for a series of ice scrapers. Carefully arranged, the varied shapes evoke a new kind of hieroglyphs. Immediately beside this strange convergence of uses—bodily hygiene and automotive visibility—a modest collection of flat screwcaps are strewn on the ground like forgotten coins, with their deliciously antiquated gilded halo. Compelling in its nonchalance, this detail of the assemblage appears amidst a succession of doors, windows, and partitions that create alcoves, corridors, thresholds, and such. The makeshift architectural forms give a certain rhythm to our transit through this space, a hybrid between the ruins of a soviet building and an ikea display: the Swedish brand’s central concept is to give the illusion of multiple choices for the interior of the same house. Francesco Finizio calls these multiple entry signals that punctuate his labyrinthine installation **Go Ghost!** (2021) at Frac Bretagne “punch lines,” witticisms or Freudian slips dictated not by the interplay of language but by the objects themselves.

These things, all of different rank, are haunted by the promise of a “primitive” scene from the Cohen Brothers’ film, **No Country for Old Men** (2007), that Francesco Finizio invokes. It is the scene where Javier Bardem transforms a simple coin toss into a frightening wager on a man’s life.





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1. Anne Giffon-Selle, *Les astronautes du dedans : L'assemblage californien 1950-1970* (Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2017).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The psychopath tells the cashier—who has just been spared—to regard the coin that has just saved him as something rare, and to not mix it in with the others; otherwise it would look like any of them. The founder of Marxism would read in this an allegory of capitalist fetishism; I see a new way of (re-)defining assemblage, still too entrenched in “East Coast” modernism.

Nothing predestined Francesco Finizio, a former student of Joseph Kosuth, to the American materialist interpretation of European Dadaism. If **Go Ghost!** holds any remnants of semiotics, it is in its collections of trash. On reading Anne Giffon-Selle’s **Les astronautes du dedans, L’assemblage californien 1950-1970**,¹ I realized how much the familiar “West Coast” feeling in the huge anarchic ordering of the 2021 installation is aided by visualizing the major pieces of Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, Jess, Edward Kienholz, George Herms, and Wally Hedrick. The “**astronauts of inner space**” thwart the modernist vision of William C. Seitz, father of **The Art of Assemblage**, held at MoMA in 1961, all while impertinently illuminating **Go Ghost!** and fixing it in a succession of gestures and of empowerment. In this instance, Californian artist Bruce Conner has, according to Anne Giffon-Selle, “detected an enterprise of shaping and formalizing a new genre equipped with every artistic filiation, essentially modernist and pictorial.”² The vision shared by Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, Jess, Edward Kienholz, George Herms, Wally Hedrick—and

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3.
Ibid., p. 86.

4.
Ibid.

more recently, Francesco Finizio—has more to do with a stubborn refusal of any “historicist interpretation” or “formal determinism” while simultaneously flirting with a “wasteland” aesthetic.³ The latter contributes to nourishing a fertile soil to prevent the sedimentation, the fossilization of the city’s historical-cultural events. Let’s not forget that for the Angelinos and the Franciscans, Europe, as well as the cities of the East Coast, are considered the “Old World”. Immutable in this belief, they navigate a vision of contemporaneity constituted simultaneously in amnesia—conducive to neoliberal activities—and an adolescent enthusiasm where everything is possible. It is enough to rewatch the innumerable Hollywood westerns, or the films of the Cohen brothers, to understand with exactly what performative power this timeless myth is part of a North American culture that distinguishes itself from the patrimonial construction of old continental Europe.

Californians’ attraction to poets and Dadaist artists can be read, according to Anne Giffon-Selle, as being at the start a violent “individualist resistance” to “all artistic assimilation”⁴, ideological and spiritual. The desire to seize abandoned objects or things has less to tell us about the consumption society—a theme worn thin in relation to assemblage and Pop Art—than to reveal individual ways of making memory. On this subject, Edward Kienholtz said: “I really begin to understand any society by going



5.
Ibid., p. 99.
Originally quoted in
Roland W. Wiegstein,
"Ed Kienholz, the
'Volksempfänger'
and the 'Ring,'" in
Edward Kienholz's
Volksempfänger
(exh. cat. Berlin's
Nationalgalerie,
Berlin, 1977).

through its junk stores and flea markets. It is a form of education and historical orientation for me."⁵ That this enthusiasm for assemblage and collage emerged in California during the turbulent geopolitical context of the 1950s, is no coincidence. Francesco Finizio mentions having needed a certain time to shake off the East Coast conceptual heritage and to connect with the countercultures and counter-knowledge of the "wild boys" (William Burroughs) of the West Coast.

