

## Andersen, Peill, Koivisto: Survivals and Migrations

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The show that brings the work of the two artists Claudia Peill and Kaisu Koivisto to Villa Helene does so in the form of “Intersections” [*Intersezioni*], a theme whose various interpretations and associations are all addressed here, elements that emerge from diverse backgrounds in terms of both materials and conceptual approaches and which the artists employ in various ways to explore the possibilities offered by their dual presence in the exhibition spaces.

Here the contrast is not simply between two different stylistic languages, superficially more traditional in the case of Claudia Peill or, for Kaisu Koivisto, entrusted to a wide range of natural – and then recycled – materials; but also between two points of view: one Mediterranean, one Finnic.

A pairing that echoes the history and very nature of the Hendrik Andersen Museum, former home of an artist who was Norwegian-born, American-educated and Roman by adoption; a man who incarnated two faces of the culture of his time: one fascinated by Old Europe with its wealth of culture and history, a European American who interprets the general concept of classical art with a very distinctive approach to the individual details – sacred and profane – of the Mediterranean tradition, and the other characterised by the disturbing and utopian presence of majestic forms, Nordic in their DNA, derived from the gigantic natural mythology of the peoples of Scandinavia.

Fruit of a project that the artist commissioned and constructed between 1922 and 1925, the Villa presents an American vision of a sort of neo-art nouveau whose architectural and ornamental elements are arranged in neo-renaissance rhythms enlivened by classical and neo-paleochristian decorations: a style that weaves together candelabra pilasters, frescoed friezes depicting putti and plant motifs and ornamental friezes in mosaic. Inside the villa the polychrome stuccoes, gilded panels and paintings in a taste redolent of Böcklin appear in what seems to be a series of deliberately distinct stylistic languages; intersections that reinterpret images taken from repertoires quoting the past and invested with new symbolic

meaning: for example, at the centre of the ceiling in the salon the funeral cortege suggests the funeral of Hendrik's beloved sister-in-law, Olivia Cushing, tutelary spirit of the house and of all of Hendrik's artistic activity.

It is the symbolic and imaginative motif of Andersen's World Centre of Communication that represents the point of encounter between the museum and the two contemporary artists' creative projects, establishing an ongoing and hypnotic dialogue that touches on an extraordinary variety of elements offering new inspiration and suggesting new interpretations. A testimonial that also exploits the thousands of photographic images and archived documents belonging to Hendrik Andersen [that the museum] conserves like precious treasure; a long-lost world in which individual identities sometimes slip away enveloped in the mystery of time's passing, but which can lead us far, on the trail of journeys and great migrations, in the pursuit of an artistic language unique of its kind.

This is what seems to happen to the “filter” that Claudia Peill creates in her work: the subject she has chosen to represent encounters and addresses reality, but fades into the imprecision of the photograph's “stolen” image.

The forms she adopts in composing her canvases, the diptych and the triptych, seem to suggest classical allusions, and yet her use of synthetic materials and acrylics gives a powerfully contemporary stamp to her multiple layers which, superimposed and stratifying, render the representation ambiguous and hard to define. The image represented is, moreover, always a fragment of a photograph, which acts as a sort of technical starting block defining the work; and the work takes the form of a modular installation in which the figure is divided up, creating spatial intersections. Classical mutations, for the details of Castel Sant'Angelo, lingering monochrome reproductions of second glances and gazes held – a score subdivided into various compositions that were exhibited at the Galleria Mara Coccia (April-June 2012); close-ups in which the stone and the shapes emerge so sculp-

turally as to be unrecognizable, even though they always conserve a hint of the fragment [from which they came].

