

PRESSBOOK

Paola PIVI

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page 78 Paola Pivi, I Never Danced Before (left), 2013, and Sometimes I Have to Stand for My Safety (right), 2013. Both mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Paris, New York & Hong Kong



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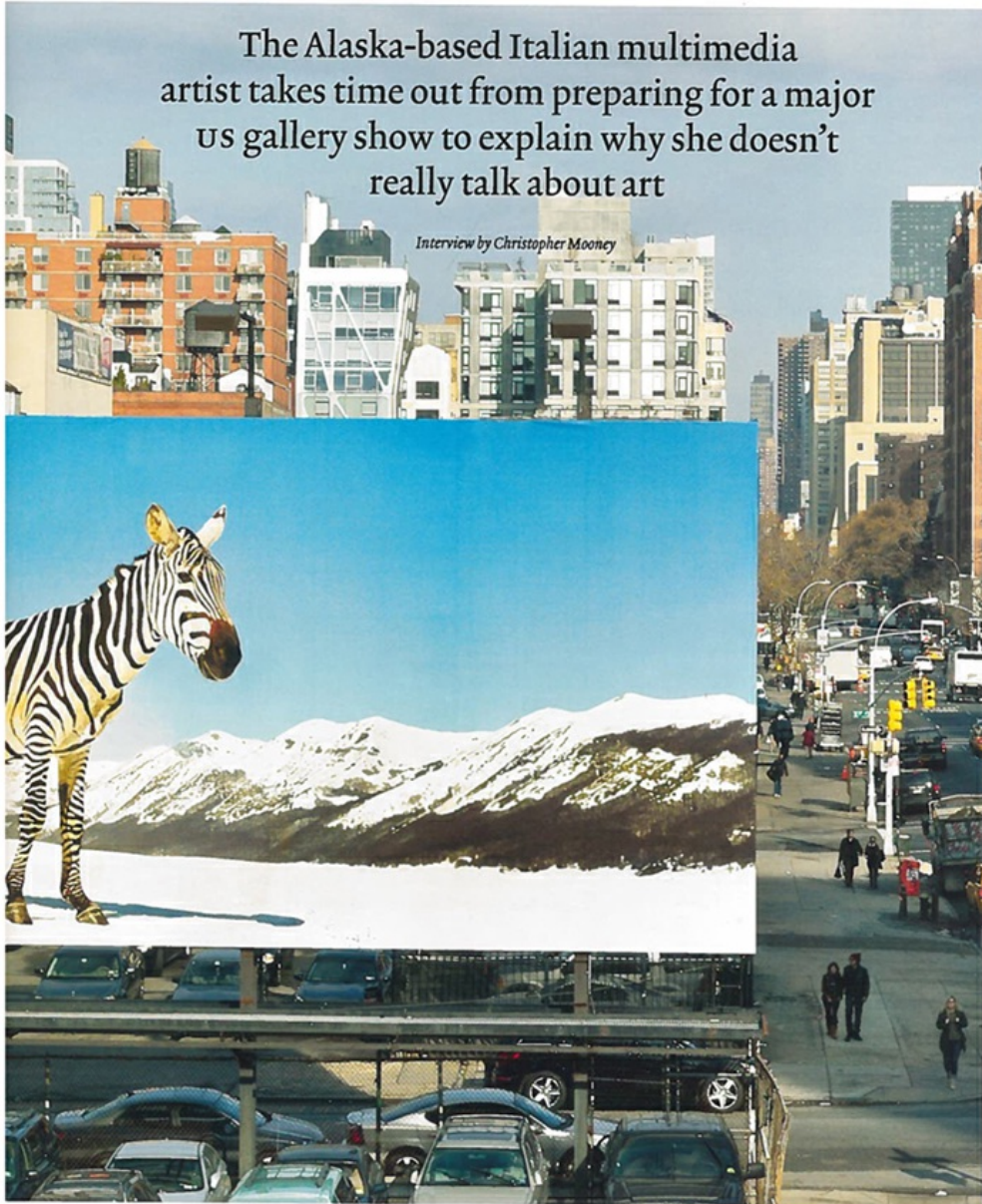




Paola Pivi

The Alaska-based Italian multimedia artist takes time out from preparing for a major US gallery show to explain why she doesn't really talk about art

Interview by Christopher Mooney





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ARTREVIEW Nice to see you.

