

MOUSSE



ALESSANDRA SPRANZI
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Alessandra Spranzi “He runs after facts like a beginner learning to skate, who, furthermore, practices somewhere where it is forbidden” at P420, Bolognaby Estelle Hoy

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REVIEWS



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Alessandra Spranzi, *Metronomo (non farlo)*, 2023, Alessandra Spranzi “He runs after facts like a beginner learning to skate, who, furthermore, practices somewhere where it is forbidden” at P420, Bologna. Courtesy: the artist and P420, Bologna. Photo: Carlo Favero



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“Depersonalization like the deposing of useless individuality—the loss of everything that can be lost, while still being. To take away from yourself little by little, with an effort so attentive that no pain is felt, to take away from yourself like one who gets free of her own skin, her own characteristics.

Everything that characterizes me is just the way I am most easily viewed by others and end up being superficially recognizable to myself.”

—*Clarice Lispector, The Passion According to G.H.*

Having the fortitude to trust that our duty as artists is not to ratify problems or even upend them; it is to inaugurate a steadfast allegiance to eschewing didacticism. This statement is overbearing and doctrinal itself—let’s start again. Our fidelity in making art is to allow ourselves to be carried away by whatever happens and get scared by its fate and retribution. Maybe all that happens is nothing, and we’re afraid of the flutters and rippling electricity of ritual mistakes. Prostrate and wincing, surety and uncertainty find a perfect existence in Alessandra Spranzi’s solo exhibition *Egli rincorre i fatti come un pattinatore dilettante, che per di più si esercita dove è vietato* (He runs after facts like a beginner learning to skate, who, furthermore, practices somewhere where it is forbidden) at P420, fixed with voids, sounds, and objects hovering mere moments away and seven million years from one

another in the ecstatic form of aesthetic depersonalization. How to enter its forbidden, inexpressive space, the expanse between identity and existing, alive?

Getting carried away by the idea of gaps, Spranzi photographs surreality in *Cose che Accadono #11* (2002–05), depicting a woman's effortful yet fruitless attempt at holding milk in her hand, grasping at liquid and straws. Watery milk, the creamy manna of life, seeps through her fist, falling wastefully onto a cedar table. Between sustenance and hand is a story in and of itself, an essential dissociative disorder, a place where the self cannot exist but does. When we disconnect and live outside of ourselves, observing our every gesture of dissolution, our self exists beyond the outlines of flesh, the molecules of our being, surpassing perimeters and boundaries of what is understood as our human quality. Spranzi succeeds in exiting herself, totally disinterested in the gravity of reality and useless individuality. But this photograph *isn't even in the show*. It's merely an echo of an artistic life left behind, living outside the exhibition, *almost* included but not, outside of material fact. You can find all sorts of inspiration in deprivation.

So what could be the reason for this? Why find luminosity in observing and distancing oneself rather than chasing the facts of living? The intimacy

of Spranzi's pictures causes the sort of visual deception that the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector attempted to liberate: "I was seeing, like someone who will never have to understand what she saw." The infuriating success of dissociation finds its perfect photographic elaboration in all the fruits of Spranzi's labor: blood oranges, mandarins, yellow lemons, walnuts. *Agrumi sul tavolo di cemento* (Citrus Fruits on a Concrete Table, 2022–23) rolls over the entire premise of anything concrete. Centered on the table is a perfect circle in damply sponged grout with a single golden fruit, neglected but sunny in the middle. To be precise, off-centered in the ring. Eight lines of mortar spike outward from the circle like a childish drawing of the sun, setting barriers with its harmless tango of symbolic rays. Peering back at us just as inexpressively are eleven runaway oranges that rolled past the pitiful solar glands that attempted to contain them. Jettisoning the bounds of that which appears cemented and circumscribed, Spranzi forces a detachment that curtails our fate by questioning the benefits of containment. That is to say, she segments in pursuit of a mysterious, forbidden existence she is looking for.

