

Gabriele De Santis
MOROSO Prize 2010 Proposal

Introduction

Before this opportunity, I knew of Moroso, but I was not fortunate enough to fully engage with it in-depth.

The first step was obviously to carefully explore the website. Through the images and literature offered I gained a better understanding of what encapsulates the brand, the philosophy from the conceptual beginnings of products through to their execution in reality.

Subsequently, I felt the need to visit a store to better understand the spaces and products, with which I would face with this project. I moved to London about a year ago to gain an MA in Fine Art so I had the opportunity to visit the Moroso store on Rosebery Avenue.

The feelings from the moment I entered the shop were mainly two: pleasure and fear.

Pleasure because it was a bit like visiting a well-curated exhibition: the objects and their arrangement in the exhibition were simply perfect.

Fear because all the assumptions for my project, that I had preconceived until that moment, were now redundant. Every detail of the store appeared so professionally curated that any intervention seemed to be not suitable for what was around me.

Like any artist, I am used to working empty white spaces. My works are usually produced for neutral spaces like galleries or museums, which are created exclusively to house works of art. This time is different: the spaces are neither empty nor neutral, but perfectly designed to accommodate objects of high design, which in themselves have nothing to envy the works of art.

So I immediately ruled out any possibility of material intervention. For material intervention I mean the insertion of an installation, a sculpture or a video, the media I usually work, within the store. Immediately, I thought to intervene in a gentle way, which would allow me to enter into dialogue with the objects and avoid the unnecessary inclusion of a self celebration of my work.

Secondly, I thought it was right to leave unchanged the leading role of the products displayed in the store.

I therefore concluded that performance could be the most appropriate media to use for this occasion.

Performance in which certain objects of the store were an essential part of the whole, so as to create a balance between what the Moroso store is and my project, which is to operate within that specific context.

Project Description

To be more specific in my project, my idea will be realized in the construction of three different performances in the Moroso store. These will take place all at the same time and on a single day.

The whole environment will be left in the dark during the exhibition, with the exception of three sites chosen as the location of the three performances. This is to give prominence to the three events and create a sort of frame of light on my actions. It will not be difficult to do this properly considering the vast lighting system of any kind located in the store.

As already mentioned each of these performances will co-star a piece chosen from among the objects on display in the store of Moroso. I would simply indicate the type of product that I needed (eg a chair or a light) and, if the project move forward, I would like to discuss specifically with any of the store staff on a particular model to choose for each of the three performances. This is to try to create, as much as possible, a cooperation and a dialogue that are both crucial for this kind of initiative.

Thus, my work in the space of Moroso will cohabit perfectly with what is already there, without a need for upheaval. Art and Design will be co-stars in the event. A happening, not repeatable, that sees the meeting of two different realities, but in perfect sync.

The choice of the three performances

The three performances are an extension of one of my latest project called Seven Sisters.

Seven Sisters is the neighborhood where I have my studio here in London and is located in the north of the city. Wikipedia states that this area: 'had recent publicity as The Most ethnically diverse area in the European Union'.

This makes the area very interesting and full of stories. People are all different, they live and coexist peacefully creating a great mix of generations and culture, but never forgetting their origins or want to delete them.

The clothes, the food and the various customs and practices often they do not change at all. Everything is simply shifted geographically, but the roots remain firm.

Spending time in Seven Sisters has allowed me to approach carefully different cultures that I did not know before, or perhaps mistakenly thought to know, and gave me the opportunity to meet a large number of individuals who have much to tell.

These people and their stories have already inspired some of my works which I will illustrate with images as documentation.

Follows the specific descriptions of the three performances.

Untitled - (Quiàn = Monly)

The protagonist of the first performance is a man of Chinese origin in the act of praying. Each time the man will burn a particular thin layer of paper. According to ancient Chinese tradition, burning paper is good when you have the intention to pray for the dead man. It is believed that it will help him cross the line to the afterlife.

