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PATRIZIO DI MASSIMO

Friends, Foes, Beds and Beaus

Opening: Thursday, January 30, 2025; 6pm-9pm

January 31 – March 8, 2025

From Tuesday to Saturday, 11am-6pm

Gió Marconi, Via Tadino 15, Milan

For Patrizio di Massimo, painting – both an urge and an obsession – serves as the ultimate analytical tool for exploring the emotional and psychological states of human life. As a self-taught painter and deep connoisseur of the great masters, di Massimo blends classical iconography with contemporary visual culture, re-examining both past and present through his own emotional and personal lens. The subjects of his paintings often resemble people who are dear to him and belong to the art world – such as artists, collectors or curators –; these allow him to identify himself from time to time in different roles and characters, investigating art history and contemporary issues relating to identity, self-determination and masculinity.

The exhibition *Friends, Foes, Beds and Beaus*, di Massimo's first solo show at the Gió Marconi gallery, takes place at a specific moment in the artist's career and is the result of a year-long working process. During this extended creative journey, on several occasions he put his hand to the artworks in his London studio, a space capable of influencing the practice itself and in which he allowed himself to listen to his own thoughts in a state of deep solitude studded with introspective insights. In its evolution and transformation, his painting practice – metaphorical, symbolist and openly lyrical – has maintained an underlying coherence over the years that is expressed here once again through a profound emotional, expressive and conceptual awareness that emerges from the exploration of the portrait and self-portrait. The artist's urge appears to be guided by the same instances that have characterised his path since his beginnings at the Brera Academy in Milan: the ineluctable necessity to question himself and his own identity, the world around him and the relationships we weave. By structuring a quest that is as much artistic as spiritual, di Massimo offers us access to his own life mediated by a visionary essence. In a process that makes him ever more (re)knowable to the observer letting him develop a progressive focus on his own image, the artist sheds – and then reclaims at will – the conventions that define male identity within the framework of painting.

Di Massimo meticulously arranges photo shoots, orchestrating every detail with his friends to achieve the desired image. Several tests are often required before the artist obtains the desired result, in a deeply performative action that can last even hours. Patrizio di Massimo's practice thus is fully endowed with a deeply performative capacity, implicit both in the creative method of the works, through the articulated steps that characterise them, and beforehand, in the feelings and urges that define and guide his work in the discovery of possible lives, situations and embodiments. Before painting, the artist digitally edits the photo by changing elements, sometimes mixing several different pictures and often altering the size of the faces, a ploy also used in ancient portraiture. Over the years di Massimo developed an increasingly consolidated oil technique, preparing the canvases by means of a process conceived with non-absorbent chalk and different colours, warmer or cooler according to the *overpainting* applied.

Friends, Foes, Beds and Beaus condenses all the most pressing issues of Patrizio di Massimo's practice – identity, everyday family life, masculinity, human self-reflection in general – and is divided into five chapters that develop in different rooms, an exhibition approach already tested on the occasion of the *Anthology* exhibition at the Pinacoteca di Jesi in 2023 and also applied to the editorial field in his latest book *Patrizio di Massimo. Anthology / Anthology* (2013-2023), published by Quodlibet.

The "Room of Quarrels" – the emotional core of the exhibition also thanks to the numerous references to the city of Milan – takes up one of the recurring themes dearest to the artist, that of quarrels and fights, which found ample space in his expressive research until 2020. All produced in 2024 and typically large in size, the works *Spatial Concept (Alice and Elena)*; *Still Life with Guitar and Mask (Michele and Monia)*; *Room 1 (Beatrice and Loredana)* and *Tears (Gaia)* are characterised by an almost grotesque distortion of emotions. Everything here is pulsating pathos: the artist plunges into painting and drags us from one canvas to the next as he goes through the emotions of anger and sadness. The subjects, who here almost take on the role of actors, stand out against detailed backgrounds depicting iconic monuments and architecture of Milan, places that are also important for the artist's personal history: Room 1 of the Brera Academy where Alberto Garutti's lectures were held. A decisive figure for the generation of Italian artists trained from the 1990s to 2013, Garutti passed away in 2023; the hall of the Milan Triennale and Villa Necchi Campiglio, a step of a project crucial to the development carried out by di Massimo in 2011. In

particular, the room relates to the period of his training at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts (2003-2007) and represents, as is often the case in the artist's practice, some close friends of the time who are now part of the art world (including artists like Michele Gabriele and Monia Ben Hamouda, Beatrice Marchi and Gaia Fugazza). The *tableaux vivants* series delves into a profound spiritual theme, central to di Massimo's belief that negative emotions must be processed with the same care and intensity as positive ones – not in a form of apology, but in one of acceptance.

