

Mircea Cantor

(Oradea, Romania, 1977)

Why do we always desire something? Why do we incessantly beg? And again, why do we want above all what we cannot hold onto? There are so many questions that arise, looking at Mircea Cantor's *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi* (*Thus Passes the Glory of the World*, 2012). In the film, which is only a few minutes long, a woman ignites the wire of a fuse and distributes it among a group of people before her, apparently beggars, who humbly long for something. Kneeling in a circle, their faces on the ground, each member of this silent assembly extends one hand in which he accepts the flame that rapidly traverses the fuse, while a rhythmic sound punctuates the fleeting passage. The fire finally reaches the far end of the fuse, burning out before the woman's eyes and quickly vanishing without a trace.

Secular yet vaguely religious, the action described by the work does not seem to pertain to any specific place or time, but seems destined to an eternal repetition, making the work a potent reflection on the human condition and its inescapable transience. Part of a group of works inspired by the city of Rome and some of its religious symbols, the film's title is a Latin phrase that is often found engraved on tombstones and that, in the traditional ecclesiastical ritual, is spoken by an officiant to every new Pope, while he lights some flax resting on a staff. The sound that characterizes this work, however, is the almost hypnotic beat of a semantron, an instrument used to mark the monks' hours of prayer and work. Cantor recorded the sound in Romania, at the orthodox monastery in Putna, one of the most important cultural, religious, and artistic centers established in the Middle Ages in Moldavia.

Whether taking his images from reality or through references to history, art, craftsmanship, or various cultures, Cantor is the author of a body of work that is intensely both poetic and political. In his own words: "It is essential today not to talk globally by playing the multinationals' card, but to speak a universal language, which is the opposite of global. This is what globalization has destroyed." (MB)