

Maurizio Vetrugno

(Sant'Antonino di Susa, Turin, 1957)

Maurizio Vetrugno's adventure in art began at the end of the 1970s when, having left the province of Turin, he began to attend course at the DAMS in Bologna, where he was among the founders of the non-profit space Neon. In the golden age of the return to figuration, his debut could not have taken place anywhere but in the field of painting, with a series of canvases featuring the names of Christian saints, martyrs and mystics, and bearing impressions of the shape of the body in various postures. The following passage led him to produce something else completely different, in line with a need for renewal which would always characterise his poetics. It was his friendship with the Bolognese art critic Francesca Alinovi that fuelled his interest in American graffiti writing, the underground scene and non-official cultures. Vetrugno elaborated these evocations in images with a Pop background to them – albeit a reappraised and interiorised Pop, he states – on loan from a myriad of different contributions from comic strips to rock icons, going as far back as his childhood memories of the advertisement featuring 'la Mucca Carolina' ('Carolina the Cow'). Without ever being bound to a specific cultural environment, his art has always rejected immediately recognisable styles, languages and techniques, standing out for the extreme freedom in his choice of sources. The continual references to music, religion, cinema, science and fashion contaminate one another without snobbery, without boundaries between disciplines, and within an ironic interplay of relationships.

As well as paintings, Vetrugno has also focused on the production of objects and installations, sound and video performances and embroidered tapestries. And it was the latter technique, until then explored in Italy only by Alighiero Boetti, that would over time become his medium of choice. A slow practice, traditionally linked to the female realm, embroidery allows the artist to explore the way in which the iconic status of an era may be constructed through an image or a mere name. With this, Vetrugno – a collector of records and many other things – reproduced a single copy of the front cover of famous easy listening records, making use of an outmoded object yet one which cannot but be accompanied by a veil of nostalgia.

In the middle of the 1990s, his link with fashion and design was formalised in a more explicit fashion, especially through the advertising campaigns created for famous brands and the scenery designed for a number of fashion shows. It was in this period that the video in the collection *Crickets* was produced: the recording of a performance presented in 1996 in Turin at the gallery The Box. Putting together a professional masseur, the iconic lampshade in rice paper designed by the Japanese Isamu Noguchi and a garment by the stylist Issey Miyake, Vetrugno produced a bizarre and paradoxical action in which the objects appear to come to life, speak, move around and become aware of what is happening around them.

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