

**WAKE-UP CALL.  
DI UN PRESENTE IRREALE, PER UN FUTURO DISINCANTATO  
(OF AN UNREAL PRESENT, FOR A DISENCHANTED FUTURE)**

*Critical essay by Irene Sofia Comi for Luca Staccioli's solo exhibition "Wake-up call"*

"What is a statue, a portrait, a group, if not a 'toy'? A toy that is to civilisation what a wooden horse is to a child. A bronze must be caressed lovingly, like a doll." (Marino Marini in F. Gualdoni (edited by), *Marino Marini. Le opere e i libri*, 1998).

"It is not just the [...] objects that are being returned but the means to transfer and perpetuate knowledge." (Moirra Simpson, "Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education, in *Museum International*, 2009)

"The fable always explicitly formulates a moral truth; there is no hidden meaning, and nothing is left to our imagination. The fairy tale, on the contrary, leaves every decision to us, and even allows us to make none. It is up to us to apply the fairy tale to our lives or simply to enjoy the fantastic things it tells us." (Bruno Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy tales*, 1976).

With these three quotations from different years, authors and disciplines, I have decided to introduce Luca Staccioli's poetics, a layered distillate that skillfully combines many different ingredients, amalgamated with such harmony that it is no longer possible to distinguish them at the moment of tasting. Thus, as we enter the exhibition, we cannot say for sure whether we have landed in a humorous amusement park or whether we are on a guided tour that will lead us through an imaginary and personal tale, or whether perhaps we have just ended up in one of our most bizarre dreams, with its melancholic atmosphere and sugary taste, ready to perturb us with the appearance of a few jarring notes, which upon waking will reveal improbable associations. In observing our surroundings, pure rational logic becomes elusive. Pre-constituted certainties are shattered: are we faced with phantasmal caricatures that are the fruit of autobiographical memories? toy-sculptures that are the protagonists of fantastical scenarios? overabundant consumer goods that are the legacy of some sort of event?

Staccioli's works have a strong narrative component, in which the sense of displacement prevails. Yet what appears is familiar to our eyes. In a continuous alternation of theory and process, the elements constituting his works come from known contexts, immersed in the pervasiveness of the iconosphere, capable of dissimulating life through sight, wrapping the environment with the insidious surface of images. The latter, which are chosen by analysing their social function, are reworked with a hermeneutic will. In this way, Staccioli's art savours political commitment, without becoming an ideological manifesto. The references that nurture the artist's multidisciplinary research are numerous: condemnation of the solipsistic habits of a degenerate individualism, the result of a neo-liberal society; awareness of a political commitment in terms of ecology and community, exercised for a revolution of living; affirmation of a sweet and bitter existence that returns to the melancholic origin of puerile memories, drawing new lifeblood from decontextualised images, anonymous traces of the historical past. In the works, the artist gives life to empty environments and semantically strong fetishes. The human presence is only evident from the traces it leaves behind, archaeological remains of a lively dying present. In this tragic and at the same time



Via Ponte di Legno 9  
20134, Milano (MI)

+39 324 9974878  
info@artnoble.co.uk

liberating abandonment, the themes of irony and childhood play a redemptive function. A playful, childlike attitude shines through in the vivid, bright colours chosen for the works, with its cartoonish, caricature-like aesthetics.

In this respect, I am reminded of the photographic series *Familiar Stories (ritorni)*, capable of synthesising contrasting polarities: illuminated by saturated lights, childlike-style maquettes generate alienating interiors, scenographies created with didò that reek of existential listlessness. In bedrooms, dining rooms, cots and bathrooms, silhouettes-objects appear in the strangest functions and positions. They are forgotten characters, drawn from images of imprisonment from 20th-century photographic archives. Suspended in the void to form a music box or intently resting in a night scene reminiscent of star-shaped fluorescent stickers, these figures are ghosts of history still imprisoned in the present. We also find them inhabiting *Studio per una protesta* (Studies for a protest), a series of drawings in which nature, osmotically, transforms them from functional objects into liberated and elastic beings, themselves creators of barely hinted landscapes that the observer's imagination can complete.

Staccioli's art is close to existence, dreams and emotions. It does not bend too much to realism and does not stray too far from reality. Within this logic, the choice of using different expressive languages is a procedural necessity before being an aesthetic one. In fact, through different media - collage, drawing, sculpture, photography, video and embroidery - the artist manages to re-appropriate the *life of the things* he experiences every day, the same things that make up our visual and mnemonic baggage. As a child, for example, when I was at the supermarket with my parents, I used to entertain myself by perfectly rearranging the food in the shopping trolley, according to a principle of maximum optimisation of space, in a sort of do-it-yourself version of Lego or Tetris. I could not have imagined that within a few years I would find myself playing, with the *click* of a mouse, with the same de-materialised icon of online shopping. Messy and jaunty, the glazed ceramic series *Checkout* investigates this same obsessive *motif*. Like tired quadrupeds pointing their paws into the ground, these colourful sculptures of different sizes occupy the exhibition space. The larger ones recall Marino Marini's anti-heroes who, having lost their steed, can no longer stand as equestrian monuments. The smaller ones refer to the miniaturisations typical of childhood souvenirs and toys, stereotypes turned into icons. Likewise, the *Castello (di sabbia?)* (Castle (of sand?)) composition consists of floating office chairs, rotating washing machines and parked cars. They resemble metopes and bass-reliefs but do not show heroic deeds, they are actually epiphanies of everyday consumer products.

*Driiinn*. The alarm clock rings. The dream is over and it is time to get up. We can no longer play thoughtlessly on the beach building imaginary fortifications. Perhaps instead we have always been awake in the room and everything we have experienced is more layered than we thought, an identity game with a high symbolic value in which we either win or lose. So perhaps we have learnt our lesson? do we need to critically re-appropriate the present and remain firmly grounded in reality in order to re-imagine our future? The alarm clock then is actually a bell on the way out of school and communicates that the time of vertical and predetermined learning is over. At the end of the day, understanding or not understanding what the truth of *Reality Check* is, is a choice of awareness that depends solely on each and every one of us.

Let us return to the quotes chosen at the beginning of this text. Let us review all three. Let us pay attention, one after the other. After all, Luca says so from the beginning, when in *Way Out*, through the caring gesture of embroidery, he wraps a woollen thread around an emergency sign depicting the standardised alter ego of human beings: *Wake-up call*.

Irene Sofia Comi