

Baert Gallery is delighted to present the first dual exhibition to showcase works on paper by Francesca Gabbiani and Paolo Colombo on view from 6 April to 11 May, 2024. Though accessed via disparate repositories of memory, in their meticulously detailed artworks, both artists accentuate a proximity to our past, present and future.

In Francesca Gabbiani's intricately hand-cut paper collages, the cactus serves as a metaphor for resilience, endurance, and adaptation in an age of impending ecological challenges. Her carefully constructed works confront the beauty and terror of destruction reflecting the increasingly arid and life altering conditions of a changing climate in Southern California, where she now lives and works.

The protracted process of carving thorny spines and overlaying them to create depth and shadow extends beyond the experimental framework of stick-and-paste without compromising spontaneity. In this sense, Gabbiani is absorbed in layers of time, mirroring the cacti's own slow growth and long lifespan to underscore a humanitarian need to carry forward the vast memories ingrained within the natural world.

The addition of salt to Gabbiani's considered application of acrylic, watercolour and gouache paints makes the very act of depicting her desert flora a brutal one, gesturing towards the intensity of survival in contemporary life where water seems more precious every day. Her scenes are entirely unpeopled yet there's a sense that these are, indeed, portraits. In an ongoing series of paintings titled *The Survivors*, cactus paddles begin to take the form of faces crowding towards the centre of the frame, coarse stems bowed in quiet communion. The compositional treatment of these forms, at once bodily and architectural, renders them solitary relics against looming sinister skies. A degenerative world in which nature and urbanisation collide in their innately anarchic states.

The artist's thermal, Lynchian-washed landscapes, as in *Pink pink pink pink... Pink moon* are hauntingly

beautiful yet surreally desolate, indicating a broader preoccupation with dystopian themes of environmental degradation and societal collapse. All the while, her pieces seem at the same time to hold a sense of quiet beauty, as if there will always be some sort of beauty that survives. Drawing inspiration from literary figures like Donna Haraway and Octavia Butler as well as the westerns of Sam Peckinpah, Gabbiani's work delves into the eerie intersection of science fiction and societal critique, inviting viewers to confront the complexities of our modern world and the implications of our collective choices.

In the adjoining room, Paolo Colombo similarly fosters a sense of gestalt intelligence, collapsing the boundaries between the ancient past and present. Working exclusively with watercolour and pencil, Colombo balances his simple language with a meticulous visual method, building a tableau of dots and lines that mimic mosaic tesserae. Mythological figurations, decorative designs and pastoral vignettes emerge as fragments of history, part-excavated, inviting the viewer to journey through the veil of time.

As an Italian who has spent the vast majority of his life in Athens, the artist's attachment to the motifs of ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine culture is hardly surprising. After a twenty-one-year hiatus, in which he pursued a career in curation, Colombo returned to a painting he had left unfinished in 1979 as if not a day had passed, implicating himself in the same quiescent stream of artistic exchange his paintings evince.

Foremost in his practice is the embodiment of an economy of means; he works solitarily, mostly from memory, and with minimal materials, respecting the lineage of 'humble' art forms - such as embroidery - which he so admires. For the textile piece *Untitled, After Gold*, Colombo collaborated with Iterarte - an itinerant gallery connecting contemporary artists and artisans across the globe - to design an embroidered hessian canvas in keeping with his signature style, the facial contours of a Venus stitched in a glorious gallimaufry.

His intimate and lyrical execution demands prox-

imity, to be paid the same attention one would give when reading a book. Colombo aligns himself with poet Giorgos Seferis' yearnings for chasteness, as articulated in his poem *'An Old Man on the River Bank'* (1942):

I want nothing more than to speak simply, to
be granted that grace.
Because we've loaded even our song with so
much music that it's slowly sinking
and we've decorated our art so much that its
features have been eaten away by gold
and it's time to say our few words because
tomorrow our soul sets sail.

Such sentiments even extend to the titles of his works; *Wisteria*, *Antwerp Blue*, *Pyrrol Orange* and *Quinacridone Gold* no more than a simple indication to the primary colour used for the canvas. Like Gabbiani, Colombo's use of paper, often seamed together and stitched in these soft blues, blushing pinks and creamy whites evokes an essential humility, a historical resonance that will continue to bear the weight of expression across cultures and epochs.

Francesca Gabbiani (b. 1965, Montreal, Canada) lives and works in Los Angeles. In 1969 she moved to Switzerland and graduated from the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Geneva in 1992. Gabbiani continued her studies at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam from 1993 to 1994 and received her MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1997. Her work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York; and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Geneva (MAMCO), among other venues.

Paolo Colombo (b. 1949, Torino, Italy) lives and works in Athens, Greece. He received a degree in languages and literature from the University of Rome in 1975 but the formative years of his painting and drawing practice were self-taught. In 1977, Colombo was the first European artist to exhibit at PS1, New York. From 1986, he worked as a curator in museums across the United States, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Turkey. After a 21-year hiatus, Colombo took up his personal work as an artist again, coinciding with a move to Athens, Greece. His work has since been exhibited at Tristan Hoare, London and Baert Gallery, Los Angeles among others.