While looking at images of **Pléstéchine** (pronounced "playstation") from his 2003 exhibition *Transmission Studies* at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Marseille, Francesco Finizio confided in me that he wanted, in retrospect, to remove the imposing elements, the chairs, the desks, the partitions, the board, and such. We would have liked to have kept only the lists, the accumulations of very small plastic modules arranged on a shelf, to have encouraged others to manipulate, organize, and combine them according to the rules of board games (checkers or chess) or early arcade games. The charms of the possibilities of play—the way of advancing, tactics for staying one move ahead, the processes of turnarounds—are already shared by the assemblagists Wallace Berman (billiards and cards) and Marcel Duchamp: remember that celebrated game with Eve Babitz at the Pasadena Art Museum in Los Angeles. In his studio in Brest, we see, Francesco Finizio and myself, a precocious taste for assemblage.

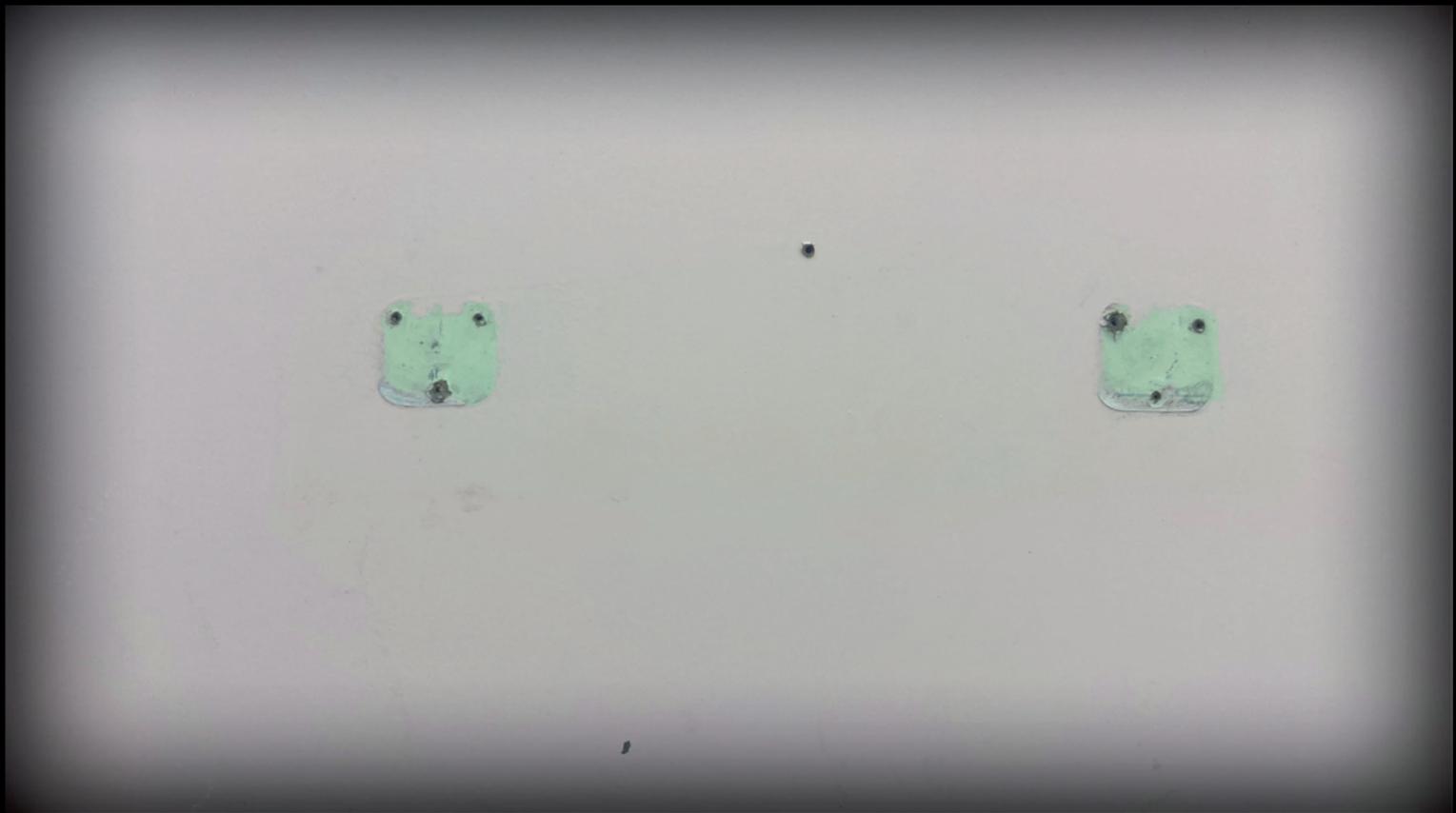


leboncoin









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6.
Galerie Territoires
Partagés,
Marseille.

It continued in the **Centre de Tri Visuel (2001)**, an installation that offered a space for the recycling and reconversion of glossy publications, where Francesco Finizio took the time to name and detail the group of plastic storage crates, stacked like Lego modules to form, in turn, counters, seats, and full-length plinths—on which the television broadcast self-promotional films—or even, storage boxes that allowed the erection of labyrinthine partitions that continually redesigned the installation's space. Like a prefiguration of **Go Ghost!