

From: *Pittura in persona. La nuova Collezione della Fondazione CRC / Painting in person. The New Collection of Fondazione CRC*, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 7 November 2021 – 6 March 2022) (Rivoli-Torino: Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 2021), pp. 14-17.

Performative painting today

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Painting in Person. The New Collection of Fondazione CRC presents the works that together with Chus Martínez and Guido Curto we have collected for Fondazione CRC of Cuneo from 2017 to the present day. When we started this adventure, we gave ourselves a few clear rules. The first was to explore the works of art by young artists from the Piedmont region and Italy. The second consisted in understanding the specificity of these works by comparing them with current international contemporary art. The relationship between local and global is functional to better understand our era characterized by the digital revolution, in which the whole world is on the one hand connected at a translocal level but on the other sees the development of small bubble communities, where artists communicate with each other and develop unique trends in a specific territory. The third rule was to focus mostly on painting or in any case on non-three-dimensional work.

There are some exceptions, as in the case of the sculptures *Got the Void (01)* and *(02)* from 2014 by Ludovica Carbotta. These sculptures reflect on the condition of the exhibition space as well as the condition of public and urban space in a historical era in which we are linked to flat images or two-dimensional representations through our technological devices. In any case, in the selection for the Fondazione CRC, we also turned to photography, but we selected photographic works that express the importance of the body and the sensory perception of the work of art. This is the case of Elisa Sighicelli's *Untitled (1429)*, 2014, and *Untitled (8974)*, 2018, in which photography and physical space enter into dialog, helping us to understand how to articulate the relationship between two-dimensional perception on our screens and organic and sensitive life.

With the exception of these works, the medium through which the artists in the collection have most experimented is painting, that has changed its meaning and its role in the contemporary world. For millennia, painting represented the universe of dreams but also shamanic visions linked to cultural memory and community. It is no coincidence that, in Western art at least, the portrait was born since antiquity but mainly from the fifteenth century as a means by which to remember specific individuals, well before the advent of photography. This purpose of painting has disappeared, replaced by photography since the end of the nineteenth century, a historical period in which the notion of archive and archiving of reality took root. It is at this historical juncture that painting no longer turned to the representation of reality but rather to the development of abstraction. In fact, European surrealism and abstraction evolved when painting found a task that photography could not access: the place of philosophical reflection on experience. In no longer being able to compete with photography to represent the world, painting began to investigate the world philosophically. And it did so by seeking the essence of the world.

In our age, on the other hand, the technological and digital revolution have once again caused a shift in the meaning and role of painting. For contemporary artists, painting and not working on digital art is a choice of intentional obsolescence—a painting is a unique work, which cannot be multiplied like the images disseminated on social media and cannot be experienced in its fullness through the digital. This choice is not so far from the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche who at the end of the nineteenth century wrote the *Untimely Meditations* (1873–76), which focused on the actuality of the outdated. On the other hand, the painter now enters into a physical embodied relationship with the painting and the image, becoming a performer of physicality and of “being incorporated”—to quote Nora Berman, “The goal was to use my dense, limited body to touch and record the weightless infinite energy of this subtle realm. I was fascinated by the possibility that my body could have a different dynamic in creating, an attitude of yielding to the material, when my mind was in this state of moving towards sleep. Through this practice, I found that I had inverted the power relationship between myself and the medium: in that altered state of mind, I became subject to the brush’s will rather than a creator using paint to exert my own. When I am bound to the brush in this state, I am able to sense what is not ordinarily seen.” Looking at a painting today, we perceive its materiality, density, the way the brush was used or not used. Sometimes we perceive characteristics that before the digital age were present but minor in painting, with the exception of movements such as *materic* Art Brut in the 1950s and 1960s, for example in the works of Jean Dubuffet or Alberto Burri. Today, this physicality of the performative relationship between artist and painting becomes the main aspect of the work and allows viewers to imagine that they too can verify their existence in the world through the gesture of painting. To this main characteristic of a painting “in person,” there is also another characteristic which is to imagine how the painting will be enjoyed on the digital media as well. The taking into consideration of this virtual audience not physically present is a consideration that is found in many of today’s artistic intuitions. There is a tendency to produce a painting that has affinities and relationships with forms of magical realism and forms of surrealism in the sense of fragmentation of bodies or the use of colors that have an impact even when they are perceived through the luminous screen.

Painting in Person is therefore an exhibition that talks about a new art collection designed to explore painting and two-dimensionality in the contemporary world, but it is also a way through which to understand this particular moment at the beginning of the twenty-first century—a moment of transition and of the need to dance between our online life and our life of the senses, at keyboard and away from keyboard.

The staging of the exhibition in the Church of San Francesco in Cuneo is based on the chromatism of the exhibition walls themselves rather than on the creation of a white neutral modernist environment as was used in the twentieth century. Furthermore, it involves artists, many of whom—such as Guglielmo Castelli, Alex Cecchetti, Claudia Comte, Francis Offman, Giuliana Rosso, Elisa Sighicelli, and Alice Visentin—intervened in the exhibition space to involve the public in a single large *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art.