PAOLA PIVI Nice to... hear you. I don't think India allows video. Let's switch off the cameras so that we can talk.

AR *Okay, done. So, I think the last time I saw you was at Wolfgang Puck's restaurant in Beverly Hills. And now you're holed up in an undisclosed location in India, with a show in London and another coming up at the new Galerie Perrotin in New York.*

PP Yes. The London show first. It was *Once upon a Time (A Dream by Paola Pivi)* with Massimo De Carlo at Carlson, a very special show for me because it paired my works, including a couple of new ones that I had been working on for years, with new works by the Italian painter Carla Accardi. Do you know her work? It is fantastic. I cannot remember her exact age, and it would not be polite to say, but her first show was in 1950, and her work is as beautiful and fresh today as it was then. I have always had a great love for her as an artist and a person, and there are some similarities between our work – my art is made of simple gestures, as are her abstracts. That was the starting point for the idea of a show together. It was my idea and I was going to curate it, but as I am unable to leave India, Massimo had to select her paintings. I dreamt of this show for a long time, and in the end I was not even able to see it, because of my situation in India.

AR *Do you want to talk about your situation in India, or not? This is about the adoption of your child, right?*

PP This is about the custody and guardianship of the little boy for whom we have initiated custody and guardianship proceedings, yes. We have good lawyers, but it's a complicated situation. We are the first in history to bring to court and expose some authorities of the Tibetan community in exile, which most people, including myself before all this started, believe are above all suspicion. But, actually, the people that we have brought to court are exactly the opposite, and they're reacting in the same way that I would expect the mafia in Sicily to react, persecuting us illegally and brutally. So suddenly I have woken up to a new reality. I am living what I only saw in movies, you know? Being persecuted, under threat, having to move, it's unbelievable.

AR *It sounds like a nightmare.*

PP It is.

AR *And complicated. I'm not sure this is the best forum to discuss it.*

PP No, and it's also important for us to talk about art.

AR *The September show in the new Galerie Perrotin in New York has two elements, right?*

PP Yes. Emmanuel [Perrotin] has granted me the huge honour of having the first show in his brand-new gallery on Madison. There are two exhibition rooms on two floors, so I am thinking of a show with two elements. The first one, on the ground floor, is all worked out in my mind – polar bears. But the other one is kind of stuck inside my head. I was planning to work on the self-immolators of Tibet, but now I feel very confused about the whole issue.

I never had any inclinations towards animals, and then all of a sudden they started popping up everywhere

Like much of my art, they're just visions that come into my head, that I then make real

AR *Let's talk about the part that is done, then. The polar bears.*

PP The polar bears. Which come from my life in Alaska.

AR *How did you end up in Alaska?*

PP [In 2005] I pretended to be a journalist following the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, and I had the time of my life. A year later, Massimo De Carlo was teasing me, saying, you know, "How come this year you're not risking your life again in Alaska?" So I tried to sign up for the race but didn't get in, and then I just decided to move there.

I do believe in change. Changing of one's thoughts is the utmost example of progress and evolution. It is very hard for people to change the way they think

AR *And you love it.*

PP It is a perfect dream. Until Anchorage I moved all the time. Now I hope it will be my home for the rest of my life.

AR *I'm just down the coast from there now, in the British Columbia rainforest.*

PP Are there bears?

AR *I saw two today.*

PP How do you cope with them?

AR *There's never been an attack, but there are many close encounters. Problems usually arrive when a young one gets separated from its mother.*

PP This sounds familiar... Which brings us right back to my problem in India, because they want to separate this little boy from us.

AR *Where in India are you right now?*

PP We don't tell anybody, because when we say it, even to 100 percent reliable people, it just gives us a feeling of anxiety, so we just have this rule that we don't talk to anybody.

AR *How long have you been in India?*

PP Many months now.

