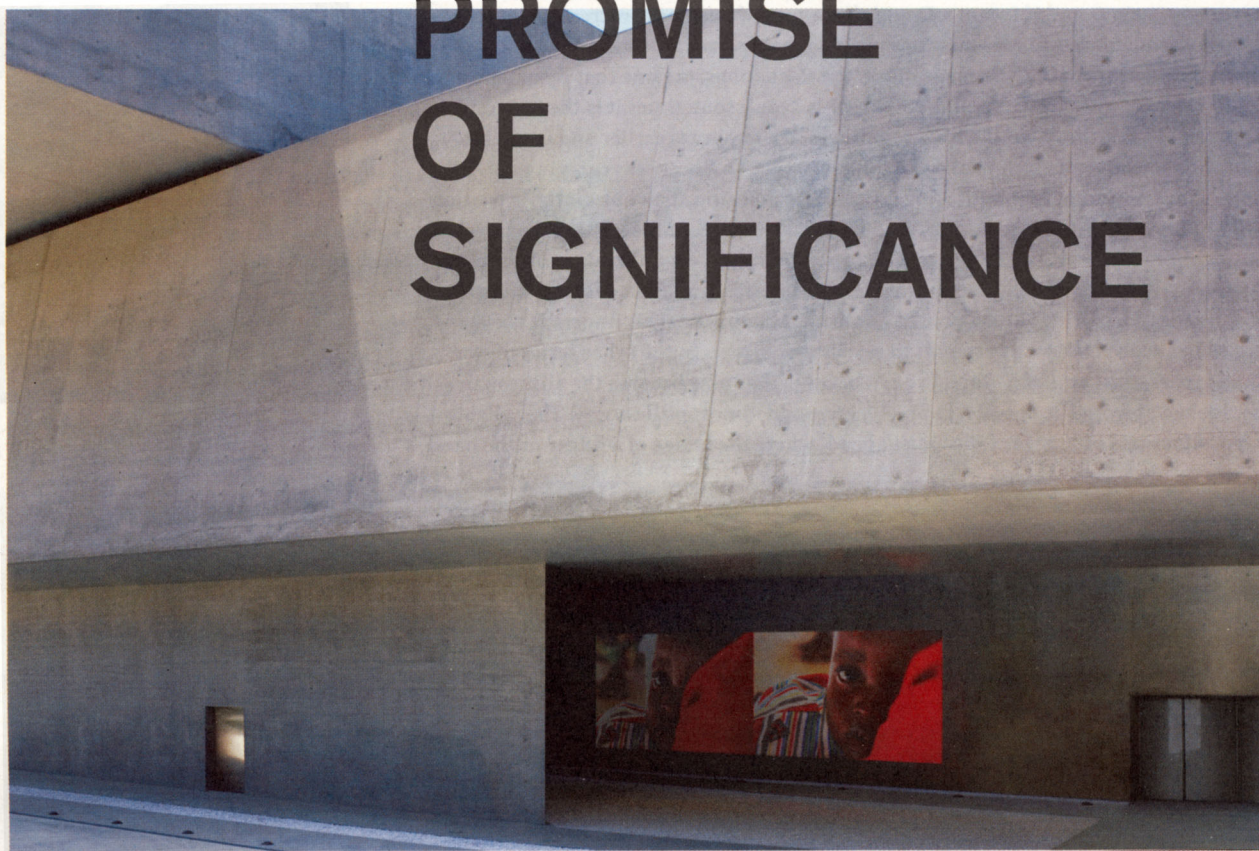


A PROMISE OF SIGNIFICANCE



Midway between formalist abstraction and the violent reality of war stands the controversial work of MASSIMO GRIMALDI, the recent recipient of a gargantuan prize provocatively spent to build a pediatric center in Sudan.

words by ELENA VOLPATO

*Emergency's Paediatric Centre In Juba Supported By MAXXI, 2010
Courtesy: the artist and ZERO..., Milan*

With his latest project, Massimo Grimaldi is preparing to burn images of naked reality onto the walls of the MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st-Century Arts in Rome, designed by Zaha Hadid in such a way that the gaze slips over the movement of its surfaces and over the solidity of its concrete exterior. But Grimaldi's images promise to open breaches in these walls and fill them to the brim with real life.