**, you moved around, you penetrated each space differently, and they, were raised and fell with indifference. An infinite playground where the plinth's authority was never able to take hold.

These display shelves, counters, and seating are the common threads that we again find in his installation **XIO-P(p)ing Thing (2019)**. In the back of a store in a Marseillais passage,⁶ Francesco Finizio copied and pasted the basic functions of an airport (the transit and control of passengers) and its link with our time, to lose in consuming, in eating, or in watching others evolve in their own suspended time of waiting. The idea of the row and the invitation to sit is found in **Vision Center (2012)**. An alignment of disparate chairs, their only character being a disquieting sense of banality, stages a tension between the dematerialized screens, reincarnated by the cushions, doormats, trays, and the potential spectators. The game of checkers or chess has been abandoned but the tactical spirit of substitution,

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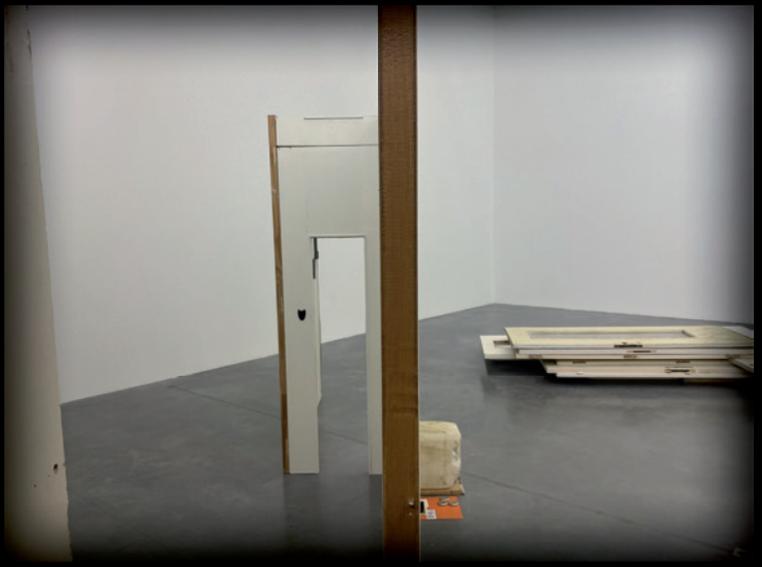
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7.
Anne Giffon-Selle,
*Les astronautes
du dedans*, p. 91.

evocation, and metamorphosis remain. A kind of corporate mesmerization in the image of the white column covered with office phones at the Museums of Bat Yam in Tel Aviv, in 2015.

