

The Cthulhu Club

Gasconade, Milan 11 January - 9 February

By Barbara Casavecchia



2013 (installation view, Gasconade Club, Milan)

‘What is Great Cthulhu? An arrangement of electrons, like us,’ writes Michel Houellebecq in *Against the World, Against Life*, his 1991 (trans. 2005) study of horror novelist H.P. Lovecraft. The French writer proclaims himself a fan of Lovecraft’s tiredness with mankind and the founding mythologies of Cthulhu, the ancient squid-headed god lying asleep at the core of the earth, beneath the sea, ready to resurface and take the world. It’s a concrete incarnation of our worst fears of (self-) annihilation: ‘Lovecraft’s terror is rigorously material,’ quips Houellebecq. ‘Perhaps, he confirmed, something is hiding behind the curtain of reality that at times allows itself to be perceived. Something truly vile, in fact.’

A fascination with Cthulhu unites many subcultural worlds: from the writers who continued to expand Lovecraft’s dark cycles, to sci-fi and cyberpunk adepts, Metallica and their fans, role-playing gamers, cartoons. The numbers keep on growing now that we’ve entered the so-called Anthropocene, a new geological epoch in which human activity produces such a massive (and disruptive) impact on Gaia’s ecosystem that all boundaries between natural and artificial are in dire need of reframing. The

exhibition summons a clever selection of works that confront material representation with the *terrain vague* where organic and inorganic, real and virtual, seeing and touching now regularly meet.

The primary eye/hand candy is *Campo di Grano (Wheat Field, 2003)*, a large floor-installation by Italian artist Piero Gilardi, an Arte Povera 'dissident' now in his seventies. It's a smart choice, given the artist's groundbreaking fascination with nature and new technologies: in 1963, Gilardi titled his first exhibition *Machines for the Future* in homage to the cybernetic society soon to come. During the 1980s, when he reverted to artmaking after a decade of militant political activity, he turned to new media, virtual reality and interactivity, and he's now running the Parco Arte Vivente in Turin, a project that brings together 'living art' and environmental issues.

Campo di Grano belongs to Gilardi's best-known series, started in 1965, the *Tappeti-Natura (Nature-Carpets)*: hyperrealistic reproductions in polyurethane foam of fragments of 'landscape', which the public can experience by touching, walking or lying down on. With its bright colours and picture-perfect red poppies and ears of wheat, this lifeless field looks like an avatar.

Close by, from the wall hangs Andrei Koschmieder's *Untitled (Radiator Series #2) (2012)*, a tactile and unnaturally mimetic sculpture of a potted plant on a radiator, rendered in epoxy, corrugated metal and spraypaint. Its fragile leaves are transparent and as thin as film, like images halfway between two- and three-dimensionality. On the floor lies Lupo Boronovo's *Untitled (2013)*, an organically shaped sculpture in polyurethane expanding foam that recalls the bone of a giant sea creature landed ashore. Beatrice Brovia presents a postapocalyptic jewel in sawdust, leather and silver (*Potlâc VIII, 2012*). David Douard's camp assemblage *Sick Saliva (2013)* has metal wires protruding from the back of a plasma screen covered in plaster, at whose centre a head seems to resurface from the bottom; it recalls period horror movies where the fright arose from the impossible coexistence between humans and ghosts from other, inner dimensions, like Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist (1982)* or David Lynch's *Eraserhead (1977)* – whose deranged protagonist, one recalls, used to live among dead plants and watched and listened to the Lady in the Radiator.

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