Grimaldi's project envisages the construction of a pediatric center by the NGO Emergency at Port Sudan, built with the 700,000-euro MAXXI 2per100 prize awarded to Grimaldi in October 2009. The photos, taken by him and by other artists and photographers he has invited to contribute, will document the phases of construction of the hospital and the start of its operation and will be projected onto one of the outer walls of the museum. Those images will constitute a channel of connection, an umbilical cord between the two buildings. The artwork will breathe through that channel. It will be composed of the architecture of the hospital itself, of its operation, of the life of the children who will be treated there, of the beauty of the images projected onto the MAXXI, as well as the beauty of Emergency's commitment. We will have an opportunity to see the first of these images, taken at the site as-

signed by the Sudanese authorities for the construction of the structure, at the inauguration of the museum at the end of May.

The nature of Grimaldi's images is not new. We can find similar ones on the Internet and in the newspaper, but it is their force that seems new to us. They come across as hard-hitting and direct because they are not presented in the context of a newspaper or the website of a humanitarian association. Rather, we come to confront them in our familiar old world of art, with its indifference and its attempts at dissimulation, and on one of its new temples.

In 2003, Grimaldi produced his first work linked with the activity of Emergency, *Igor Pesce's Life in Afghanistan Photos Shown on Apple 23-Inch Cinema HD Display*. These were 1010 photographs taken by Pesce during his stay in Afghanistan as the architect in charge of the construction of the hospital of Lashkar Gah, displayed in sequence on the screen of the most recent Apple model in production at the time. Two years later, the same display mechanism, updated to the latest Mac model on the market at the moment of the work's creation,



*Smashed Red Guitar Inside
A Dismantled Red Tent, 2006*
Courtesy: the artist and ZERO..., Milan

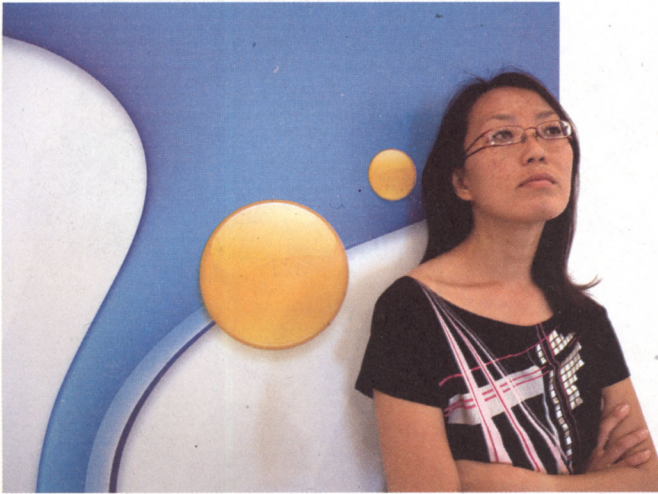
framed a series of pictures of deformed children in *Images of Extreme Birth Deformities Caused by U.S.A. Depleted Uranium Bombs Shown on Apple iMac G5*, and again, the same year, the images found on the internet by typing in the words "Baghdad Bomb" interspersed with the results obtained by inserting the name "Rosario Dawson" in "Baghdad Bomb" and "Rosario Dawson" Google Image Search Results Alternatively Shown on Apple iMac G5.

The structure of Grimaldi's works is antinomic. It opens up differences and distances that cannot be closed in the constituent elements of the work, and does so by means of associations and juxtapositions. The bombs in Baghdad, the birth deformities in Kosovo and Iraq, Apple and the design of its products and the actress Rosario Dawson are all "American products." Even the wider setting of contemporary art that contains the Apple screens on which Grimaldi displays his works and contains us while we look at them is to some extent an "American product." However, it should be stated that "American" is an adjective often used by European and global culture to reject its own responsibilities, by standing in for what would otherwise, with different degrees of approximation, be called the "Western world." The antinomy of these works is cultural and emotional. It is the friction that we feel in being compelled to see from close-up things that we are not inclined to approach.

In the past, however, other works by Grimaldi have tried to make us recognize as disconnected things that we are accustomed to regard as connected and consistent. They have sought to get us to admit the conventionality of some associations that we consider primary—above all, the one between the meaning of a work and the work itself.

ARTIST'S BIO

MASSIMO GRIMALDI (b. 1974, Taranto) lives and works in Milan. He recently had solo exhibitions at ZERO... (Milan) and at Castello di Rivoli (Turin). His work has been shown at the 50th Biennale di Venezia and in the exhibition "Italics: Italian Art between Tradition and Revolution 1968–2008" held at Palazzo Grassi (Venice) and at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago). Recently, Massimo Grimaldi won a competition hosted by MAXXI (Rome) for a project to be realized in an area outside of the museum. Grimaldi's proposal consists in building an emergency pediatric center in Juba, Sudan.



