

Nicoletta Leonardi, *Listening. Marzia Migliora, Percorso sonoro. Quelli che trascurano di rileggere sempre la stessa storia*, EnnErre, Le nostre ragioni, Milano, 2012

In 2009, ten Lombard museums and exhibition spaces initiated a joint project of production and acquisition of contemporary art works with the aim of enriching their collections, supporting artistic research and promoting art appreciation among the general public. Each invited artist was asked to produce a site-specific project, that is an artwork created to exist in a certain place and conceived as a response to the encounter with that particular place.

Marzia Migliora was invited to participate in the project. Among her preferences, she indicated the Museo del Novecento. At the moment of her choice, the museum did not yet exist: it was just a construction site. Unable to work on the exhibition spaces, Migliora decided to produce a sound project, a choice also motivated by her intention of entering the museum's galleries in a subtle, discreet way, through an audio guide. The sound would not be projected into the space, but would reach only those who chose to wear the headphones and listen.

The audio guide's content is entirely devoted to the collection of the Museo del Novecento and, in particular, to 22 works covering the entire time span of the 20th century from Georges Braque to Alighiero Boetti, selected by Migliora among those destined for inclusion in the museum's permanent exhibits. When Migliora's project was carried out the paintings were still in museum's storerooms, waiting to be put on display in the galleries. The artist invited 17 people to actively participate to her work, asking them to stand in front of the paintings and give voice to the thoughts and emotions triggered by the works. Each person was accompanied to the museum's basement storage spaces and left alone in front of the paintings while a digital recorder recorded his/her thoughts expressed through words, through the voice or – as in the case of the violoncellist – through musical improvisation. By way of this unusual and privileged encounter with art works, presented to the viewer no longer in the public and official form of the

exhibition display, but in the private and subterranean dimension of the storerooms, Migliora transforms the viewer from passive consumer to co-author and co-protagonist of a choral work developed around the notion of the text as plural, as well as the importance of re-reading as an escape from the indistinct repetition of the identical and the stereotype typical of consumerism. Significantly, the title of Migliora's project, "Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere", is a quote from the French semiologist Roland Barthes, which the artist uses as a theoretical framework. Barthes has written that re-reading does not mean returning to the identical, but multiplying the text, exalting its plurality and complexity.

Migliora's sound path functions as a normal audio guide: it contains explanations of paintings identified by numbers, each corresponding to an audio track. Yet the voices of the individuals involved in the project also offer a re-reading of the museum. Instead of the usual interpretation of paintings professionally and impersonally narrated through art historical canons, Migliora's audio guide provides the visitor with the opportunity of an intimate encounter between personally involved individuals talking about their lived experiences, and the paintings as privately seen in the unofficial context of the storerooms. Migliora has thus produced a dialogue between the museum as a site of institutional and official knowledge, and the visitors' personal and private spheres. The artist has offered the viewer an encounter with the nude materiality of art works conceived as objects moving into space and time, following the trajectories of their social biographies – from the storage facility to the exhibition spaces and back. Exposing subjectivity through narration and the grain of the voice, Migliora has pointed to the very simple and often overlooked fact that art objects affect viewers on a personal and emotional level.

Iolanda Ratti, *An original voyage. Marzia Migliora, Percorso sonoro. Quelli che trascurano di rileggere sempre la stessa storia*, EnnErre, Le nostre ragioni, Milano, 2012

The work created by Marzia Migliora for the initiative “Twister” is particularly interesting because it uses the immaterial nature of sound to take the viewer on an original voyage through a number of iconic

paintings from the collection of the Museo del Novecento, ranging from the historical avant-gardes to the 1970s. From 2009 to 2010 our storage facility was the site of enriching encounters, performances behind closed doors, bizarre soliloquies, touching stories. We all tried to take a few moments, in the midst of the frenetic pace of preparing to open a museum, to meet and listen to some of the seventeen people invited to freely comment on the paintings, who included – to indicate just a few – an astronaut, a child, a refugee, a journalist, a cellist, a philosopher, an actress, a poet.

What we see today are people walking through the rooms of the museum wearing red headphones connected to a strange red object. What they are listening to is a collage of sounds that offers them new perspectives, new interpretations of the paintings. What the museum conserves are the files, the mp3 players and their rubbery containers.

