

Claudio Abate*

(Rome, 1943 - 2017)

In a 2007 interview, in response to a question about what he was working on at that moment, Claudio Abate responded, "I am working on irony. A key to the interpretation of the reality that is capable of raising me out of the sadness of our time, without being forced to bury my head in the sand like an ostrich. I prefer allusions to declamations, they are more erotic." (Codognato, M., "Interview with Claudio Abate," in Bonito Oliva, A., ed., *Claudio Abate, Fotografo*. Mart: Rovereto, 2007).

Looking at Abate's photographs, one would be tempted to say that irony, far from being the theme of just his recent research, is rather an attitude that has accompanied him since his earliest works devoted to artists and their art.

It is true, as Achille Bonito Oliva has written, that instead of a 'frontal' reading of the entire art scene, which is more typical of Mulas, Abate searches for a relationship of complicity with artists, like that of a fellow traveler, always looking for deliberately subjective, biased, and, in a certain sense, activist photographs. But it is also true that this subjectivity is not colored by ideological participation or by emotional or psychological delving. Many of his memorable works, instead, seem like an invitation to the artists to accept another risk within the space and time of the photo, to push themselves somewhat further, and, if possible, to make fun of themselves a bit, through a play of identification and mirroring with their own works. Often the artists and works he portrays are themselves imbued with irony. This is the case of famous photos such as *De Dominicis, Il tempo, lo sbaglio lo spazio* (*De Dominicis, Time, Error, Space*), 1970, or *Aldo Mondino, L'ultimo gioco* (*Aldo Mondino, Last Game*), 1968. The photographs devoted to Pino Pascali are perhaps even more striking, where the artist 'interprets' his works, seated atop a cannon like a bored soldier, in *Bella Ciao*, 1965, or in a sculptural pose in *Vedova blue* (*Blue Widow*), 1968. There are arresting portraits of Emilio Prini "with monocle," Mimmo Germanà engaged in "scaling," one of his works from 1971, and one of Jannis Kounellis from 1989, where the artist uses his face as an element of what might be an installation, pushing himself to the point of metamorphosis into a hybrid being, half-artist, half-work. And even when the portrait seems to be a more classic homage to artists of earlier generations, Abate chooses to focus on a figure endowed with humor verging on sarcasm, such as de Chirico, captured beneath De Dominicis's amused glance, or Roy Lichtenstein, who, thanks to a play of perspective and chiaroscuro, sprouts two wings and has the smile of a cheerful angel, his shirt collar half-in, half-out of the neckline of his sweater. (EV)

Additional Works in the Collection

Aldo Mondino, Last Game, 1968, gelatin silver print, 39.40 × 26.60 inches

Eliseo Mattiacci, Work in Progress, 1968, gelatin silver print, 25.41 × 38.81 inches

Pino Pascali, Cannon, 1968, gelatin silver print, 27.58 × 38.22 inches

Marisa Merz, Shoes, 1968, gelatin silver print, 39.99 × 26.99 inches

Robert Smithson, Asphalt Run Down, 1969, gelatin silver print, 38.22 × 25.41 inches

J. Kounellis, Flame, 1970, gelatin silver print, 37.82 × 24.43 inches

Gino De Dominicis, Time. The Error, Space, 1970, gelatin silver print, 25.41 × 38.42 inches

Mario Merz, 1970, gelatin silver print, 38.61 × 25.61 inches

Giuseppe Penone, Turning Your Own Eyes Upside Down, 1970, gelatin silver print, 25.41 × 37.82 inches

Maurizio Mocchetti, 120 Meters Per Second, 1971, gelatin silver print, 26.79 × 38.42 inches

Alighiero Giuseppetti, 1971, gelatin silver print, 38.61 × 26 inches

Diana Rabito, Still Life from the Underwood Series, 1972, gelatin silver print, 37.82 × 27.97 inches

Giorgio De Chirico and Gino De Dominicis, 1972, gelatin silver print, 39.20 × 18.12 inches

J. Kounellis, 1973, gelatin silver print, 28.17 × 39.40 inches

Luigi Ontani, Don Quixote of la Mancha, 1975, gelatin silver print, 26.60 × 38.42 inches

Emilio Prini, 1979, gelatin silver print, 38.61 × 24.43 inches

J. Kounellis, Candle, 1989, gelatin silver print, 59.10 × 47.28 inches