

Alessandro Pessoli's exhibition at the Cloisters of Sant'Eustorgio continues a path initiated a few years ago in which contemporary artists have been brought into dialogue with this historical and religious context. After Adrian Paci, Kimsooja, Stefano Arienti and Vincenzo Agnetti it is the turn of Alessandro Pessoli, born in Cervia in 1963 and who, for years, has lived in Los Angeles. The title that Pessoli has chosen for this exhibition project is emblematic: *Testa Cristiana*.

For centuries, believers have related to the faces of saints mediated by the imagination and genius of artists; and for centuries these faces have been precious and protective presences, true references for the faithful. Then, as Paul VI asserted with great sincerity in his famous 1964 speech, that relationship, that "friendship" between the church and the artists was obstructed and consequently the faces of the saints began to thin out. For this reason it is stimulating to look at Alessandro Pessoli's exhibition *Testa Cristiana* as an attempt to resume that interrupted dialogue. The artist does not simply speak of faces, but broadens the meaning: speaking of a "Christian Head" in fact means going deeper into the field, relating to a way of "thinking," to an identity that is not only physiognomic but also psychic. The saints are never just devout figures, but are intelligences in action, capable of developing ideas about life, the world and the mystery that concerns them. Pessoli's is a path that must realistically deal with an interrupted memory, as Paul VI said. Resuming that path, trying to align it with today, therefore also implies working on wounds and fractures, accepting the fatigue of faces that sometimes seem disfigured. "The image is charged with tension, because I want it to be expressive, because for me it is not pacified," says the artist. This tension is necessary to ensure that these faces and heads are contemporary presences.

Pessoli's art is also characterized by a touch of whimsicality, which the artist does not give up even in this cycle, even at the risk of seeming disrespectful. But how can we fail to remember that a necessary dose of madness has always been attributed to the saints? And didn't Don Giovanni Bosco argue that Christian heads are full of a strange joy?

Alessandro Pessoli (Cervia, 1963) lives and works in Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in institutions and galleries such as: Palazzo Vizzani, Bologna (2021); 17th Art Quadrennial, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (2021); Anton Kern Gallery, New York (2017 and 2021); Greengrassi, London (2014 and 2020); Nino Mier, Los Angeles (2019 and 2020); Xavier Hufkens, Brussels (2014 and 2018); ZERO..., Milan (2014 and 2015); Palazzo della Triennale di Milano (2015–16); Villa Paloma, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Montecarlo (2015); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012). A series of drawings with religious subject matter was exhibited at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); his exhibition at Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia (2011), was also centered around a triptych of religious-themed paintings.

During the course of the exhibition, a book with photographs of the exhibition will be published by Lenz (Milan), containing texts by Eva Fabbris, Giuseppe Frangi, Alexis Vaillant and a conversation between the artists Pier Paolo Campanini and Alessandro Pessoli.

Testa Cristiana

09.15 – 11.28.2021

Curated by Eva Fabbris

Curatorial assistant: Giovanna Manzotti

Thanks to: Valerio Nicolai, Alessandra Santerini, Mariacristina Sironi and the volunteers of the Museum of the Basilica of Sant'Eustorgio

The section displayed at the Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum is curated by Giuseppe Frangi

Thanks to the lenders: Sandra and Giancarlo Bonollo Collection, Vicenza; Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia; and all who wished to remain anonymous

Special thanks to ZERO..., Milan

Museum of Sant'Eustorgio, Portinari Chapel, and Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum

Open Hours

Tuesday – Sunday:

10 am – 6 pm

Monday: closed

Ticket office closes

at 5.30 pm

Entrance from Piazza

Sant'Eustorgio 3

Entrance to the exhibition is regulated according to the current anti Covid-19 security measures