In order to better suspend, defer, or neutralize them, the attributes of commerce's heaving mass are made visible, sometimes with their potential multiplied, as in **How I went In & Out of Business for Seven Days and Seven Nights** (2008), for example. In the new Galerie ACDC in Bordeaux, Francesco Finizio opened and closed as many businesses as possible, using only found materials. While the texts and conversations of the "**astronauts of inner space**" demonstrate an interest in vitrines and "window dressing", which the Surrealists praised for their "process moved by an internal necessity... Where things are linked one to another following their own logic"⁷, Finizio associates them with a fascination for the viral potential of objects. This anxiety-inducing viral nature can even result in a "climate of paranoia", according to his own words. In **Minimalia (mini-mal-ya)** things that are meant to be reassuring—colorful garden houses, the heads of stuffed toys, children's clothes—instead embody haphazard habitats or security checkpoints, like those Francesco Finizio saw in Tel Aviv. His 2013 performance **Never Trust a Stranger**—featuring a rabbit escaped from Walt Disney handing out flyers decrying conspiracy theories while recirculating them—extended the artist's solo show

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8.
Mike Kelley,
The Uncanny
(Cologne: Walther
König, 2004),
p. 26.

9.
Ibid., p. 38.

10.
An expression of
the artist.

beyond the Tel Aviv museum's wall, heightening a feeling of weight peculiar to the "**society of control**" (Gilles Deleuze). This exhibition worked like a collage of objects worthy of Mike Kelley's "uncanny": "The uncanny is a somewhat muted sense of horror: horror tinged with confusion."⁸ Mike Kelley had (already) integrated a critique of neoliberal white suprematism, because he extended the dissident ambition of the West Coast assemblagists. Aware of the performative force and visual power of the ultra-capitalist North American ideology, in **Ramoneur - Dentiste - Visionnaire**, Francesco Finizio's "uncanny" multiplies votive scenes and micro-situations of recollection without remembering the *raison d'être* of these liturgical prayers. The "**fetishist's 'harem'**"⁹ mimics the idols inhabited by childish beliefs, a libidinal machine that stirs Francesco Finizio, this "trash collector of the future who'd apparently looked at the Constructivists."¹⁰

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An animal tossed into an empty space, a field or cage

Will quickly make for the corner.

A space, empty to start.

Cold and dark.

A switch discretely niched

To play master of night and day.

On-off. Cool white. Big blank.

w O mb

r OO m

t O mb

All share the same vowel

An O-pening of sorts

Though pronounced the same

only once does that "O" O-ccur twice.

Implying perhaps a tO and frO That you may cOme and gO As you please

A good room has its ins and outs

"Every day I push the broom across the room to make some room for the next day."

A space is more than its interplay of walls windows and doors.

A space becomes what it is according to what you put inside it, how you arrange those things and their respective qualities.

As Martin Kippenberger beautifully demonstrated with "The happy end of Kafka's America"

As is visible in my work "How I went In and out of Business for seven Days and Seven Nights"

I'm interested in spaces that take shape from within rather than above.

Space exploration starts at your fingertips.

I'm interested in space as plural and mobile. It happens. Is and was.

I'm looking for the point or moment where one thing becomes several.

Contours become blurred, logic fuzzy

Oscillate IS the steady state. Shapes shift.

Identity takes a hit...

(Put a dent in your "I"!)

The linguistic tyranny of commodities teaches us that a table is a table is maybe a dinner table but is certainly not a desk or workbench.

A table is also a bed, a shelter, a boat, a shield, a table-au

This was the idea behind the title of my exhibition ARKPARKCRAFTRAFTCLINICLUBPUB at MOBY, Bat Yam, Israel

Where the vessel that is the museum building became all those spaces at once.

Names must be tossed aside to feel things fresh

Language needs thickening : put the putty back in poetry (sic).

How sad for a chair to be reduced to a set of logocentric representations.

When we could think things affects such as "sit ass silent softly"

"Jam Econo" as the Minutemen put it.

Make with Hammers for Hands. An art of heart and parts.

Oppose the all-thumbs to the opposable thumb.

Dumb down enjoy the low life and help things help themselves.

Lo-fi semper fi: sea shells can do cell phones.

Low-res rapid proto leaves the imagination free to ponder both the best and the worst.

Finishing is farther than I need to go.

Walk shoestring budgets.

Arrange, rearrange disrupt and derange.

