

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Rabottini, Alesandro, "Ugo Rondinone," *Frieze*, March 2009, pp. 166-167

Ugo Rondinone



Ugo Rondinone
'turn back time. let's start this day again'
2008
Mixed media
Installation view

Raucci/Santamaria, Naples, Italy

Representation has a long history of being considered suspicious, while memory and consciousness seem to be its eternal innocent victims, still asking for compensation. And that's not just true of Plato and his followers. From the theory of photography to postmodernist criticism, imitation has always been loaded with a guilty proximity to lying or, at best, ideological connivance.

Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone's show at Raucci/Santamaria established a different approach to a reconciliation between illusion and memory, and its narrative title 'turn back time. let's start this day again' locates the phenomenon of time passing in a Proustian trajectory of regret. In one of the gallery's two exhibition spaces, a few sculptural elements were scattered on the floor

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Rabottini, Alesandro, "Ugo Rondinone," *Frieze*, March 2009, pp. 166-167

and in the corners, leaving the remainder of the room almost empty. Cast in bronze, the works are full-scale reproductions of humble everyday objects: five lemons, two slim pine logs tucked into a corner, four foam sheets leaning seemingly precariously against the wall, and a weathered, battered wooden door. Painted in a hyperrealist manner, the bronze figures become perceptual tricks that take the ancient tradition of painted sculpture into an ambiguous area where a quasi-religious sensation of awe meets the kitsch of theatrical illusion.

Emphasizing connotations of fragility and decay - the lemons that will eventually rot, the defunct door - Rondinone creates an almost literal still life, except that the traditional allegorical meaning is replaced by a sentimental preference for the preservation of things, as if the feeling of loss could be tempered only through an extreme act of pretence. In recent years, Rondinone seems to have been perfecting his approach to the most common human emotions - desire, pleasure and loss - and in this show the subdued spatial display expresses them with the softness of a whisper. The contrast between the pictorial illusion of mundane surface and the rhetorical weight of the bronze casts that lie beneath implies that, paradoxically, simulation appears to be the ultimate remedy to loss.

This application of funeral cosmetic to illusionist sculpture can be traced back through modern and contemporary art history to works such as Marcel Duchamp's *trompe l'œil* miniature windows *Fresh Widow* (1920) and *The Brawl at Austerlitz* (1921), Robert Gober's psychologically charged bronze casts (which similarly imitate foam blocks, plywood and fruits), and Charles Ray's Freudian Hyperrealism. But if all those examples have a hand in a surrealist investigation of perception as a battleground where dream, hallucination, memory and morbidity converge, Rondinone's monuments to everyday nothingness are rooted in a phenomenology of the object as perpetual miracle, more in line with Giorgio Morandi's continual exploration of the same.

There is another level of interpretation, however, according to which one could see Rondinone's works more in the trajectory of Paul Thek's series 'Technological Reliquaries' (1964-7), especially in terms of his special-effects aesthetic emulating flesh, blood and skin through the use of wax, paint and resin. Thek's engrafting of the existential experience of pain onto the neutrality of Minimalism resonates with Rondinone's precious leftovers. In that vein, Rondinone, rather than favouring the Pop-dandyish excess of the artificial, seeks to achieve an excess of realism, loaded with empathy.

Alessandro Rabottini