

Ibid London
27 Margaret Street
London W1W 8RY, UK
+44 (0) 207 637 8773
info@ibidgallery.com
www.ibidgallery.com

focus (2-7)

Alighiero Boetti

Flora Hauser

10 May – 21 May 2016

“As soon as there is language, generality has entered the scene... I do not believe in pure idioms. I think there is naturally a desire, for whoever speaks or writes, to sign in an idiomatic, irreplaceable manner... We are all mediators, translators.” - Jacques Derrida.

On the far wall of Ibid Gallery hangs *Smettere in Moto* by Alighiero Boetti. Three wooden panels are filled with vertical lines drawn with pen in horizontal sequence, marking the passage of time. It took the artist two years to complete this from 1978 to 1979. The lines are close and the pattern that emerges is dark. Each board follows its own rhythm, as if it were capturing the timbre of different voice. The lines are a record; white (empty) alphabet letters descending on the left are a fixed point in the passage of time; the lost speech marks scattered across each panel surround nothing but lines. On the opposite wall, the pale yellow canvas *Midtown, in the company of some pigeons* by Flora Hauser seems light and ephemeral. Little wrinkles from the dying process remain. A series of smudges are framed by a delicate scattering of tiny markings. Up close they read like symbols, from a distance they form the outline of a shadow. The urge to make sense out of what we see here is overwhelming, even disorientating.

Italian conceptual artist Alighiero Boetti was one of the main protagonists of the Arte Povera movement, but he was reluctant to be called so. Whilst his artistic strategies are considered as typical of this movement, namely the use of simple materials and techniques, Boetti was really interested in the relationship between certain oppositions like chance and order, construction and deconstruction, meaning and nothingness. *“First of all I prefer thought. This is the basic thing. I really think manual skill is secondary...”* he said.

But, in 1969 he left his studio that had become a *“depot for materials... and began again from zero with a pencil and a sheet of paper.”* Distancing himself from Arte Povera, he explored the idea of inefficiency and would set himself tasks on gridded paper to cover each line only once, but complete each sheet in a different way. He started by outlining forms that disappeared as the surrounding lines were covered, thus highlighting the contrast of order and disorder.

Through the process of creation itself, he deconstructed concepts which many of us take for granted like authorship, time, language and geography. By taking existing systems, like grids or maps, and working through them, Boetti was calling into question our systematic structuring of the world. And yet he was also illustrating his own systematic approach. Throughout his life Boetti was preoccupied with a notion of duality, or as he came to describe it *“twinning”*. So fundamental was this principle, it led him to add an ‘e’ between his first and last names *“stimulating a dialectic exchange between these two selves”*.

Applying this to his creative process, he became widely known for his maps of the world series, *Mappa*, hand embroidered in Afghanistan between 1971 until his death in 1994. With each work, Boetti traced a world map onto canvas, used colours in reference to the national flag of each country, and then sent the canvas to Afghan craftswomen to use as a base for a tapestry. More than 150 *Mappe* were created, thus forming a body of work that is a portrait of the passage of time and how an underlying concept can generate endless iterations.

By splitting (twinning) the process of creation, Boetti allowed for the intrusion of chance into design, such as the choice of pink coloured thread for the sea in *Mappa* 1979. The effect was that each finished product showed both the deconstruction of the initial idea, and the system or process required to execute it. In this sense one might link him to the great French literary critic Derrida who located the potential for deconstruction within the work itself:

"The very condition of a deconstruction may be at work in the work, within the system to be deconstructed... not at the center but in an eccentric center, in a corner whose eccentricity ensures the solid concentration of the system." Derrida in conversation with Amy Ziering Kofman from Documentary *Derrida*

Following both these concepts (duality and deconstruction) Boetti might be delighted that his work has been "twinned" with a piece by Flora Hauser, and in many ways it is a match made in heaven. In theory these two works have so much in common: they both follow a specific set of rules or self imposed system in the making, and both works question meaning. Indeed, trying to read Hauser's work requires you to move in close, as if studying a map which we might connect to Boetti's *Mappa*. And yet they differ wildly.

One is heavy and ponderous the other is light and diaphanous. Whilst each work explores and deconstructs a system, there is a giant chasm in the intention and the result. Procedurally they share so much in the use of a system that requires hours of labor-intensive mark making, and both call attention to the passage of time. Yet Boetti superimposes one system on top of another - he flattens our capacity to read. Meanwhile Hauser has developed a very specific and inimitable set of marks that follow the logic of chance markings on the canvas. She draws you in to multiple readings.

One only has to look at one of her many notebooks filled with writing so small it might be data bits rather than actual words, so minute you could only decipher them with a magnifying glass. She does know what they mean, just as she knows what the marks she is making on the canvas refer to. She is working from a system, but it is so minuscule it potentially masks what it refers to and interrupts meaning.

Together these two works ask us to reflect on what we see. Can we read into the concepts that first sparked their making? Is the language they use appropriate to what they want to express or suppress? If so can we really locate a dialogue between them? If you are reading this after seeing both works hung opposite each other at *Ibid*, you might wonder how the history of the work informs what we see? Should a work speak for itself? More importantly what are we looking for?

"As the spirit wanes the form appears." Charles Bukowski

Text by Nico Kos Earle