

## Elisabetta Benassi

(Rome, Italy, 1966)

Is it important to remember everything that happens? In what way does news become history? What happens if one distances an image from the facts that it should describe? These are only some of the many questions that emerge when one looks at *Loro (Them)*, created in 2010 by Elisabetta Benassi. The work, a group of watercolors on canvas, is part of a broader research project that emerged from investigations the artist carried out beginning in 2008. That year, while she found herself in the United States during the presidential elections and at the height of the economic crisis, Benassi began to assiduously visit libraries and archives for the major newspapers, focusing her research on images published by the press over the course of the twentieth century. Visionary, utopian, but at the same time concrete and pragmatic, the artist's project soon became an enormous collection of facts.

Initially, with the ambitious installation entitled *Memorie di un cieco (Memories of a Blind Person)*, 2010, it took the form of a dark room illuminated only by the light a microfilm reader that, coordinated by a computerized machine, advances, rewinds, and then stops at news without any apparent logic, obsessively plumbing the memory of history but also the chaos determined by an excess of facts. After this first presentation, Benassi moved her project in another direction and, always drawing upon archival newspaper materials, including from Italy, she extrapolated a series of photographs and relevant news that she entrusted to a copyist, who was asked to transcribe and draw the reverse side of the found images. The copyist thus precisely collected all the details present on the back of the indicated photographic material, both conveying the phrases that describe the image and transcribing other information, including credit lines, archival filing codes, and references to earlier uses or publications. *Loro (Them)*, the eight watercolors in the collection, are part of this series that the artist entitles in English *All I Remember*, in homage to an unpublished novel by Gertrude Stein. From Hitler, portrayed on the occasion of a parade of May 1, 1933, to Martin Luther King, photographed while entering his new apartment in Chicago in 1966, to the identification of the body of the publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in 1972, via the Mexican artist Diego Rivera at work, the death of Alice B. Toklas (companion of Gertrude Stein), and up to the presentation of a bust depicting Einstein, the brief selection of facts presented in the watercolors in the collection offers a cross section of the history of the recently concluded century, giving equal attention to hysterical convulsions and merely curious details. Above all, as copies of photographs that remain hidden to the viewer's eye, the work investigates the paradox that is hidden behind the images and the stories to which they refer, exposing the unbridgeable distance that separates facts that have occurred from the History into which they will be organized. Subjects related to memory and to the many stories that the past does not always convey have always informed Elisabetta Benassi's work from the beginning, in films,

videos, sculptures, and installations. In particular, over the years the artist has frequently been inspired by Pier Paolo Pasolini and, through a double or objects that evoke him, she has created works that reiterate the inspirational role he has played for a new generation of artists and intellectuals. (MB)

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