Similarly, in the works devised for the exhibition at the Hendrik Andersen Museum, the rich modulations of her fields of colour entice the viewer into the depths of her thick, full-bodied brushstrokes, chasing the traces of a mental detail of the “almost-object” that might emerge, illuminated, as it does in the multiplying open skylights of *Orizzontale/verticale* (2013, fig. 45) and again in *Chiodo fisso* (2013, fig. 48) and *Contro il cielo* (2013, fig. 57). Macroscopic details of a deceptive reality, forcing the mind’s eye to search for analogies; mechanical scaffolding, gigantic concrete structures, swallowed into the colour and depicted in light: a gripping and entrancing sight. The use of video installations – such as *Static* (2013) on the ground floor of the Hendrik Andersen Museum, and in *Giorno/Notte* (2008) – offers her a means of distancing herself from the immediacy of physical contact with the material that offers her source of inspiration, generating the space she needs for reflection, and allowing for the flow of time, allowing her to linger, allowing her to invent. Fascinating in a different way, at times aggressively aloof, at times tenderly involving, Kaisu Koivisto’s images strike, amaze and leave us questioning and puzzled. They are all installations in which what emerges is an encounter between what animal and human kingdoms have become now that we have drifted so far from the perfect equilibrium of primordial nature. There is absolutely nothing primitive in the skin of the eviscerated bear lying on a metal support in *Ghost* (2009, fig. 30): it is a symbol of global warming; the fearful spectre of the great natural disasters that man is bringing about; a contestation of our desire for easy, comfortable adventures. In her ongoing investigation of the traces with which man is besmirching the Earth, leaving nature’s most majestic aspects so ferociously violated, Kaisu’s work is vibrant and poetic, as can be seen in the photos from the *Missile Hangars* series (2012, fig. 31) or the *Bombé* series (2011–2012, figs. 23–26), which demonstrate how quickly nature reclaims even the most fe-

rocious of weapons, and criticizing Russia’s part in the arms race during the Cold War.

Immersed in a vital world in which man and nature share the same roots, Koivisto’s Nordic inspiration graphically confronts the living mystery of nature, which it seems is not lost to us even in the monstrous physiognomy of the city. *Cows in New York City: Reintroducing the Species* (2000, figs. 9–11, 77).

In her continuing exploration of man and nature the use of recycled materials represents an important form of bridge: skin, fabrics used symbolically, metaphors. These all appear, once again, as emblematic pieces of evidence in the exhibition at the Hendrik Andersen Museum *Flood* (2013, fig. 29).

Her abilities are very evident in her numerous “animals”, like *Bambience* (2010, fig. 39), which, with the skins from which they are constructed and with their forms, recreate the wildness of primordial creatures seen through children’s eyes. Images that seem derived from fantasy, human illusions, ambiguous toys, fragments of an industrial era, menacing elements of a world that no longer exists.

If, therefore, this exhibition moves amid the surviving fragments of our recollections of a violent and chaotic world that destroys and transforms everything, but which can be fully apprehended, its true beauty restored, only in mind and memory, the significance of its underlying message recalls, like a bright enigma, the wonderful “map of memories” that Aby Warburg reconstructed with such patience and genius in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

We don’t know if Hendrik was present, but in 1929 Warburg gave a lecture in Rome at the Biblioteca Herziana, a lecture which was, in fact, entitled *Mnemosyne*, like his extraordinary project dedicated to rediscovering the culture of the past through images – a project to which he would dedicate his entire life and which lay at the heart of his famous library (saved by Fritz Saxl from the Nazi furor), his texts and the boards [the *Mnemosyne Atlas* itself] of collected images from the world of the ancients and the renaissance, representing the migration and revivals of the images of ancient gods in modern European cultures.

Hendrik employed all his iconographic knowledge in decorating his Roman house/museum. He filled his atelier with sculptures inspired by the world of Humanism, and there, a natural extrovert, he received Italian and foreign callers, always happy to converse and to make acquaintances and friendships among the vast mass of humanity, which he portrayed and described in his sculptures, paintings and photographs. He was defender and champion of [the idea

of] a global city in which the entire world would communicate, a centre in which knowledge would be exchanged and intellectual inspiration found.

The Museum today, as it was then, is a place in which the stylistic symbiosis of the exhibition spaces allows contemporary art to express itself in open "conversations", forming, in images, a palimpsest of testaments from the most varied of sources.