

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Panicelli, Ida, "Marisa Merz, Madre," *ArtForum*, Summer 2007. Pg516.

NAPLES

Marisa Merz

MADRE

A sort of musical cadence structured this installation of recent works, just a few in each of the gallery's six rooms, featuring Marisa Merz's familiar materials—copper wire, oiled paper, lead, clay, glass, gold leaf, wood—and themes. There were pauses and accelerations, and unexpected voids. In *Untitled*, 2004–2007, weavings of copper wire

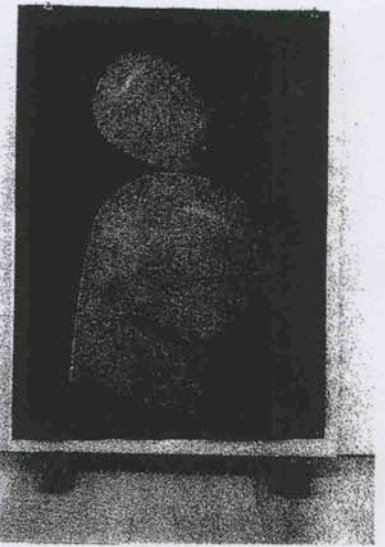
hung between the walls like the lines of a pentagram, delineating an oblique triangulation and leading the viewer's gaze toward a corner of the room where one saw . . . absolutely nothing. It is here, in the margins, where every noise falls silent, that Merz wishes to lead us, so we can focus our attention on what is apparently insignificant, anonymous, or incongruous. There she points out things whose origins seem to have been forgotten and whose destination is ignored.

Merz's approach does not follow a logical line but proceeds via unpredictable twists and turns, with surprising moments of intimacy; her work evokes fragility and contingency. The sculpture *Fontana* (Fountain), 2001–2007, alludes to nature's capacity for regeneration: A small lead basin on the floor contains a desert rose that is able to survive a long time without water but blooms as soon as it is hydrated. A light jet of water creates a delicate bubble that mimics the flower's round form; the bubble grazes the flower and trembles at the slightest movement of the air. Here, Merz condenses forms and meanings and at the same time makes them seem to float free and evaporate.

The human face was a dominant motif in the exhibition: barely delineated ovals, profiles without features, or sometimes with grotesque physiognomies; diaphanous female faces, sometimes deformed, sometimes lovely—as in *Untitled*, 2004, in which a head, sketched in blue and black, is held between two delicate little hands, its eyes lowered and mouth open in what might be a smile or a cry. Merz leaves open the door of ambiguity: Just as she does not define forms, she does not define feelings, only hinting at states of mind and allowing them to remain at the threshold of visibility.

In the last room of the exhibition, two large sheets of paper, *Untitled*, 2006, seemed to encapsulate the mystery of human encounter. Everything was in precarious balance, the unframed paper attached with thumbtacks to wooden panels behind a pane of glass that rested against the wall. On the first sheet, two heads in profile stand out against an opaque black background, a small one on top of a larger one, with eyes like luminous slits; the bigger face looks downward, the other upward. On the second sheet, gold spray paint defines the same profiles against a neutral background. Nocturnal and radiant, the heads are suspended in an undefined space, relating to each other only through a barely perceptible point of contact: a momentary point of equilibrium between movement and inertia. That unstable point of balance is the place of every possible occurrence, the prelude to a fall into darkness or an ascent toward the light.

Marisa Merz, *Senza titolo* (Untitled), 2004, mixed media on paper, 83 1/2 x 59 1/2".



—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.