

Martina Simeti

ALEK O.

*Il giorno della fine non ti servirà l'inglese*

with a text by Cornelia Mattiacci

31 March 2023 – 3 June 2023

Opening Thursday 30 March, 6 – 9 pm

*Il giorno della fine non ti servirà l'inglese* ('On the final day, you won't need English') is the title that artist Alek O. has chosen for her first solo exhibition in the Martina Simeti Gallery spaces. The phrase was surgically extracted from a Franco Battiato song to gain its autonomy as a title, and this simple operation reflects a recurring attitude of the artist, that of drawing on fragments from the world around her and dislocating them, so as to observe and modify their very essence. On the final day (which has already come around several times, has it not?), some of the objects that have patiently populated our lives for so long are likely to survive us. Incidental objects that, having been exposed to the lives of multiple people and designed to last, accumulate a latent collective memory, thus becoming hard to get rid of. Having moved to Milan years ago from Buenos Aires to study design, Alek O. intercepted a number of recurring elements that make up unnoticed threads of the city's identity fabric. The grade zero of domestic condominium matter thus provides the landscape in which the artist switches between closed circuits, melts ingredients and unhinges synthetic and functional textures, before recomposing and reassembling them once more.

The exhibition features a site-specific installation – made up of found ceiling lights and doormats – along with some of her new and recent works made using everyday materials. On entering the gallery, we cross the expanded threshold of a work on two levels: brown and red doormats (the colour red is particularly recurrent in Milanese entranceways) make up the two-dimensional population of squares, rectangles, semicircles and irregular polygons brought together under the title *Flatland* (2023), paying homage to the satirical novella of the same name published in 1884 by the English author Edwin A. Abbott. The installation is completed by the group of sculptures *Ehi Siri, Lumos* (2023): compositions of modified ceiling lights that, from static wall and ceiling illuminations, now land like mini flying saucers ready for their next take-off – with the word 'Lumos' Harry Potter would turn on the light of his magic wand, just as we might turn on the torch on our iPhone. *Untitled (Glovo)*, 2023, is a work consisting of carved and folded paper segments, inspired by the patterns of gift cards, non-authorial decorations. The verso of the work showcases the back of the poster, the blueprint – that light blue that varies in tone according to the printer, inexorably personalising the industry standard. The bedspring in *There Was a Lot of Waiting*, 2022, originally designed to support the weight of mattresses and bodies, is a harmonic wall-mounted mesh reminiscent of an engineered score.

Sugar paste and food colouring shape the group of sculptures *Il giorno della fine non ti servirà l'inglese*, 2023: pastel-coloured negatives of anonymous objects, kitchen moulds, minor totems of our daily routine and its designers – who actually did patent the design for roll-on deodorant? For *Autoritratto con capelli grigi* ('Self-Portrait with Grey Hair'), 2023, strands of the artist's own hair become wearable earrings, blending into other hair. The persistence of objects, which resists their obsolescence, also transfers to what we wear: the Lacoste logo migrates from oversized items onto a new Benetton T-shirt, generating the stylistic clash in *Sfinge* ('Sphinx'), 2023. In *Zig Zag*, 2016, the artist indulged in the breaking of a mirror – an act of superstitious outrage. However, the damage is not a reason for the object to be discarded, but rather generates a new compositional element that, beyond the need for repair, finds scope for new possibilities in the fracture itself.

On the final day, in the long pauses and suspensions, discarded materials left around the house, deposited in the cellar or accumulated in the cupboard were used, in a sort of domestic autarchy that makes the artist autonomous and guarantees the potential continuity of her production. Objects inevitably consolidate memories; in mnemonics, in order to train the memorisation of numerical series, each figure is associated with an object – possibly eccentric and unusual – ideally placed inside a house that one knows very well, and the exercise then consists in mentally going through its rooms to return the sequence of object-figures. Alek O. transforms the alien space of the gallery into a memory chamber, in the meanders of which we may come across fragments of private, involuntarily shared stories.

- Cornelia Mattiacci

In her practice Alek O. (Buenos Aires, 1981) blends the common notion of the readymade with craft, embroidery and other traditional art-making forms. On the verge between transformation and conservation, Alek O. strips the objects' common visual aspects and replaces them with geometric abstraction. Reversing the perspective of design, Alek O. favours re-creation over creation and deconstruction over construction.

Alek O. lives and works in Milan, where she graduated in Design from Politecnico. Among her most recent solo exhibitions: *L'impero delle luci*, Frutta, Rome (2017); *Time Goes By So Slowly*, Jeanine Hofland, Amsterdam (2016).

The artist's work has been largely exhibited at an institutional level, particularly at Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma (2021); The Courtauld Institute of Art, Sommerset House (2020); Nomas Foundation, Roma (2018); Fondazione Zegna, Trivero (2017); 16esima Quadriennale d'Arte, Roma, Palazzo delle Esposizioni (2016); Triennale di Milano, Milano (2015).