What never makes an appearance, on the other hand, is the long, demanding procedure that has led up to the finished work: the contacts with the “interpreters”, the long hours of work with Marzia, the technical difficulties caused by recording voices in a space not suited to the purpose, the movement of the paintings, the sound editing. But above all, a wonderful experience that has been a unique opportunity, for all of us who have been able to take part, to rediscover paintings we have seen dozens of times, to break out of pre-set schemes and to grant ourselves the time to re-view, from another perspective, the same story.

Marina Pugliese, Marzia Migliora, *Conversing. Twister*, Silvana Editoriale, Milano, 2010

Marina Pugliese, Marzia Migliora, *Conversing. Marzia Migliora, Percorso sonoro. Quelli che trascurano di rileggere sempre la stessa storia*, EnnErre, Le nostre ragioni, Milano, 2012

Marina Pugliese: For the site of a project that was complex in and of itself, the creation of a specially commissioned piece, you chose a museum under construction, and what’s more, a museum of 20th century art. Could you tell us why you chose the Museo del Novecento and how you arrived at your idea for the piece?

Marzia Migliora: I’d say that I’ve always enjoyed arduous tasks; limits are a theme I’ve often touched on in my work. I think that difficulties are a way of putting yourself to the test, but also an opportunity to discover the unexpected, which is why I’m not afraid to tackle new techniques in my artistic projects, to try out different materials and venture down untrodden paths, even at the risk of losing my bearings. Isn’t it a beautiful thing to fall in love with an idea and pursue it, despite the inherent risks of any “fall”, in the attempt to see it realized and shared? The Museo del Novecento was one of my first choices for Twister precisely because it didn’t physically exist, since it hadn’t yet been completed. The construction site was there, but the rest was an unfinished project, still on paper. This step, in an art- it’s work, is a fundamental one, given the fragility of its evolution, made up of decisions, chaos, change. This choice simply put me at my ease. I thought of basing my project on the pieces in the collection precisely because they’re from the last century want to question them, to ask them to keep talking to us.

MP: The metaphor of travel underlies your piece: you lead visitors on a selective path through the museum. Starting where and headed where?

MM: When I started working on the project, I invited several people to a meeting, including Franco Malerba, the first Italian astronaut. At the museum’s storage site, I showed them a few pieces of artwork that I had selected, and recorded their comments. It’s extraordinary to listen to the flow of thoughts that pours out when you’re all alone with a piece; that back-and-forth between the observer and the artwork, when spoken out loud, is like a secret revealed. Usually, when we look at a piece, the thoughts it inspires stay inside us, even though their power is that they take us

elsewhere, they make us try on someone else's thoughts. In *Quelli che trascurano di rileggere si condannano a leggere sempre la stessa storia* ("Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere"), the viewer's thoughts are revealed, to become inspiration for another journey by the people who use my audio device to discover what you won't find in art history books: the stories of people, ordinary people, but also people who have a special job, or have made unusual choices in life, completely outside the art world, like a cloistered nun or an astronaut.

MP: You are the collector, but the project is a choral one. How did you choose the people who act as guides in the interpretation of the artwork?

MM: I like to think of this project as a matryoshka doll; I let the pieces themselves suggest, through their content, what eyes to put in front of them. I'm surprised by the capacity of vision; I saw that figures I thought were quite removed from the world of art know how to take an open stance in front of a piece, simply listening to it. I tried to put myself in other people's shoes and imagine, through those life experiences, potential stories, windows onto other worlds. My attempt is to collect, through the audio recordings that will be made for me by the people I have invited to take part, stories that contain themes close to my heart, which my work has touched on over the years. In the field of literature, film, dance, and contemporary theatre, I have always looked for travelling companions who could add something to my investigation, through an exchange, an association and a vicinity of thought that would not end in the space of an encounter. With this project, on the other hand, I have the chance to meet people I respect and whose work has stimulated and enriched my own.

MP: This is essentially an audio piece. In the field of contemporary art, sound is an increasingly common medium. What does it mean for an artist to work with an intangible medium?

MM: Sound is aerial, but has the capacity to fill an environment without any real physical presence. For the Museo del Novecento, I thought it was important not to impose any physical encumbrance, to work by subtraction. This contradiction attracts me; the sound of a voice carries tonal shadings and inflections, leaving it to the listener's imagination to try to reconstruct the facial features of the person who's talking. This piece involves looking at what is already in the museum: the works it contains, and the voices, become an invitation to the journey I'd like the viewer to undertake, to enhance their personal store of knowledge.