The arrangement of oranges, their glands, and zest in constellation leads to other heavenly bodies in *Petanque (nove palle)* and *Petanque (quattro palle)* (both 2022–23), photographs of silvery

boules in an actual game of pétanque (*jeu de boules* in French, *bocce* in Italian), the Provençal sport. In this precision sport played in triplet or tête-à-tête, one aims to score points by rolling the balls as close to the target jack as possible—a shortcut to the idiocy found tangibly in states of precision. With enormous human effort, gleefully disrespecting people's pleasure, Spranzi's images capture and revile the determinist, mechanistic vision that sees the games of the past as inevitable and events of the future as predictable and devoid of novelty. As if in response to elegiac requiems, the artist presents *Palle di mare sulla spiaggia di Oliva #1* and *Palle di mare sulla spiaggia di Oliva #2* (Sea Balls on Oliva Beach #2 and #1, 2022–23). Two color photographs capture dozens of fibrous marine balls of seagrass rhizome netting, dusky hazel tobacco torn out by water movement. One billion trillion grains of white Calabrian sand cradle their round, salty hoops clustered together. Despite the proximity between marine balls and grains of sand depicted in the images, no matter how close together, an interval of space, an atom, remains. Not quaintly interested in dissociation, the artist will do whatever it takes to find the border of our condition as living beings that exist without absolute exactness. Not understanding exactly what she sees is a call to silence. And by silence, I mean the filmic sounds Spranzi plays in the gallery in loop-

de-loops that create moments, mere milliseconds, of irregular quiet: a video of the monotonous sounds of a metronome (*Metronomo*, 2023) in the back room of the gallery; a video of children bouncing balls against enclosed walls or over tangy seas in summer at its height in the front room (*Palleggi*, 2023); the broken notes of a young girl practicing piano scales in clumsy staccato (*Esercizi di piano, Ann R., undici anni*, [Piano Exercises, Ann R. Eleven Years, 2023]) from a distant room, in a year unknown, someplace. The audio loop is played on a speaker in the gallery's bookshop, inaudible from the exhibition's main space. Spranzi asks us to disconnect from the primary area to hear the lovely sounds of her young neighbor, Anna, learning an instrument that the artist herself hears from a separate room through a wall in her own home. She cloaks the gallery windows ceiling to floor in striped curtains, green and white (*Tende bianche e verdi* [2023]), long swaths of fabric reminiscent of sunlit holidays sipping Aperol spritz under rented umbrellas at Forte dei Marmi. Removing the audience from the cement city badlands, she takes us on an unsanctioned escapist pursuit, and filled with clear, sweet sighs, we happily disengage. Disconnected, not *loss* of reality. This distinction is important because it shows us that her irregular sounds, videos, and images can acknowledge the fact of reality; they

simply step out of it. Detachment is her religious act.

Spranzi's devout pastime of preclusion is captured in a series of works depicting kitchen chairs tipped onto tables, overbalanced and precarious. *Due sedie appoggiate sul verde* (Two Chairs Resting on Greenery, 2022–23) does nothing to prop up reality but rather encourages the viewer to ruminate on all the suspicious moods, people, objects, food, waiters, and conversations left behind: burn stains from Italian cappuccinos, freshly sliced cedar fruit, peaches, apricot, pistachio cannoli, white linen tablecloths, green floors, failed solitaire or Scala 40, tipples of negroni that topple bodies struck down by incompleteness. *Almost* toppling, but not quite. *Sedia appoggiata su tovaglia bianca* (Chair Resting on White Tablecloth, 2022–23) lives somewhere between the true labor of self and the loss of origins. In pretty anger and piercing vanity, whoever left the chair leaning and askew siphoned the approximate words of Lispector, reading diagonally: “I was now so much greater that I could no longer see myself.” Superficial thoughts and feelings are outside the body, movement suspended, body floating, hands smaller or larger than ever, free of our skin, unrecognizable to ourselves. Spranzi does

nothing to anticipate equilibrium—her perverted paradise.

Equilibrista sul filo (Tightrope Walker on the Wire, 2022–23) advises against rigid junctures in time, displaying the hypnotizing force of a suit-clad funambulist. A man holding his balancing pole like a crucifix, distributing mass away from the pivot point, increasing the moment of inertia, sky walking between human-made buildings or worlds in a white tuxedo and black bow tie. Potentially dying is a formal occasion. The result of the balance pole is not less tipping; his sway and torque cannot be corrected because he is photographed, caught ever in the process of stabilizing between life and death, wobbling in stillness, a figure in bas-relief.

Perpendicularity is a painstaking, inexorable place, and Spranzi uses a subject in the fugue state to pitch different questions: How do we view his equilibrium? How do we choose his unknowable fate? A greedy dilemma that she trusts to her audience.