GO GHOST !!!

Ghosts don't make things. They move things.

They rattle windows and walls, sling furniture and hurl objects, shake the house and all inside...

They trigger encounters and collisions, squat bodies like thieves do cars for joyrides...take possession of them so to speak – ventriloquy.

My economy is the stand-up comic's.

A glass of water and a microphone, maybe a stool for when the glass gets tired.

The stand-up comic's condition is not unlike that of the early Christian hermit: each works his schtick spartan and lonely.

Bunuel tapped into this with Simon of the Desert

Overhead is minimal and storage isn't an issue.

A stand up economy.

I remember a teacher back in art school scolding us for our one-liners,

As if each time we'd committed a shamefully stupid crime.

But if your one liners are good and you can line a few up, you start to have material.

And maybe in those few lines you can say more than your average American author in a six hundred page book.

INTERVIEW
WITH FRANCESCO
FINIZIO

ALICE
MALINGE



ETIENNE
BERNARD

Alice Malinge

I'd like to begin by asking you about your connection to language and literature. You introduce your exhibition with a poem and you have often spoken of the importance of science-fiction novels and post-apocalyptic stories for you. What role do these narratives play in your work?

Francesco Finizio

It's more about language than about literature. I don't feel like a very literary person. I grew up in an Italian immigrant home in the United States. The tug-of-war between the two languages, and by extension between the two cultures, was constant. Arriving in France added a third layer. My relationship to language is quite elastic. The same is true for literature. The idea of the plasticity of language reminds me of Louis Wolfson's book *Le schizo et les langues*¹ that Deleuze and Guattari cite in *Mille Plateaux*². Wolfson was schizophrenic, and he recounts his life and the linguistic techniques he developed as a

self-taught polyglot to escape his mother's grip. He also suggests improvements for the French

language—which is especially surprising considering that Wolfson had never, at that time, left his hometown of New York. I came across the book not long after I arrived in France—it was a providential find.

1. Louis Wolfson, *Le Schizo et les langues* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), with a foreword by Gilles Deleuze.

2. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980).

AM Have you often introduced an exhibition or project with a poem?

FF It's really the first time to introduce myself or my work, and I didn't consciously think about writing a poem. I'd have a hard time seeing it as a poem; it's more of a rant, a tirade maybe, in the sense that there's no structure to the poetry... it's quite stream of consciousness.



Etienne Bernard We use the term "poem" because in its structure there is something reminiscent of a prose poem.

FF If there is something to associate with the poem, it is plasticity. The poem tries to make language resistant to a literal reading; the words come back to life, and can form shapes, becoming a kind of chewing gum for the mind. From there, the link is with pop music and the work of the lyricist, who lays down the words and the rhymes. The meaning lies in the way things feel.

EB The logic of the poem, in its plasticity, can be compared to this text, but it is at the same time extremely demanding. It sets the tone for project of the exhibition. You talk about ranting, and we could equally talk of slam.

What place does it have in the *Go Ghost!* project? Is it central or is it, on the contrary, a commentary, a satellite?

FF It's probably closer to slam, but I don't know much about it. In any case, the emphatic dimension is what drew me to poets like Allen Ginsberg and Amiri Baraka, and singers like Mark E. Smith of The Fall. At the beginning of each show, there is a text that introduces the scene. So, it's fundamental but also part the process; it's one and the same, the way the elements come together—the way I say what I need to say is kind of the same way I put things together in the space.



AM Among the references you mention, the author Antoine Volodine comes up again and again, *Minor Angels*³ in particular. In this novel, we meet a community of people who live in an undefined world, where the stratum of today's society are evident, but we cannot understand their organization. Can you tell us about it?

3. Antoine Volodine, *Minor Angels*, trans. Jordan Stump (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Originally published in French as *Des anges mineurs* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).



