

Marco Maggi

Slow Politics

Adriano Pedrosa - 2008

“Examining a ream of the best-quality white paper proves that it is impossible to find a single absolutely white, silent sheet in 500 examples.” - Marco Maggi

The great movement of the 20th century is velocity. Speed radically transforms landscape, city, architecture, and things; and, if it does not banalize them, it visually simplifies them. Thanks to the invention and disseminated use of the automobile, people travel rapidly across the city and their gazes scan streets and highways at high speed. Their visual and perceptive experience is completely transformed. On account of the swift motion, the individual can no longer perceive the finishing and decorative details on façades of pre-modern houses and other buildings, for example. Facade and landscape must be simplified so they can be captured by the gaze that fleetingly scans them. The modernist architecture and landscape design of straight lines and flat surfaces are to a great extent a response to acceleration. Within this scenario, the swiftness and the banalization of gaze and visibility pose a threat to aesthetic decadence. The risk: an architectural design and an urban planning might appear that will introduce large cartoon- or caricature-like façades which can be understood and appreciated at a single glance. Speed is also given a compelling impetus in such media as television, the Internet, and other globalized networks. The amount of events must also supply the media's daily consumption, thereby spawning news production rather than reports. Going against the grain, in this case, we have ancient, modern or contemporary art. Notwithstanding the unbridled multiplication of art works, shows, fairs, collections, museums, and biennial and triennial exhibitions, art insists in demanding a slowdown, a pause. (Possibly the exception is Andy Warhol, who to a certain extent incorporated multiplication and acceleration in his work; but one needs time and dedication to fully understand this.)

The work of Marco Maggi (Montevideo, 1957) opens trenches in this clash with speed. “Paper is my purpose. Time, plus focus, is my preferred medium,” the artist stated. His work consists of finely traced, accurate, delicate and subtle drawings (at times rendered without graphite or ink) of intricate patterns that albeit being abstract and geometric, relate to architectural designs, networks, landscapes, maps or grids, whether they be real, imaginary, fabulous or idealized. Maggi's drawing resorts to different media that include graphite on paper and graphite on the passe-partout of the picture frame (such as in *San Andreas Fault*, 2008); dry point on aluminum foil, which in turn is framed (such as in *Slow Foil*, 2008), or framed in slide mounts (such as in *Sliding*, 2008) or yet framed on the foil roll itself; making incisions on acrylic (such as in *Slow Shadow*, 2008, in which the light shining on lines incised on the transparent plexiglas frame casts fine shadow lines on the blank paper), or on piles of paper. By and large, Maggi's works are small (even the large installations that he creates are made up of numerous piles of paper that can hardly be distinguished from the distance); they are patiently made with precision and careful attention to detail. There are no sudden, violent, expansive, or expressive gestures. Although there is excess. In this context, one needs to view the works from up close to understand the small and vast micro-universe that they contain. Not by chance, Maggi's works are difficult to reproduce or record in photography. One should strive to view them live and to inspect their surface, line, cut, shadow, relief and transparency.

Maggi asks us to slow down. The reference comes up more obviously in two of his titles shown in Sao Paulo: *Slow Foil*, and *Slow Shadow*. It also comes up in *Sliding*, a work made up of photo slide mounts, thus evoking a photogram or still, i.e., the suspension of the cinematic movement. The slowdown also appears in a more oblique, though penetrating manner in a series that the artist has been developing since 2005 named *The Ted Turner Collection—From CNN to the DNA*. The title is an ironic reference to celebrated U.S. media tycoon Ted Turner, the highly influential developer of the television news station Cable News Network (CNN) that revolutionized the market of news fabrication, broadcasting, and consumption. With this series, Marco Maggi intersects different speeds in life, in the media and in the globalization of art. In his own words, “From CNN to the DNA, I focus my attention on reading surfaces without the minor hope to get informed. Every day, we are condemned to know more and understand less.” In the works of this series, Maggi appropriates reproductions of works by modern masters Jasper Johns, Sol Lewitt, Lucio Fontana, Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian and Robert Ryman—, turns the work with its back to the viewer, adds piles of paper to it, and then slits its surface, creating small paper reliefs and sparsely revealing filaments and fragments of hidden masterpieces. The overall result boasts characteristics of a nearly all-white minimalist grid, except for the small color fragments and filaments of the appropriated works. The title of each individual work relates to the perverse realm of the media, in which

much is shown but little is actually seen: Complete Coverage. Maggi has brought to Sao Paulo, “complete coverages” of works by Gerhard Richter and Warhol, as well as foundational characters of the Latin-American modernism that include Lygia Clark, Jesus Soto, Helio Oiticica, Lygia Pape and Mira Schendel. In this specific context, the white grid structure for the works brings to mind a few reliefs of Pape’s “Grupo Frente” series (1954-56).

The game that Maggi proposes is replete with great concealments and strategic revelations. The viewer must take the time for careful observation. The reward may relate to Jorge Luiz Borges’ Aleph, the small, brilliant and pulsating sphere that contains the entire universe. However, this is a silent, delicate and slow game. In this sense, here we have a subtle political vein, even if masked by the beauty and dazzle of the works. The slowdown is anti-modern, anti-progressive, anti-capitalist, anti-urban, and anti- globalization. Much like a contemporary Faust, the artist seems to say “This passing instant may stop”, but his wish will hardly come true. It is precisely this trace of resistance that makes art so fundamental for our daily life.

Translated from the Portuguese by Izabel Burbridge.