Noce in equilibrio nel piatto bianco (Walnut Balanced on White Plate, 2022–23) is just that. Though devoted to poetics, Spranzi's titles are bare and unpretentious, angling our passions toward her aesthetic vision of simplicity-as-disaffected. Or *almost* affected. Most of the works in the exhibition depict ordinary, everyday objects in peculiar arrangements. There is no perfect and

tender pronunciation of the walnut in the composition; it stands upright in the middle of a white dinner plate steeped in hazardous prospects, kissing precariousness close and often, thinking of nothing carefully. At any moment, the walnut could fall. Somewhere, someone has to understand that equilibrium is only a heap of decisions we never made ourselves. With the background of the photograph slightly blurred—lens smeared in summertime Vaseline—the balance between a walnut and a plate, the most ordinary of objects, becomes an extraordinary tension and somatic estrangement. Spranzi isn't looking to maintain equilibrium so much as challenge its very existence or usefulness. *Egli. A cavallo* (He. Riding, 2023) presents a film on a continual circuit, stretching out time for as long as possible. Riding into the distance on a white, svelte horse like a fairy tale (total fantasy) is a man in a crisp white shirt, brown loafers in polished stirrups, clacking happily down an idyllic Italian street, giddy with ease, diabolically alert, lying to himself. We've always had a deficient understanding of interdict fantasy, foiled by homiletic theories of volition, but the fool's paradise is Spranzi's attempt at turning a world of tar and turpentine into an emerald city—a fanciful place, a never-never land, out-of-body experiences we so desperately need to escape the droll reality that abounds. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop.

Spranzi's invitation to *Egli rincorre i fatti come un pattinatore dilettante* disconnects brain regions from the posteromedial cortex. The title of the exhibition—borrowed from Franz Kafka's *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* (1917–19)—sits next to a childhood photograph of Kafka playing dress-up, with a bow and arrow in his arms and feathers in his hair over little vampire ears. (Make-believe worlds are forbidden once we grow up.) But this photograph *isn't even in the show*. A total breach of contract. Is this a hallucination? Hardly. Alessandra Spranzi's fight is for worlds we were told we cannot have. Depositing citations, Spranzi takes Lispector's lassitude and Kafka's lament and grows them to the size of a dynasty. She waits for us until we learn. Our destiny for the show is to return empty-handed, to fall away from the magical deception of our own identity. Giving up is a revelation. Welcome to this place, Spranzi says; I'll show you everything.

at P420, Bologna
until January 20, 2024

The artistic research of Alessandra Spranzi (b. 1962, Milan) is connected with photography—with photographic staging, the reuse of images of her own or taken by others, collage, and photographs of photographs. The work reveals a taste for humble materials, everyday situations, domestic settings, neglected and obsolete objects, handiwork and its gestures. Through these tools and these subjects, through appropriations and even minimal manipulations, Spranzi never stops questioning the mystery of existence and the fundamental forces that determine our fate, as well as that of the objects and spaces that surround us. Since 1992 she has had solo and group shows at IUNO, Rome (2022); Monica De Cardenas, Zuoz, Switzerland (2021); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome (2021); Colección INELCOM, Madrid (2020); Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, Valencia, Spain (2020); Palazzo Duchi di Santo Stefano, Taormina, Italy (2020); Fotografie Forum Frankfurt (FFF) (2020); Palazzo re Rebaudengo, Guarene d'Alba, Italy (2019); Castel Sismondo, Rimini, Italy (2019); P420, Bologna (2018); Centre Photographique Ile de France, Pontault-Combault, France (2015); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2014); Arcade, London (2014); MAMbo, Bologna (2013); Museo MAGA, Gallarate, Italy (2013); Galleria Nicoletta Rusconi, Milan (2012); Festival di Fotografia Europea, Reggio Emilia, Italy (2010); and Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, Italy (2009). Since 1997 she has made many artist's books and publications. Her latest book, *Tecnica senza vocabolario* (A&Mbookstore editore, 2023), was presented on the occasion of the exhibition *Numero Speciale* together with Bibliography4, which collects the sixteen books published from 1997 to 2023.

Estelle Hoy is a writer and art critic based in Berlin. Her critically acclaimed book *Pisti, 80 Rue de Belleville* was published in 2020 (After 8 Books) with an introduction by Chris Kraus. Her latest artist's book and exhibition at ICA Milano, *Jus d'Orange*, was published with NERO Editions (2023) in collaboration with Camille Henrot. She has a forthcoming book of essays with After 8 Books, Paris (2024). Hoy regularly publishes in the international art press, with features in *Mousse*, *Spike*, *e-flux*, *Flash Art*, *Autre*, *CURA*, *apartmento*, *Ursula*, and *frieze*. She has exhibited at White Cube, Paris; Kamel Mennour, Paris; ICA Milano, Milan; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, alongside artists including Louise Bourgeois, Anne Imhof, Mona Hatoum, Camille Henrot, Sarah Lucas, Bruce Nauman, and Miriam Cahn. Hoy is an editor at large for *Flash Art International*.