ALMINE RECH

Claudio Abate

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Almine Rech is pleased to present an exhibition of photographs by Claudio Abate, the artist's second exhibition with the gallery and his first in the United Kingdom in over 15 years.

Claudio Abate was born in Rome in 1943. Abate started his career as a photographer at the age of fifteen, when he opened a photography laboratory in his father's studio. While still very young, Claudio Abate started collaborating with the Press Service Agency, and from 1961 through to 1963 he became assistant to one of the founders of the Magnum photography agency, together with Eric Lessing. While at Magnum, Abate started collaborating with Life Magazine, becoming a foreign correspondent and sending commissioned photographs to the US. Thanks to the fame he acquired so early, both as a photographer and as a photojournalist, he was able to publish his photographs in other famous magazines, such as Sipario, Domus, Carte Segrete, Metro, and Il Giornale dell'Arte, also being given covers for L'Espresso.

Having become friends with Mario and Marisa Merz, he worked with both artists in a series of photographs of their works, such as *Scarpette*, 1968, and *Che Fare*, 1968. *Scarpette*, 1968, presents two shoes woven using nylon by Marisa Merz on a seashore at Fregene. A wave occupies the upper side of the picture, leaving the viewer questioning whether the tide has brought the shoes to land or if they are about to be swept away by the sea. In *Che Fare*, 1968, Claudio Abate documents a sculptural installation by Mario Merz, which had been named after Lenin's 1902 pamphlet on the importance of the intellectual's role in revolution. In adopting this phrase within his work, Merz was signaling towards the new role artists had acquired. "What to do?" was a question which artists needed to consider when making art, at a time when, as Germano Celant stated, the status quo was 'the authoritarian power of one generation over another'. The statement can be read as a warning of the artist's role in the fragile state of post-war Europe. Claudio Abate's *Che Fare*, 1968, focuses on the iconography of the hand-written phrase. The opaqueness of the water spill below it rhymes with the stark black of the graffiti, the water an extension of the outpour of the artist's hand.

While working on other projects, Claudio Abate was an integral part of the artistic scene in Rome. From the 1960s, Claudio Abate was called to work as the official photographer for "Galleria La Salita" owned by Gian Tommaso Liverani, and until 1977 he was also one of the documenters of the exhibitions and performances which took place at another celebrated Rome gallery, "L'Attico" owned by the father and son team of Bruno and Fabio Sargentini. It was at the "Galleria L'Attico" in 1969 that Claudio Abate documented a ground-breaking Kounellis exhibition which featured live horses. Kounellis' *12 Live Horses*, 1969, was conceived in a pictorial composition: it presents the rectangular gallery space as resembling a canvas, which is populated with horses, organised elements within the picture plane. As the gallery can be perceived as containing the horses like a frame, these in turn indicate the dimensions of the gallery, becoming part of the architecture.

In Claudio Abate's photograph *12 Live Horses*, 1969, the archaic elegance in the obscurity of the horses' movement and behaviour is felt in the depth and darkness of their fur and opaque suggestions of their form, which contrast the concrete, white stillness and banality of the gallery. The result is an icon of impression, imbued with the aura of the confrontation with the ancient and graceful beasts. The jagged outline of the white horse in the foreground suggests movement, perhaps even attempted escape, but above all, tension between their captivation in the dead, low room and their liveliness, the potential for an event, a revolt against their host space and the dignity of their presence as guests. Kounellis and Abate's great friendship and ongoing collaboration is further documented in Abate's *Black Rose*, 1966, which stands as testimony to Kounellis' homonymous series of works based on a dark flower silhouetted against a white background. In the photograph, Kounellis' shadow can be observed watching his canvas, almost merged with the plain wall it is hung from with a chain.

By 1970, the year Abate captured Gino de Dominicis's *Zodiaco* performance, he had become the main reference point for Italian artists, who called him in to capture their exhibitions and performances. Working across public and public spaces, Abate became familiar with the art of Cy Twombly at Gian Enzo Sperone, Ugo Ferranti and Konrad Fischer's galleries, striking up a long professional collaborations and friendships with him and many other artists. From the 1980s, Claudio Abate associated himself with Berlin's Neue Wilden artistic current, specifically with Markus Lupertz and A. R. Penk, becoming their official photographer.

Abate first exhibited to the public in 1972, when his photography was included in *Incontri Internazionali d'Arte: Contatti con la Superficie Sensibile*, as full-size prints in black and white, produced through the direct contact of the subject with photographic paper sensitised to light, in a homage to his friends and collaborators. This exhibition was followed by *La malattia dell'Occhio* (1979), where Abate introduced in his photography the torsion typical of painterly anamorphosis, and *Progetto per un Monumento al Cinema* (1983), created using the technique known as contact printing, starting from some photograms of a film by Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni.

From the 1990s, Claudio Abate developed research projects in which he would invite his artist friends to work with him in the dark room. To this series belong *Obscura* (2005), *The Bathroom* (2008), and *Pesci e Formiche* (2009). Together with these works, Abate has left us some of the most intense and evocative portraits of artists, taken both as commissions and as candid snaps. In 2009 he organised an exhibition which saw 64 artists present a work of theirs based on a single, common theme an oval shape devised by Abate.

Claudio Abate (b. 1943, Rome, Italy, d. 2017, Rome, Italy) was given his first solo exhibition was in 1979 at the "Centro Culturale dell'Immagine Il Fotogramma". In 1993 Abate presented a series of his photographic experimentations at the Venice Biennale. Documented from the first half of the 1990s is his professional relationship with the French Academy in Rome at Villa Medici, which led to the creation of some of his most expressive images. One of his final projects took place in the summer of 2017, at the exhibition of Yoko Ono and Claire Tabouret. Finally, highlights of Abate's career include his collaborations with "Fondazione Volume" and "Galleria dell'Oca". In 2010 the Archivio Abate was instituted: arranged by artist and exhibition space, it serves as an immense historical photographic catalogue of artistic life in Rome and internationally.