Contemporary masculinity is another key theme in di Massimo's work, explored both in his self-portraits and in his depictions of others. The five portraits in the "Men's Room" focus on this theme and are inspired by traditional poses that contrast with the contemporary nature of the characters depicted. If in *The Orange Curtain (Gray and Asa)* and *The Yellow Curtain (Andrea, Simone and Terra)* the artist explores the romantic relationship of two male couples – artist Gray Wielebinski with writer Asa Sereni and the designer duo Formafantasma (Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin with their doggy Terra) –, in the painting *The Doctor Is Ill*, the artist portrays himself with his own father; the two clasp each other in a moving embrace, a loving gesture between father and son that is precious in today's patriarchal society. The painting *Beauty will Save the World (Roberto Bolle)* is dedicated to the famous Italian ballet dancer, also portrayed in a classical pose while wearing stage clothes and staring resolutely across the canvas from a stage at La Scala in Milan. This solitary portrait creates a space of generative tension in the dialogue with the work *Nike (Federico, Clementina, Dorotea and Costanza)*. The latter introduces the theme of family through the portrayal of a friend and his three daughters – the only female figures in a room otherwise populated by men – while also serving as a thematic counterpoint to di Massimo's ongoing exploration of identity and masculinity.

Themes of personal life and domesticity are central to Patrizio di Massimo's practice who dedicates the "Family Room" to the exploration of subjects such as fatherhood, parenting and care, representing himself in the company of his wife Nicoletta Lambertucci and daughter Diana. The series *28B Erlanger Road* includes several works in which the composition sometimes focuses on the presence of the parents with their daughter – together or alternating – and at other times on the relationship between the artist and his wife. The series of sleepers, always portrayed in bed in moments of most intimate closeness, represents an exclusive and analytical way for the artist to process his new life as a father and the adjustments that this entails. It is in these paintings that the drapery slowly emerges in the details, enhancing the emotional nuances in the canvases and calibrating their intensity. Little by little, beds and blankets, sheets and pillows become co-protagonists, occupying the foreground of the canvas and pushing the bodies to move, until they force the human figure out of the picture and become the undisputed subjects of the painting itself.

This is what happens in the "Room of Empty Beds". This series, comprising six monochrome paintings, tests the removal of the human figure, marking a new approach to abstraction that leads him to work exclusively on drapery. Originating from some previous works dedicated to three friends of the artist who passed away in 2023, the research has evolved over time, evolved into a deeper exploration of abstraction. Patrizio di Massimo develops here a path inspired by the seven chakras in a process of decoding of the chromatic spectrum colours. The beds, in which pillows, blankets and sheets are represented in ever-changing positions, have an epiphanic quality, imbuing the room with a meditative atmosphere, while the presence of a third small pillow once again makes them portraits of family. The rhythmic pattern of the room is altered exclusively by a small self-portrait of the artist depicted with a magenta ladybird on his forehead (*Amulet - Magenta Ladybird*). This work, together with two other self-portraits of considerably smaller dimensions than the other works in the exhibition, accompanies the public from the very moment they enter the gallery. The other two canvases dedicated to the self-portrait theme are also characterised by the presence of ladybirds (one yellow and one red), depicted on the artist's ear and cheek. Realised after a particularly complicated year for the artist marked by moments of joy and hardship, the three works here perform the function of amulets, reinforced in turn by the symbolic value of the ladybird, commonly considered a sign of good omen.

Friends, Foes, Beds and Beaus traces a journey of artistic and personal growth, highlighting the artist's daily process of examining himself and the world through his painting practice. For Patrizio di Massimo, art is therefore an instrument of acceptance, of understanding, not a remedy, but a practice for staying present in life. Each painting offers interpretative systems to investigate emotions and experiences only accessible through living; all this is therefore the first precious evidence of existence.

Chiara Nuzzi