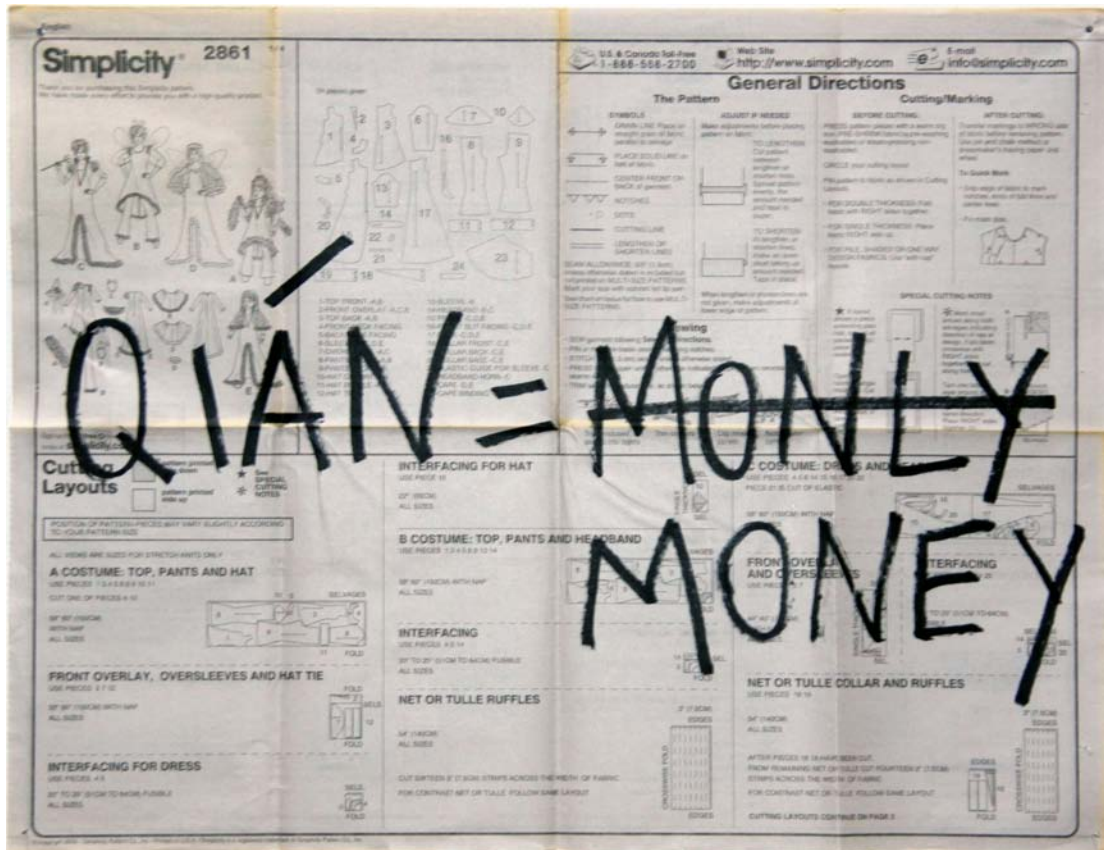
I learned of this tradition through a man, obviously of Chinese origin, who owns a small shop on the main road to Seven Sisters. As I entered his shop, I was immediately attracted to some tissues collected in bundles of 50 each. So I asked the man what they were and if I could buy them. He smiled aware of my ignorance in this regard and explained the matter. I then asked him what was represented on the paper and he told me that they were reproductions of ancient Chinese banknotes.

To explain everything, because of his poor English, he needed to take a piece of paper and a pen and write the word Quiàn and its translation in English. Quiàn in English means money. Initially he wrote the wrong spelling of the word money, writing 'Monly'.

This meeting gave birth to my work on paper that you see photographed at the bottom of the page.

This performance will be conducted with the presence of a lamp placed just above the man who is kneeling, praying and burning light tissues.

(This particular type of paper does not produce flame, but simply incinerating, similar to the paper for cigarettes. I say this, only to inform that there is no danger of fire.)



Untitled (Seven Sisters), 2010 - Paper, ink - 37 x 47 cm
© Gabriele De Santis

Untitled - (Fabric)

The second performance starring a woman of Islamic origin. For work reasons I needed some fabric and then I went to a local (Seven Sisters) shop of textiles. I met a woman named Karima, who manages the business and also makes traditional costumes. She has been a refugee in London for about five years, of Afghan origin, Karima was forced to flee from her homeland because of numerous sexual abuse by her family. I was very impressed by her story, especially when she told me that the first thing she did once she came to London was burn her burqa, as if trying to erase or at least definitively leave behind a horrible period of her life. Following this, Karima has continued to cover her face, having no intention to deny her origins and her own beliefs, but to be finally free from the abuse and harassment she had undergone for years.

