

## GABRIELE DE SANTIS

« Drop it like it's hot »

Exhibition from April 12<sup>th</sup> to April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Opening on Friday, April 11<sup>st</sup>, 2 – 9 pm

### 'Upward Mobiling'

A conversation with Gabriele De Santis by Adam Carr

**Adam Carr:** The original idea was for me to write a text on your work. Although, when approaching the text it became clear that your new work is somewhat of a point of departure from your earlier pieces, which we have spoke about at length in person before. I thought, then, that would it be good instead to discuss together what seems to be a new direction in your practice.

**Gabriele De Santis:** Departure connotes, for me at least, an exit. Rather, I think my work is continuously developing around the intrinsic points of interest for me: the modular contexts of the written word and its ambiguity; and the humour of every day life and how both of these can intertwine with artworks.

**Adam:** What was your starting point behind the new works?

**Gabriele:** I was reading 'In Search of Lost Tima' by Proust whilst I was watching the repeat of the great match Chicago bulls VS Utah Jazz of 1998 on TV where Michael Jordan played an amazing game. I began to think of how they are interlinked – their simultaneous ambitions of measures.

**Adam:** Could speak about your use of marble as a kind of support for your new paintings? Marble has great historic and geographic links of course, so I was wondered if it is of importance as to which location you source it from...

**Gabriele:** I use the marble as a way to utilize mark-making. On top of richly patterned marbles, I paint monochrome negatives of parenthesis marks. In diptych form, they are a suggestion of opening and closing, allowing the viewer to imagine their own contents within the succession of beginning and end. I am really interested in the reference to language – parenthesis gives extra information or context to sentences. In a similar manner, this series is an attempt to add extra context to painting. Using the background texture, pre-made by nature, and imposing areas of monochrome on top, I am playing with the hierarchy of background and foreground within painting. Other works in the series play with the ambiguity of language and the symbols that create it. The simple '(' parenthesis mark is rotated, forming a smile. Other parenthesis marks seem to become mustaches, music notes or utensils. You are right; the marble comes from different places – from all over the world. I guess it is like multiple languages speaking at once. I also like the idea the marble takes so long to form. Those slabs have been witness to the world for centuries. The paint on top is applied really quickly – it's like two different dimensions of time on one surface. Their relationship to the skate canvas works is interesting, as they are opposite. The canvas works imply speed and movement, whereas the marble itself is such a slow-forming material. Moreover, the hashtag image that I frequently use is a reference to instant imaging, the contrary of marble.

**Adam:** The new works have a lot of humour attached to them. Could you speak about that?

**Gabriele:** I have an interest in personifying the artworks, giving them human attributes – allowing them to form a personality. We are surrounded by humor and many of my works are an amalgamation of things I find ironic or funny.

**Adam:** Speaking about inducing personality in your work, where your particular approach seems to result in your painting and sculptures taking on different personas, there is a whole series of pieces you are producing that animate plinths, a museum standard, raising its status and giving it character. While most of the pieces in the series turn the plinth into something much than an object used to display works, some play in line with convention in that they display works by other artists, a kind of duel function...

**Gabriele:** Yes, I have always been interested in the idea of the plinth as a support; it seems this classic rigid structure, which we have become to accept as an efficient way to display sculpture. I always find it disturbing that it seems to stop motion – but artworks (at least the ideas around them) are always in motion. Mounting the plinths on roller-skates became a metaphor to explain the constant evolvement of ideas and movement around works. It also again personifies human attributes, which I really like. I have collaborated in the past with other artists, allowing them to place their artworks on top. In the case of this show, I have placed two together, with touching cocktail glasses – it's a sentiment. We assume that artworks within exhibitions must have a relationship with one another – I wanted to play on that.

**Adam:** The roller-skates that you just mentioned, as well as basketball and specifically the Nike Jordan logo, crop up in your new work frequently. They appear to me to be used as motifs within the work the work and deployed for reasons of familiarity, a reference to American culture...

**Gabriele:** I think rather than their aesthetic properties of familiarity, I am more interested in their abilities to let you move. Indeed, the idea to let the artwork move is the main idea for me amongst these works. The Jordan symbol, again, is an idea of illustrating movement – reaching new heights, perhaps referring to the American Dream, the hunger for success. I like the idea of heights within the works, again a suggestion of competition or limits. The plinths are raised off the ground; the t-shirts enveloping the canvas seem to leave a white part of the canvas bare at the bottom, a bit like a midriff, as though it is human and stretching.

**Adam:** A playground of performativity!

