

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 Borgonovo'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.

This article was first published in the April 2013 issue.