FF What stuck with me in *Minor Angels* is the positioning with regard to the present, the experience of the world, of life, where the reality lived by the novel's characters is a world of the past, one that is lived vicariously, through stories. It is at this level that there is a strong connection between the exhibition and Volodine: the feeling that we are witnessing something that is playing with the materialization of memories of a past world. In Volodine's work there is also this reality that is a little syrupy. We don't know what time we are in. Perhaps it's a dreamtime, because people are talking about the world they have lived but which no longer exists. It is a place with a community aspect, but at the same time this community is imbued with a carceral or post-apocalyptic dimension; it's a bit dark... I'm interested in Volodine, but *Philip K. Dick*⁴ is another important reference for me, in relation to this split in reality, in which we're always pulled, between the impossibility of distinguishing what is real and unreal or illusory. This separation is schizophrenic, and is perhaps also something that I can relate to with regard to my own cultural schizophrenia. I have drawn on it at different times, because I find this division, this split, interesting, informative, perhaps because it indicates my own inabilities to reconcile polarities.





EB Let's talk about the materiality of the exhibition *Go Ghost!*, about its use of low-quality, even worn out, materials. In the introductory poem, you use an expression that caught my attention: "LO-FI SEMPER FI." LO-FI means "low quality" and SEMPER FI is the motto of the US Marines.

FF Yes, it's the motto of all the assholes you find in college fraternities or in the Marines... the paragons of a certain America that makes me sick.



EB So it's a battle cry. Is there a kind of mannerism in the assertion of this lo-fi aesthetic?

FF Honestly, not yet. When I sense any lurking mannerism, I'll change direction! It's true that lo-fi is as ridiculous a term as alternative rock. I'm interested in lo-fi for its singularities, the artists who occupy the margins because their mix isn't clean,



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because they don't always see the need to polish their work, to erase their mistakes.

EB If we put the question of mannerism to one side, we can talk about references. We've talked about assemblage in particular, in its American tradition, but when I visit the show, I also see fairly strong references to German artists, such as Manfred Pernice.



FF Yes, but much more fun!

EB In the exhibition, we can see a lot of references to different aesthetic fields. Listing them wouldn't be fruitful, but if we consider the work while ignoring these artistic references, looking at it in the context of contemporary societal debates, do you have a message about recycling and the issue of waste?

FF I'm a little disappointed with people seeing the exhibition through that prism; we immediately fall into a trap. The feeling I get reading Volodine is that we are in a future world, one where experiencing the world is no longer possible, so we retell our memories of the past world, where experiencing the world was possible. Volodine's world is stripped back; we have to make do with low-quality ersatz objects,





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evoking a vanished world. I feel like our reality is not far from that. I think about trends, movements, where we talk about retrotech or neo-retro. From that point, we are in a logic exacerbated by the monetization of reality that every past moment is a potential future in the sense of an investment. The future becomes plural—futures—a collective vision parceled into individual visions. So the materials I use and the things constructed are conceived in terms of a material poverty, to narrate, communicate this sense of estrangement.

AM I'd like to talk to you about your relationship with the objects that delineate the exhibition. How did you find them? How did you organize them? Did they have a life in the studio that predates their life in the exhibition?

FF I'm not a collector. There are groupings, families of objects that come together without necessarily having a precise objective. Generally, they all fall into the category of the pareidolia figure; everything can conjure up a face. Because it is so primary, and is one of the first things we learn, something that ensures the survival of a human. I find the fact that smartphones have face recognition funny, this function that recognizes the face.

Talking about the studio, it's a place where I experiment with materials, with how things can go together. I look for connections between things; it's anything but a systematic work—there's no grid.

AM Do you have any kind of domestic relationship with these objects?

FF I think that for a long time, domesticity has been and is clearly visible and determining in the constitution of the work. I remember Roe Rosen once wrote an [article](#)⁵ about Guy Ben-Ner and myself in which he talked about the domestic man as an artistic figure. My practice is cemented to the house—the spaces constantly merge...

EB The space in the FRAC Bretagne where you have installed *Go Ghost!* is very close to a real white cube (it is a square white room). In the introductory poem you write: "I am interested in spaces that are built from the inside rather than from above." I like this sentence very much because the installation as it is placed seems to construct the space, to occupy it, in the sense of occupying or taking territory. You charge the entire space without



5. Roe Rosen, "The Horny Homemakers, On a Photograph by Guy Ben Ner, and a Photograph by Francesco Finizio" [in Hebrew], *Studio Art Magazine*, no. 161 (July–August 2005). The information is from the author's website: <https://www.roerosen.com/pagecv>



hanging anything on the walls. You use the electricity to play a soundtrack. You use the room's lighting as it is. And that's all. Could we perhaps consider that the territorial occupation by this installation is a contradiction in the use of the white cube as a neutral space promoting the work's autonomy.



