

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Rodney Graham: 'Più Arte dello Scovolino!'

28 January – 4 March 2016
Via Zenale 3, Milan, 20123

"Graham's work plays with the disjuncture between, on the one hand, the apparent obviousness of the references he is making to 'masters' of high culture that we are all familiar with, and, on the other, creating interpolations or devices that complicate our vision or reading of them to the point that we 'overload'."

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Rodney Graham's debut exhibition at Lisson Gallery Milan, 'Più Arte dello Scovolino!' presents the work of a hypothetical artist lost to history: the pipe cleaner artist. A new body of sculptures and paintings see the Canadian artist in modernist mode, casting himself as the maker of abstract sculptures and paintings that supposedly date from early- to mid-Sixties Italy. So often the chief protagonist in his own art-historically informed tableaux, Graham is simultaneously Renaissance Man and comical persona; his works at once profoundly inter-textual and humorously self-reflexive. Each image layers multiple references and allusions, their sheer decorousness a mine of visual puns and cross-cultural riddles.

For over forty years Graham has pursued a conceptual, multi-disciplinary project that encompasses photography, sculpture, installation, books, film, video, audio and painting to explore past and present possibilities of creativity. Fundamentally a performance artist, Graham's art proceeds from disguise and digression, through quotation and humour, towards an understanding of place within culture and time.

The works on display at Lisson Gallery Milan evolved out of the props Graham first made for *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961* (2013), a diptych lightbox which depicts the artist in a rustic, sun-dappled room meditatively knotting pipe cleaners into works of art. Inspiration came from three separate images: a 1930s Man Ray photograph of Jean Cocteau working on a hanging pipe cleaner construction like those he made for his 1930 film, *Blood of a Poet*; a photo of Asger Jorn in his studio in Albisola taken in 1961; and an image of Lucio Fontana relaxing in the backyard of his Milan studio while apparently playing with pebbles, moving them around on a canvas in front of him. "I wanted," Graham has said, "to invoke an image of a studio utopia in a period where modernism still seemed to hold possibilities."

Like Graham's earlier works made in the guise of the 'gifted amateur', which likewise explore the idea of the artist's studio, the new pipe cleaner pieces are situated on the convergence of ironic distance, serious homage and play, where romance is fleshed out with pragmatism. Graham's depiction of the artist states: "Like Cocteau he uses pipe cleaners but his art is more informal, his influences more 'contemporary': Klein, Fontana, Manzoni. He is probably a northern painter like Jorn (who came to Italy partly for his health, I think) and he is trying to move into three-dimensional work by way of assemblage. An avid scuba diver, his work is influenced by the colourful diversity of Mediterranean coral."

By interpolating new artworks into a prior point in time and absurdly up-ending the logic of production, Graham finds new ways to engage with sculpture and painting, footnoting art history with his own invention.

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About the artist

Rodney Graham pulls at the threads of cultural and intellectual history through photography, film, music, performance and painting. One of the most original and influential artists of his generation, Graham has constructed a complex and articulate practice which operates through systems of quotation, reference, adaptation and inscription from other works or authors. He presents cyclical narratives that pop with puns and references to literature and philosophy, from Lewis Carroll to Sigmund Freud to Kurt Cobain, with a sense of humour that betrays Graham's footing in the post-punk scene of late 1970s Vancouver.

Rodney Graham was born in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada in 1949. He graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1971 and lives and works in Vancouver. Solo exhibitions include 'Rodney Graham — Canadian Humourist', Vancouver art Gallery (2012), 'Rollenbilder — Rollenspiele', Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2011), Museu D'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2010), Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (2004), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2002), Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2001) and Kunsthalle Wien (1999). He has participated in group exhibitions such as the 13th, 14th and 17th Sydney Biennales (2002, 2006, 2010), the Whitney Biennial, New York (2006) and the Biennale d'Art contemporain de Lyon, France (2003). He represented Canada at the 47th Venice Biennale (1997) and among awards he has received the Gershon Iskowitz Prize, Toronto (2004), the Kurt Schwitters-Preis, Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, Germany (2006) and the Audain Prize for lifetime achievement in visual arts, British Columbia (2011).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, as well as those of significant British sculptors from Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg to a younger generation led by Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza. With two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth to open under the High Line in New York in 2016, Lisson Gallery supports and develops artists globally, including Marina Abramovic, Allora and Calzadilla, Ai Weiwei, Gerard Byrne, Liu Xiaodong, Tatsuo Miyajima, Rashid Rana, Pedro Reyes and Santiago Sierra.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours Monday-Friday 10am-6pm. Closed between 1pm-3pm

Location Via Zenale 3, Milan, 20123

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