The story of Karima is the inspiration from which takes the second live performance that will see a woman of Islamic origin, who will continually remove and re-wear the burqa as a loop of a single gesture.

The woman will be sitting on a couch, facing a small table where she rests the Burqa each time before wearing again.

Below there is a still from a video, which I made of the burning on the wall of the fabric which is usually used to create burqas. Deleting something by burning does not allow us to remove that thing from our memories. The ash and the burns left by the combustion are a perfect metaphor for what will always remain imprinted in our minds even when we try to eliminate it totally.



Untitled (Seven Sisters), 2010 – Video – 7'27"
© Gabriele De Santis

Untitled - (Orchestra)

The third and last performance is inspired by a humorous (in Pirandello's way) experience, , which I happened to spectate frequently. Actually, every morning at the exit of the Seven Sisters railway station. A large man of black complexion directs an orchestra which does not exist. The man's movements are very plausible and it is very exciting to watch him. Many people leave coins walking, but he seems not to ask anything.

I could not say with certainty whether the man is there every day to collect a few coins or if he really believes he is conducting an orchestra. I would never have the courage to stop his performance. The fact is that he is there as a milestone, to conduct an orchestra that life has not given him.

This third and last performance, therefore, sees a man conducting an orchestra, which is not there. As an act of power/ powerlessness against society, which is not always in sync with our expectations.

The object co-star of this performance will be a chair. The actor indeed will conduct the imaginary orchestra standing on a chair, which thus becomes a symbolic stage.

I have not had the opportunity to create a work on this strange experience.

Therefore during the performance I would like to film this and then later realize a video. This initiative will allow me to leave the initiative with a product.

Conclusion

I hope I have been able to explain my idea clearly enough.

I reiterate my interest to put two different realities, that are in connection with this initiative, in communication.

For any further information I remain at your complete disposal.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Gabriele De Santis

Some information about Seven Sisters

Seven Sisters is an area north of London in the third zone.

The neighborhood takes its name from the seven elm trees planted in a circle from the beginning of 600. It seems that until the early 800's in the middle of the seven trees witches were burned. Today Seven Sisters is very multi-ethnic, as mentioned above, and seems to be the district with the most cultural diversity in Europe.

The heart of Seven Sisters is certainly the market, where you can breathe the aromas and flavors from all over the world.

Below a picture of the seven elm trees dating back to 1830.



Seven Sisters 1830

Follows is my updated CV

Gabriele De Santis

Born 1983, Rome

Currently lives and works in London.

Education

2010 – 2011

MA Visual Arts at Camberwell College of Arts (University of the Arts London)

2009

Salzburg Summer Academy (Internationale Sommerakademie fuer Bildende Kunst)

Exhibitions

2010

Il raccolto d'autunno continua ad essere abbondante, Careof e Viafarini, curated by Milovan Farronato e Chiara Agnello, Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan

To Be Destroyed, Ten Floors, curated by Huv Chaffer and Lucy Woodhouse, London

Premio Moroso, Galleria comunale d'Arte Contemporanea di Monfalcone, Monfalcone

Argonauti, ArtVerona, curated by Andrea Bruciati

Seven 7 artists | 7 curators, group show curated by Antonio Grulli, Caroline Corbetta, Francesca Pagliuca, Lorenzo Bruni, Marco Tagliaferro, Milovan Farronato, Nicola Trezzi, Conduits, Milan

La Danse Macrabe, Nomas Foundation, curated by JCU students and coordinated by Ilaria Gianni as a John Cabot University, Rome, Art Department event

2009

Salzburg Summer Academy (Internationale Sommerakademie fuer Bildende Kunst)

Emotional Community, MONITOR, group show curated by Teresa Macrì, Rome

Dryphoto Arte contemporanea, group show curated by Lorenzo Bruni, Prato

Usine des rêves, 26cc, group show curated by Cecilia Casorati, Rome

2008

Pagine Bianche d'Autore, curated by Teresa Macrì (mention)

Beata Remix, group show curated by Davide W. Parione, Palazzo d'Avalos, Vasto

Videominuto, Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci di Prato, curated by Raffaele Gavarro, Prato