FF

Maybe it's a positive criticism, the goal is to not be fixated on thinking about the space. It's not a finality in the sense that the space that emerges through the installation is a space that is made to be walked through. It is not made to be absorbed in one image. I feel like the proof of this is in the documentation of the exhibition. It is difficult to get a sense of the installation. It's a bit like the images we receive every day from Mars. There is nothing to see until you start looking. As you roam, zooming in and out, you discover the mold on the rover and other details that allow you to make connections and structure your experience. Criticism is possible at this level, that vision is not put forward as the only sensorial faculty for understanding. In the context of the white cube, in the sense that Brian O'Doherty⁶ and Clement Greenberg understood it, the idea is to give vision precedence.

AM

Many of the objects in the installation directly reference the sacred, such as the masks, the halos, even Pope John Paul II in one of the videos. Could the approach be described as libertarian? That is to say, a way of having fun, of making fun of sacred forms, and thus the culture of religious cultures?

6. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986).



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FF

Yes, I can see myself in that approach. The register of the sacred emerges from formal associations, of halos, coins, gilded lids. These objects instrumentalize the light. The pontiff's hat looks like a breast ... activating these associations lets us imagine other relationships between things. However, perhaps what is mocked is more the institutional form and its inevitable overgrowth rather than any specific religious culture.

I'm interested in religion in its primitive forms, as manifested in the figure of the anchorite. But this applies to just about everything. We really like something when it's fresh and light. In the poem I make a connection between the anchorite and the comic.



I remember, when I arrived in France, I read a book by Jacques Lacarrière, attracted by its title: *Les hommes ivres de Dieu, histoire des anachorètes*⁷. It felt like I was reading a chapter of the history of performance art, because it was as fascinating as it was absurd. We went from Simeon Stylites to Vito Acconci. It made me think of Buñuel and his *Simon of the Desert*⁸, which draws other parallels. In the poem, I made this connection with the comic because I get the same sense of solitude, a rather ascetic dimension. It might seem a bit corny, but I really like the figure of Saint Francis because he talks to animals. Look at what Pasolini did in *The Hawks and the Sparrows*⁹, that's it. It starts like this, with the Neapolitan comedian Totò and Nino Davoli walking around, and Totò, he's St Francis!

7. Jacques Lacarrière, *Men Possessed by God: The Story of the Desert Monks and Ancient Christendom*, trans. Roy Monkcom (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964). Originally published in French as *Les hommes ivres de Dieu* (Paris: Arthaud, 1961).

8. *Simon of the Desert* (*Simón del desierto*) is a 1965 Mexican film by Luis Buñuel.

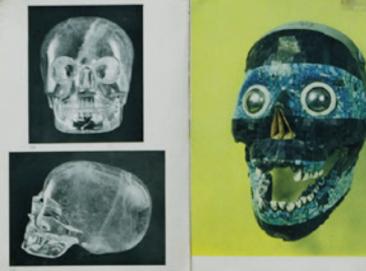
9. *The Hawks and the Sparrows* (*Uccellacci e uccellini*) is a 1966 Italian film by Pier Paolo Pasolini.



