

Laurent Grasso

(Mulhouse, France, 1972)

Laurent Grasso's research involves different media and genres, even variable historical periods. He rejects style, or rather he always experiments with new styles, because for him, style—the distinctive brand of a work—is completely secondary. What matters is the concept that animates the work. Grasso takes as his point of departure suggestions tied to science and science fiction, and to all realities that are capable of confusing, striking, or intriguing the viewer. He then builds on these through surreal juxtapositions, fictions, and tales, creating works that push to assume a viewpoint of reality and the discrepancies in its representation that are as mobile and fluctuating as possible.

Electromagnetic energies, paranormal phenomena, science fiction, but also science and astronomy, all combine to create parallel worlds, not identifiable as future worlds, but rather present or even past. For example, in the series of paintings *Studies in the Past*, 2010–2012, Grasso develops false documents, apparently ancient landscapes into which he inserts unrelated natural elements, and thus fabricates historical memories that have never existed, unidentified objects, magnetic storms and aurorae borealis in placid, small-format landscapes that are classical in construction.

Grasso enjoys confusing the viewer, putting in doubt the authenticity of his “rational” interpretation (significantly he has polemically defined science as only one of the possible contemporary mythologies). In the video *Polair*, 2007, he stages a pollen storm around the Berlin television tower; in *Les Oiseaux*, 2008, the movements of storms of birds in the sky above Rome are transformed into movements of iron filings attracted by an invisible magnetic force. The neon installation *1610* is also inspired by history, in this case the struggle of science to assert itself. Invited by the Vatican to a meeting of artists during the year that Galileo Galilei was officially rehabilitated, Grasso found a drawing by the scientist depicting the *Pleiadum Constallatio* (*Sidereal Messenger*, 1610), and he reproduced in neon a section of this constellation. The image is reworked, repositioned, and translated into a medium tied to other contexts (art, but also advertising, given the decorative nature of the stars), and the viewer is left wrestling with a dreamy work, an object that is intelligible and yet without any specific reference. At the same time the title is the first clue of the genesis of the work, which, the same year as Galileo's rehabilitation, leads to a broader reflection on images, their power and the way they are subject to mechanisms of control and exploitation. (EV)