

ALIVE AND KICKING AROUND

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I like those who determinedly elude the recognisability of ideas, choices, gestures and signs in art. And who aspire to infiltrate the pre-existing at will, to manifest themselves and communicate in unexpected ways, shifting attention to aspects of an exhibition or event that are marginal, non-central and seemingly devoid of meaning. I am speaking of a liminality that Davide Sgamaro has made fundamental and programmatic to his practice, the way he favours the margins as a strategic position, thus granting himself the freedom to range from the visible to the invisible, from the corporeal to the immaterial, and from codified spaces to those off the beaten track. Sgamaro certainly does not shy away from intervention or involvement, but he chooses to act only under precise conditions, in subtle and light-hearted, biting, provocative and sometimes humorous ways, with his own faith in the unpredictable, fascinated by things that know how to hide in the shadows, revealing themselves only to the attentive eye.

To explain how much his interventions both want and refuse to be noticed, I must confess to having overlooked some of them myself. This was before I came across the majestic and verdant instability of his *Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (green)*, a skydancer not unlike those you might encounter at a funfair or in an advertising campaign, which was duly tucked away in a corner of the 'Facile Ironia. L'ironia nell'arte italiana tra XX e XXI secolo' exhibition at MAMbo in Bologna. Here was a work that particularly struck me in its way of playing down and marginalising things. The collective as a whole was basically designed to be a measure of *hilaritas*, but Davide Sgamaro's intervention went straight to the heart of the contemporary with its hypnotic and hallucinatory kinetic rising, struggling and collapsing. It is difficult for me to put into words that paroxysmal and at the same time authentic way of freeing ourselves and others from the presumptions of art, of discrediting its aura and formalisms, here ridiculed by a clownish "cucù settete!", a playful aero-mechanical iteration of movements. We see the skydancer crashing into a wall, sensing that it is destined for slow self-destruction, because collapse seems to be the irreversible fate of that light and delicate material propelled by the air that gives it substance. But this is certainly not a statement that focuses on the originality of the object itself; rather, it emphasises where and how a work can unexpectedly escape its usual self-assurance, transforming itself into a simple moment of reality.

This, I would say, is the explosive strategic essence of Davide Sgamaro. His focus is on studying and implementing ways to evade, transcend and transgress the defined and most obvious boundaries of showing and showing off. And since this is not a simple or obvious choice, I was immediately won over by his very personal and unobtrusive way of breaking the rules. As a result, I immediately sought out the artist, wanted to meet him and was thus able to fill in the gaps in my knowledge, learning more about and gaining a deeper understanding of his choice to insinuate himself into ever-changing other places. And certainly not as a shy stranger, but as an intruder without a pass, skilled at sneaking in and well camouflaged in the ganglions of the system. A bit like an infection, one of those viruses that invisibly affect the body, or like a linguistic alteration reminiscent of Burroughs, which compromises and thus reinvents syntax and narrative order.

All the 'stylistic' choices, subjects and actions in Sgamaro's work, which ranges from installation to performance, come 'from below', drawn from the street, from youth customs and fashions, from media codes and from all the most pervasive tools of technology. The artist sees them as 'forms of resistance', transforming his art into a continuous challenge to the predictability and presumed obviousness of the visible, and assigning a role of substantial responsibility to our ability to enjoy, participate and become involved in works in the form of smileys, sweatshirts, tongue piercings, exploded firecrackers or kicks on the wall with sneaker soles. He thus chooses to blur the line between reality and representation, the ultra-visible and almost invisible, important and irrelevant, ranging from the environmental scale of laser signboard works such as *FENOMENO (Smiley)* of 2022 to that of ink marks on the tips of trainers *Tonight (alive and kicking)* from 2024, which replace the skirting board and certainly do not catch the eye. On the other hand, I am fascinated by the use of colour, which Sgamaro uses as a hallmark of individual pieces or series of works and which, also highlighted in parentheses in the titles, playfully references the great tradition of Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein and Dan Flavin, who were active in the twentieth century and continue to influence the chances of originality in the twenty-first. Without fear, and with an excellent academic background alongside unforgettable teachers such as Alberto Garutti, Davide knows how to appropriate this and, as the heir to a post-era, demonstrates that he knows how, casually, to make that enormous array of visual and semantic inventions his own. Thus, monochrome is treated and made kinetic in works consisting of hanging

sweatshirts. There may be just one, as in *Goosebumps (lilac)* from 2024, or many, changing in number and colour in line with the tonal and spatial characteristics of the context in which they are placed. Pictorially speaking, however, they form a monochrome that animates the space without overwhelming it. What we see is what it is, a hyper-real image that never appears devoid of its own depth and its own epochal *raison d'être*.

Much more remains to be added, which inevitably concerns the fearless exploration of taboos and grey areas, to give voice and face to what Julie Ackermann, in her book *Hyperpop. La Pop au temps du capitalisme numérique* (2024), defines as “new queer ways of being in the world”. But I would like to save this aspect for my next text, if there is to be one, on this artist’s work. To conclude, I would like to refer back to Ackermann: “Starting from the assumption that all criticism is futile if it does not affect the structures of power, hyperpop takes into account the stratification of meanings on the internet to bring out new forms of sincerity. In this way, it puts an end to the unchallenged dominance of irony, while at the same time feeding on its critical reflexivity.”

This is also an apt interpretation for our artist, whose work acquires its most authentic *raison d'être* in the post domain. So, please, don’t read what I have written as something you already believe you know. Davide Sgambaro’s language lies between the lines, beyond words, and today it needs to be contextualised and understood in depth.

Hyper hyper hooray!