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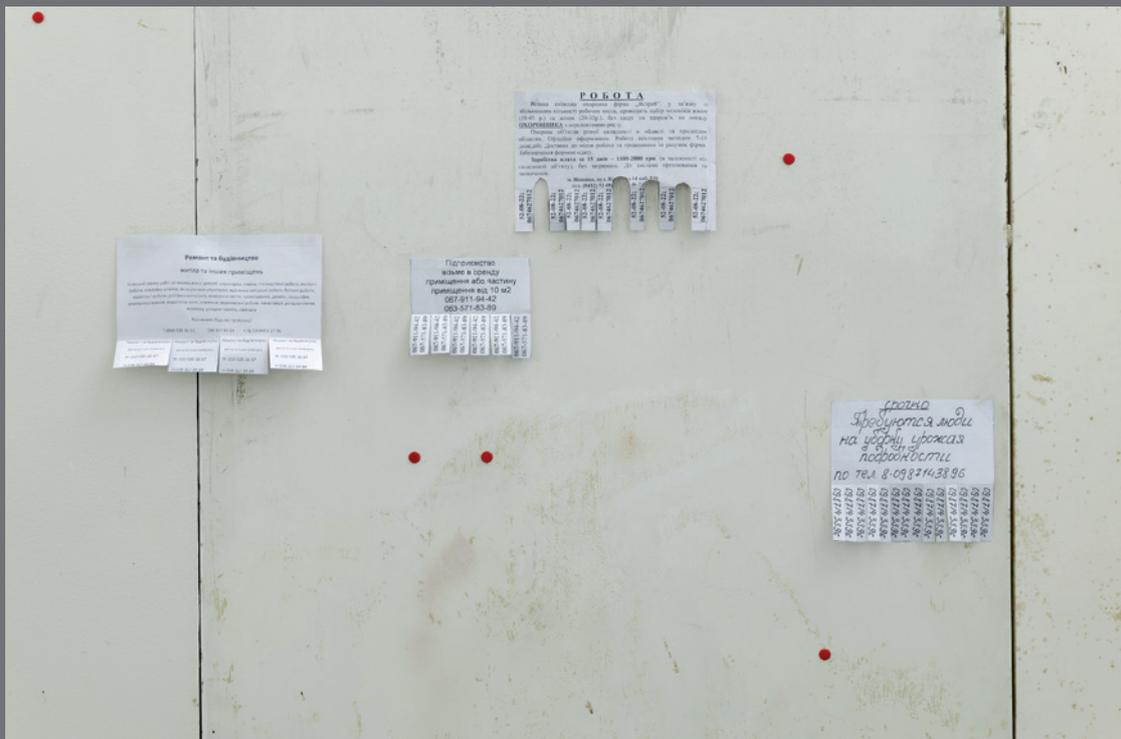
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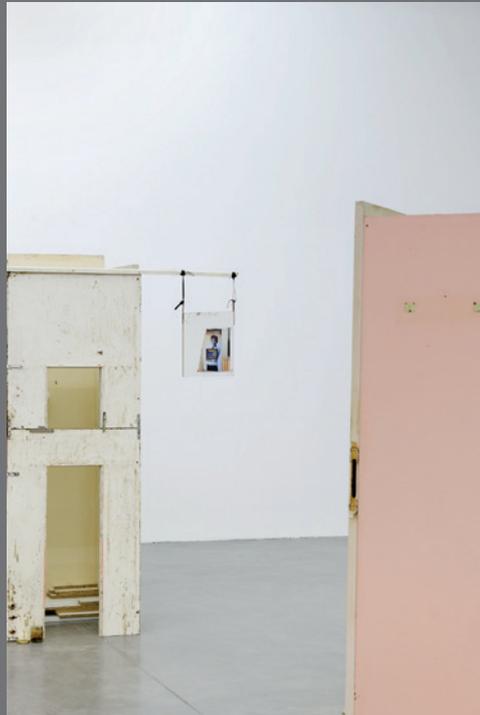
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AM What about survivalism? Is that something you think about?

FF I'm interested in the techniques of survivalism. So, if I need to make something, I look at survivalists; it's practical. How you make things, how you can put things together, the right glues, materials, ways of assembling, and so on. I like to look because it's a way of understanding the world where intelligence is the result of observation and hands. "Thinking through making" as Tim Ingold says.



We quickly realize that a shoelace is made up of smaller strands of threads, and we go back tens of thousands of years to find our ancestors weaving thread. In the figure of the survivalist, like that of the anchorite, there is the concept of poverty as a mode of action. For me, this is where the figures correspond, in the stripping back that forces us to look at things, to go beyond their name, in order to seize them and act on reality. I find this rationale in architecture. I'm thinking in particular of Yona Friedman's *Architectures de survie*⁹, or in a more architectural sense, of Siah Armajani whose focus leans toward the vernacular. He establishes a dynamic in his maquettes. From four elements he recreates a place that he has seen and gives those looking at it the impression that they have seen it too, that they know it. Every maquette embodies a dynamic relationship. Perhaps this installation at the Frac operates in a similar way.



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