

Mark Wallinger *Italian Lessons*

Private View 5:30 – 7:30pm, Saturday 27 January 2018

Exhibition 27 January – 10 March 2018

Victoria Miro Venice, Il Capricorno, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Image: **Mark Wallinger**, *Genius of Venice* (detail), 1991
Glass, catalogue pages, nightlights, metal brackets
38 x 32 x 6 cm / 15 x 12 5/8 x 2 3/8 inches each, 7 parts
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Todd-White Art Photography
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Victoria Miro, in collaboration with Hauser & Wirth, is delighted to present *Italian Lessons*, an exhibition by Mark Wallinger. Selected by the artist especially for Victoria Miro Venice, the works on display date from 1991 to 2016 and reflect a career-long engagement with ideas of power, authority, artifice and illusion. While sources of inspiration include the Italian masters and masterpieces in Italian collections, this is the first time many of these works have been shown in Italy.

“In a sense, the exhibition is like my mini Grand Tour.” – Mark Wallinger

Encompassing autobiography and art history, the *Italian Lessons* of the exhibition title are manifold. They refer to Wallinger’s own education and to his exposure to the Italian masters: via a charismatic college lecturer in his native Essex; a seminal exhibition in London; a bicycle tour from Paris to Florence. Equally, the *Lessons* make reference to the cornerstones of art history – such as the development of perspective and *trompe-l’oeil* techniques – and the shifts in consciousness they have brought about. *Lessons* theological as well as pedagogical may be deduced in the content or context of his source material, part of a long-term consideration of religion as one of the ideological forces through which order is imposed on the world.

The earliest work in the exhibition, *Genius of Venice*, 1991, features a series of pages from the catalogue of the 1983–1984 Royal Academy exhibition *The Genius of Venice 1500 – 1600*, a blockbuster show of Venetian masters remembered chiefly for introducing British audiences, including a young Mark Wallinger, to Titian’s late masterpiece *The Flaying of Marsyas*, c1570 – 1576 (on permanent display in the National Museum, Kroměříž, Czech Republic). Seven reproductions from the exhibition catalogue are displayed, each sandwiched between glass and illuminated from behind by a flickering nightlight to reveal the presence of an image overleaf. Uncanny juxtapositions – the sacred and profane, youth and old age, for example – might encourage us to tease out new interpretations from these ghostly composites, while the format of the work lends these candlelit reproductions the gravitas of devotional images – and perhaps unlocks a concomitant desire for transcendent meaning.

Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity* first piqued Wallinger’s intellectual curiosity during his teens, when a tutor at his art foundation course at Loughton College introduced the fifteenth-century fresco as part of a transformative lecture that, among other key subjects, alighted on Brunelleschi and his development of one-point linear perspective. Later, Wallinger experienced the work in person on a bicycle tour, an artistic pilgrimage of sorts from Paris to Florence which, naturally, included the church of Santa Maria Novella. Wallinger’s *Masaccio*, 1998, was completed later still, while he was Henry Moore Sculpture Fellow at the British School in Rome. To diagrammatic drawings detailing the work’s exalted orthogonals, he adds a self-penned limerick (whose structure is subject to its own system of order):

*Meeting parallel lines at Infinity
Or the vanishing point of the Trinity,
From the apex or base
We might see our own face
Staring back as the Ghost of Divinity.*

A play on art-making's inherent artifice – particularly the arrested time of *la natura morta* – Wallinger's *Double Still Life*, 2009, comprises two identical displays of silk flowers: roses, lilies and other imperishable blooms arranged in plastic urns. Wallinger refers to the work as delivering the emotional equivalent of a one-two punch: delight quickly followed by disappointment; a sense of natural fecundity, 'real' beauty, perhaps even good taste, withering in a way the flowers themselves never could. In Wallinger's hands these extravagant arrangements, the sort intended to flank an altar, grand staircase or stage, frame nothing so much as a charged emptiness into which the viewer is invited to step.

Charged emptiness is also palpable in *Ego*, 2016, in which Wallinger playfully recreates the almost-touching hands of God and Adam from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel. Comprising two iPhone photographs depicting the hands of the artist – Wallinger, ever resourceful, is model for both God and Adam – the work recreates the gesture in an act of impersonation whose hubris would be arch were Wallinger's *Ego* not an obviously humble reproduction Blu-Tacked to the wall.

While Wallinger's work encourages us to look at things from new angles, just as often it reveals how hard it can be to separate the real from the imaginary. Many of the works on show make use of photography or simulacra in order to test the extent to which the potency of an image or object transcends reproduction. In his celebrated work, *I am Innocent*, 2010, Wallinger makes a life-size, double-sided reproduction of Velázquez's *Pope Innocent X* (in the Palazzo Pamphilj, Rome), one side as Velázquez painted it, the other reversed, and, suspending it from the ceiling, sets it in motion so that it spins continuously, to beguiling optical effect. As a creative act, this seems highly irreverent, perhaps even satirical (the idea of 'spin' and its relation to the construction of image seeming to grow with each revolution). Yet, this apparently simple animation nonetheless leaves the Pope's unnerving gaze, along with Velázquez's genius and – crucially – Wallinger's veneration of the original intact. Who is Innocent? Or even innocent? As a comment on individuality and authority, the work, despite its punning title, deals with concepts that seem infinitely complex. Which may, in the end, be one of the abiding *Lessons* of the exhibition, one that offers the viewer the opportunity to view art not in a didactic sense but as a tool to unlock other meanings, to reach their own conclusions.

Mark Wallinger is one of the UK's leading contemporary artists. Having previously been nominated for the Turner Prize in 1995, he won in 2007 for his installation *State Britain*. His work *Ecce Homo*, 1999, was the first piece to occupy the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square. Later it was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2001, where Wallinger was Britain's representative. Most recently, *Labyrinth*, 2013, a major and permanent commission for Art on the Underground, was created to celebrate 150 years of the London Underground. Wallinger has held solo exhibitions at institutional venues including Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland (2017); The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (2017); Serlachius Museum / Art Museum Gösta, Mänttä, Finland (2016); BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, England (2012); Museum de Pont, Tilburg, Netherlands (2011); Kunstneres Hus, Oslo, Norway (2010); Aargauer Kunsthhaus, Aarau, Switzerland (2008); Museo de Arte Carillo Gill, Mexico City, Mexico (2005); Neu Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany (2004); Vienna Secession, Vienna, Austria (2000); Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, England (2000); Palais Des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium (1999); Museum for Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland (1999); the Serpentine Galleries, London, England (1995). Upcoming exhibitions include *MARK WALLINGER MARK* at Centro Pecci, Prato, Italy (2018). His work is also displayed in the collections of many leading international museums including Tate, London, England; MoMA, New York NY; and Centre Pompidou, Paris, France.

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