

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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frieze

LAURENT GRASSO & WIM DELVOYE Galerie Perrotin, Paris

So tucked away in the top corner of the room that I only noticed it on my second tour of the galleries, hangs a white geodesic dome, 18 centimetres across (*Sphère géodésique*, Geodesic Sphere, 2014). It is a perfect copy, in miniature, of the listening stations employed by the American National Security Agency at Teufelsberg in Berlin, Menwith Hill in Yorkshire, and elsewhere. But suspended from the ceiling and perpetually spinning, it also brings to mind disco balls. Constructed of solid marble, the sphere neither reflects nor surveils: it exists purely as a symbol of two very different kinds of temples to listening; a rare meeting-point for the iconographies of disco and the cold war.

Despite its peripheral position in the room, *Sphère géodésique* is central to Laurent Grasso's concerns and typical of

the propensity each of his works has to open up a portal onto multiple histories of power, knowledge and wonder. Across eight rooms packed with videos, neons, oil paintings, sound works, sculptures and installations, this impressive show, 'Soleil Double' (Double Sun), takes us from the destruction of Pompeii to World War II-era psychoacoustics and the remnants of Benito Mussolini's Italy in a manner at once aesthetically rich and intellectually rewarding. Grasso's work exhibits a knack for finding an idea that crystallizes a certain image of the present in its relationship to the past.

Wim Delvoye, in Perrotin's other space around the corner, is less iconographer than iconoclast – a point made rather forcibly by his *Icon (Self Portrait)* (2013), a colour print of the artist cheerfully flipping us the bird, partially covered over with the distinctive, decoratively embossed metal covering (an 'oklad' or 'riza') commonly used to protect Russian icons. Most of Delvoye's works here are in series, re-imagining everyday objects like car tyres or suitcases as if designed in parallel worlds. 'Untitled (Car Tyre)' (2010–13), for example, comprises seven works, all of which are presented under spotlights in a darkened room like religious artefacts in an ethnographic exhibit. But the original manufacturer of the tyres was Dunlop, upon whose workmanship the artist has engraved complex filigreed patterns gesturing towards a web of art-historical references, from the baroque to art nouveau.

Delvoye's car tyres have something of the cargo cult about them, but in *Double Helix Alternating Current 13cm x 15L* (2009) he has produced an icon that perhaps even Richard Dawkins would approve of, weaving several dozen nickelled bronze crucifixes into the distinctive interlocking curves of a DNA strand. Never mind that the work could be as much a response to the quasi-religious fanaticism of modern biological rationalism as to the mass production of sacred artefacts.

What links Delvoye's work to Grasso's is a kind of folding of the past into the present

- 1
Pablo Bronstein
*Girl on a Late-19th-Century
Swiss Balcony*, 2014, performance
documentation
- 2
Jiří Kovanda
Kissing Through Glass,
2014, performance documentation
- 3
Laurent Grasso
Soleil Double, 2014, two brushed
brass discs, 90 x 90 cm each
- 4
Wim Delvoye
Untitled (Truck Tyre), 2013,
hand-carved truck tyre, 148 x 60 cm

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– and vice versa. Each finds in anachronism a means of estrangement that could be either satirical or analytical. The former's 'Dunlop Geomax 100' series (2013) imagines the Gothic cathedral builders, beloved of John Ruskin, now working with bicycle wheels, their *trefoils* and *fleurs-de-lys* rendered in steel spokes and twisted rubber. The results are strangely beautiful, almost Ballardian.

Grasso, meanwhile, uses his undated 'Studies into the Past' series to project marvels like eclipses and sun dogs (an atmospheric phenomenon) into Renaissance oils closely modelled on the likes of Paolo Uccello and Fra Angelico with the aid of professional art restorers. It's a project he's been adding to since 2009, but the series remains without a date in his catalogue in order to emphasize this game of travelling through time. Presented here alongside genuinely old books, such as the prophecies of Nostradamus, we are apt to wonder for a moment if Grasso's paintings are the real thing or a modern fabrication.

It becomes a question of how we picture disaster. Several of these 'Studies' present ash clouds and eruptions, encoding them back into an out-of-date mode of representation. Contemporary means of capturing catastrophe is all too recognizable in the film that closes the exhibition, *Soleil Noir* (Black Sun, 2014). Its title a quote from Gérard de Nerval's ode to depression, 'El Desdichado' (The Unfortunate, 1854), the film takes us on a drone's eye-view across the ruins of Pompeii and the caldera of Stromboli. Captured by this cool machine gaze, the former becomes any of a number of modern wreckages (Iraq or Afghanistan post-invasion, for instance), while the latter seems a terrible threat, perhaps even a weapon. Two small white domes on the mountainside (actually there to provide protection for tourists) suggest geodesic domes, recalling the importance of seismological research to the US military since World War II. Deivoie may frequently seem to leap out of his own works but his frame of reference tends to stay within the histories of art. Grasso's work, on the contrary, draws you in, even as it points out, beyond art history to other circuits of force and of memory, both real and imagined.

ROBERT BARRY