From top, clockwise:
*Giorgia Before The Image Untitled
Beaches*, 2009

Andréa, 2008
in collaboration with Sabina Grasso
Courtesy: the artist and Sabina Grasso

*Seung Yae Before The Image 'Sam
Lowry Image'*, 2009

All images courtesy: the artist
and ZERO..., Milan



The greatest antinomy in Grimaldi's work is the one between clean abstraction—the paradise of formal rarefaction of his images and his objects, made to stir our desire and draw our gaze—and the pitiless irruption of aspects of reality so violently unacceptable that all we want to do is avert our eyes. But if this antinomy does not appear today like the latest shock on the art scene, if it cannot be considered in any way a *coup de théâtre* or even a simple heteronomous interruption in the course of Grimaldi's artistic development, that is, if we are now ready to regard the construction of a hospital, and not just its photographic documentation, as a work of art, it is because all his previous works have prepared us for this with extreme rigor and coherence.

It is as if Grimaldi has up to now allowed himself just one liberty, the original one that he granted himself when he decided to go into art, a field where there are no real rules, nor real constraints. Having permitted himself this first and unavoidable freedom, he has chosen to deprive himself of all others. He has committed himself to the rigor of a constant and responsible analysis of his own choices and his own role and has called on us to do the same through his works. He started by designing smooth, impenetrable surfaces, closed in on themselves, with a cold beauty like that of precious stones (*Serena*, 2002; *Today*, 2001). These were works suspended in a space without oxygen. They floated without frames or supports, in the isolated and aseptic space of art galleries like nuclei of impenetrability. They claimed our attention as microcosmic images of the hermeticism of exhibition places and of the conceptual and emotional hermeticism of our work on art. Works like *Gianni Bugno Object* (2003) and before that, *Sergio Cofferati Image* (2000), have led us to surprise ourselves in the act of looking at them, in the effort of trying to give them a meaning, of fulfilling that promise of significance that the title of each work of art contains. But there, in that union of title and work, we discovered instead a cleft: the inability of get the better of the combination of an inscrutable object and seemingly arbitrary title, which underlines the arbitrariness of art language as a whole.

Once he had opened up a deep gulf between form and meaning, Grimaldi injected life-blood from a variety of channels into the empty space. He poured into it the beauty of music and video clips (*Nothing Can Come between Us*, 2003, and *Baby Can I Hold You*, 2007), the beauty of nature films (*10 Discovery Channel Nature Documentaries*, 2004), the ephemeral beauty of a chemical reaction (*Variant of Belousov-Zhabotinsky Reaction*, 2001) and of dance (*Ariella*, 2008), and even the kind to be found in a personal friendship when, in 2004, he presented as a work the presence of a friend of his, very distant from the world of art, in the empty space of the gallery during its inauguration (*Gianluca at My Solo Exhibition at Zero...*, 2004).

Friendship, music and images are all linked together in a web that he has woven with extreme clarity. The significance of the author and the role of the artist are engulfed in this web, leaving on the surface only his own absence, as in the long minutes of silence that separate the pieces on his music playlists, in the interminable darkness that precedes the images of his video clips, in the closed and reflective attitude assumed by his performers, squeezed into the mental space of a platform, in the gleaming black of the methacrylate of the *Charles Aznavour Object* (2007), in the hard transparence and dark depth of *Double Hubble Deep Field* (2003).

All of Grimaldi's work can be described as an operation of hydraulic technology, of the science of irrigation. What he brings to the field of art is true nourishment because in the linking canals he has created, ethics and aesthetics flow together once again. In that matrix, we seem to glimpse a way to overcome the arbitrariness that characterizes our thoughts about art.



Untitled Sunsets, 2008
Courtesy: the artist and ZERO..., Milan

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

In April, ZERO... (Milan) will present a solo show by Massimo Grimaldi, while in May, MAXXI will host a preview of the artist's project *Emergency's Pediatric Centre in Juba Supported by MAXXI*. Massimo Grimaldi will also have a solo show at Castello di Rivoli (Turin) in Autumn.

AUTHOR

ELENA VOLPATO is Curator at GAM, Turin, where she recently curated a solo exhibition of Ian Kjaer and the group exhibition "Tutta la memoria del mondo."

Below, from left:
Igor Pesce's Life In Afghanistan
Photos Shown On Apple 23-inch
Cinema HD Display, 2003

Emergency's Surgical Centre In
Goderich Photos Shown On Two
Apple iMac Core 2 Duo, 2008

All images courtesy: the artist
and ZERO..., Milan