Tickets

Standard: 10 euros

Reduced and

groups: 8 euros

Schools and

oratories: 6 euros

For reductions and free entry

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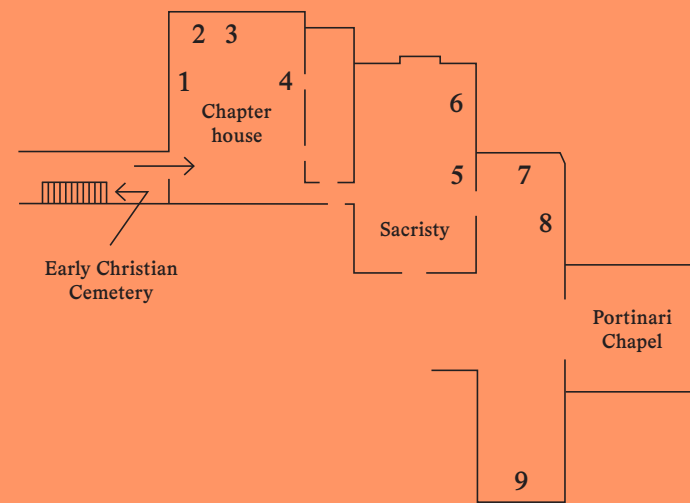
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Alessandro Pessoli *Testa Cristiana* 09.15 – 11.28.2021

Museum of the Basilica of Sant'Eustorgio
(Ground floor)



- 1 *Testa che piange e sorride*, 2008
- 2 *Cross Play Music*, 2010
- 3 *Figura che prega*, 2008
- 4 *Cristo deriso #2*, 2018

Towards the end of the 2000s Pessoli began to approach Christian iconography, with a desire to “convey the complex concepts and sensations, to capture feelings and moods” that characterizes all of his practice, as he himself states. For the artist painting is a means to investigate the emotional intensity in the faces and gestures of the individual.

The two paintings (both 2008) delicately represent moments of spirituality: *Testa che piange e sorride* shows contradictory and completely human emotions, and at the same time is surrounded by a luminous aura reminiscent of a halo; in *Figura che prega*, an ungainly male body humbly bends over.

In 2009 the artist moved to Los Angeles. Here his work, which incorporated the expressionist, futurist or modernist figuration of exponents such as Arturo Martini, Mario Sironi and Fausto Melotti, opens up to Pop influences. In the same year Pessoli participated in the 53rd Venice Biennale with a cycle of religious-themed drawings. Shortly after comes the vital *Cross Play Music*, in which the allusion to a religious dimension is indicated by the presence of the Christian symbols of the cross and candles.

The hieratic *Cristo deriso #2* is an example of the most recent evolution of his practice, in which

he reaches a pictorial crudeness that leaves room for the most exasperated aspects of emotion.

- 5 *Testa Cristiana-derisione*, 2018
- 6 *Teste Cristiane Trittico*, 2018
- 7 *Testa Cristiana #1, #2, #3*, 2018

With acid colors applied with spray paint and other techniques, Pessoli takes up both the historical-artistic and popular traditions of the representation of the face of the suffering Jesus, in particular in the iconography of the Ecce Homo. In *Testa Cristiana-derisione*, as in some ancient versions of the Gospel story (including the famous fresco version by Beato Angelico in the Convent of San Marco in Florence), the only hand of the torturer that strikes appears: red, gigantic and closed in a fist it is an incontrovertible emblem of violence against an innocent.

Testa Cristiana #1, #2, #3 are located in the area of the Portinari Chapel, so that their bright colors resonate with the bright colors of the frescoed dome. In fact, these are works, like all those of this group, created by the artist specifically for this exhibition.

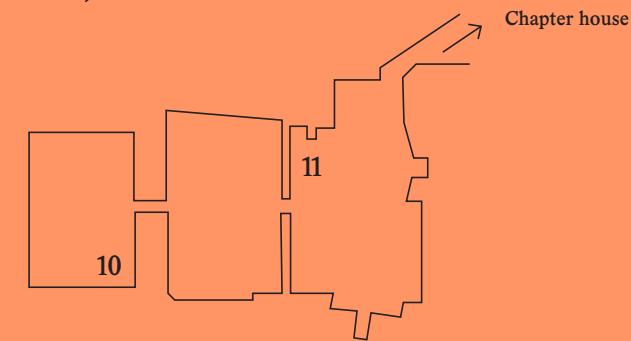
- 8 *Lacrime e cera*, 2018

An intense but calm expressiveness returns, like in the paintings presented in the Chapter house. His head, with its big tears, is characterized by the emphasis on the size of his eyes, ears and mouth, which reaffirm his humanity. Despite the attributes of the small cross and the crown of leaves, this is the mournful depiction of one of the “last.” The choice of non-noble materials such as tin and wax accentuates the sense of precariousness of this figure.

- 9 *Edicola #1*, 2018

Speaking of this sculpture, and the similar one exhibited in the Goldsmith’s section of The Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum (*Edicola #2*, 2018), the artist refers to “uncertain funeral monuments.” These sculptures are made of plaster, wax, and silk, which are, in Pessoli’s words “common materials inside a church, elements of its body, of its history.” The structure appears precarious, declaring its inadequacy in making a concept eternal. *Edicola #1* draws upon the ark of St. Peter Martyr on the one hand by adhering to the tradition of sacred shrines, on the other by de-structuring it and thus revealing the dimension of doubt and uncertainty which, according to the artist, characterizes contemporaneity.

Archeological site, Early Christian Cemetery
(Basement)



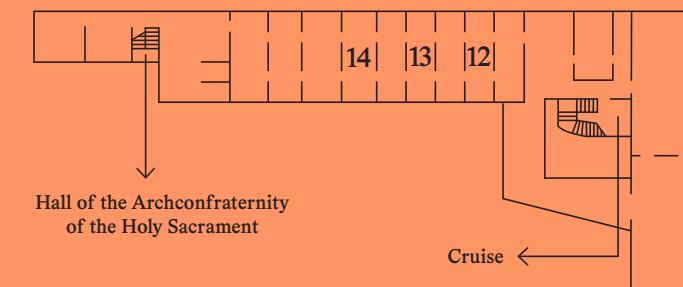
- 10 *Bucaneve*, 2008

The artist has chosen to include *Bucaneve* in this exhibition (originally created for an exhibition in Milan in 2008) due to its relevance to the theme of relics. The majolica body, clearly human even if headless, is divided into parts, from which flower-like shapes bloom. The bright colors, accentuated by the glazing of the material, are in apparent contrast with the lying position and therefore linked to death. In fact, together with the inflorescences, it makes the sculpture intensely vital.

- 11 *Figura che torna*, 2018

The possibility of exhibiting inside the remains of a late ancient necropolis stimulated the conception of this sculpture—lying but alive, made of poor materials but regal in its composure. The wooden support on the back means that, even if stretched out, the body shows: the canonical attribute of the crown of thorns, from which a blooming flower suggests the theme of the Resurrection, and the heart (pop, infantile, everyday, but universal) confirms the victory of life.

Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum
(Basement)



- 12 *Edicola #2*, 2018

In the area of the Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum dedicated to the Goldsmith collections, the exhibition itinerary is completed with three sculptures dedicated to heads, all created in dialogue with the context of the Cloisters. From the tradition of busts-reliquaries, to funerary sculpture, the “head” is traditionally a sculptural subject that implies a deepening into subjectivity—both emotional and physiognomic. Commenting on his choice to work with Christian iconographies, the artist wrote: “Even intimately, the use of religious subjects represents the possibility of working with a series of images in which delicacy, tenderness, and fragility are important issues.”

- 13 *Martire*, 2020

Inspired by the iconographic and narrative presence of the figure of St. Peter Martyr in the Cloisters, Pessoli imagined this figure of a Martyr who maintains the attribute of the Saint—the dagger that wounds his head, reinventing it in a lively polymaterism and with the addition of visual signs. Butterflies are for the artist an emblem of purity and vitality, ideally coming from the drawings of his daughter as an element that softens the story of martyrdom. The figure is characterized by a beard—that of Pessoli himself—confirming a personal responsibility with respect to the role of the artist; with the red cloth, on the other hand, a dimension of spiritual royalty is decreed. This head therefore becomes a representation of the dimension of humanity crossed by spirituality.

- 14 *S. Ambrogio fiorito*, 2020

As a reaction to *S. Ambrogio Benedicente* from the 10th century, one of the masterpieces of the collection of the Carlo Maria Martini Diocesan Museum exhibited at the beginning of the museum exhibition itinerary, the artist rethinks the figure of the Milanese saint, recovering the more minute and everyday aspects of the hagiographic story. St. Ambrose is the protector of beekeepers because as a child, while he slept with his mouth open, a swarm of bees entered his mouth without stinging him, and then disappeared into the sky. Flowers, a recurring element in Pessoli’s work especially in ceramics, and bees—together with the expression of sweetness—symbolize life and kindness in this sculpture.