AR *OK. Well, it feels odd to change the subject, but... let's go back to the bears. And the other animals in your work.*

PP The first animals that came into my art were the two ostriches on the boat [*Untitled (Ostriches)*, 2003] when I was living on the tiny island of Alicudi in the Mediterranean, a perfect cone-shaped island with no flat land and no cars... Suddenly, because of this place, two ostriches came into my art. I was completely surprised. I never had any inclinations towards animals, and then all of a sudden they started popping up everywhere. At the beginning, I welcomed them more like characters, you know, beautiful divas that were coming to me with all this charisma and beauty. And then, ten years later, in Alaska, I was talking with my friend, the Inupiaq performance artist Allison Warden a.k.a. AKU-MATU, who told me that every human being has a memory of a past when we were very closely connected with animals. Right then and there, I understood myself.

AR *So do you have a bear spirit, is that your particular animal? It seems to be the one that you've worked with the most.*

PP Well, I never thought about it, but yes, I'm obsessed by bears.

AR *The bears that you're showing in the Perrotin, what are they made of?*

PP Urethane foam and plastic. There's no real animal in them, they're sculptures. They look real, but they're not. And they're covered with feathers.

AR *What kind of feathers?*

PP Turkey feathers, I think. The last order said 'turkeys' on it, which I never knew before. So actually there is a 'real animal' part in them.

AR *Why did you choose feathers for the fur?*



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above *I'm a Bear, So What?*, 2012, photographic print mounted with Diasec, 165 x 125 cm. Photo: Attilio Maranzano. Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Paris, New York & Hong Kong

preceding pages *Untitled (Zebras)*, 2003 (installation view, *High Line Art*, 2012, New York), billboard. Photo: Hugo Glendinning



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PP A few years ago, I wanted to do an artwork with taxidermy bears – a polar bear and a grizzly bear dancing together – but I didn't want to commission the killing of two bears for art. This artwork might come about someday, if I get organised. Maybe a park will give me the bears' carcasses after they die – of natural causes. Or an accident. But while waiting for that, I had this other vision of the standard bear, and so I did it. Like much of my art, they're just visions that come into my head, that I then make real.

AR *Are they lifesize?*

PP They are exactly lifesize, which means they're humungous.

AR *And scary?*

PP Only one will be clearly in an aggressive mood. You know, with an aggressive mouth and body language. But I guess they all touch on some ancestral fear. A friend in Alaska, Stephen Blanchett, of the band Pamyua, told me that once he killed a bear because, you know, he had to, the bear had become dangerous. He said when he was cutting it up it was exactly like a human body.

AR *Are you a meat eater?*

PP Oh, yes, I love meat. I would eat it exclusively if I could.

AR *And would you ever work with a live bear?*

PP Oh my god [laughter].

AR *I understand that at one point you wanted to do a giraffe on La Défense in Paris? Did that ever happen?*

PP A live giraffe on top of a skyscraper, which is what La Défense is. It hasn't happened yet.

AR *Are there other animal visions you would like to realise?*

PP I attempted to do an elephant on top of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. That I think would be really good. But the monument is in the hands of the war veterans, and they don't particularly like the idea.

AR *Is it important for you that it be the Arc de Triomphe, or could you find another monument?*

PP The Arc is so perfect! I have never come across any other building that made me think of an elephant.

AR *Why do you make this association between the Arc de Triomphe and an elephant?*

PP I don't know. Maybe history. You know, Hannibal getting to ride the elephants. This is an image that has always struck inside my imagination. I don't even know if it's a true story, but it is what we are told in Italy.

AR *Would it be a real elephant?*

PP A real elephant, yes. Of course, the day of the performance there would be no visitors on the top of the arch, or at least none in the area where the elephant would be, which would be enclosed by some fence, you know, a visually minimal fence. Viewers would see it from the streets, from the ground.

AR *Would there be any other element, like the sculpted cups of cappuccino with your live leopard piece [One Cup of Cappuccino, Then I Go, 2007]?*



PP No, the only elements would be the elephant and the Arc de Triomphe. It would be so easy, too, because the Arc de Triomphe is low enough that you could reach it with a stable crane, similar to an elevator, so an elephant could be brought up there in a container. A trained elephant from, for example, a circus, travels on the road in a container all his life, so it could easily hang out up there and not be stressed out by the experience. And I could take a picture of it from a helicopter.

Untitled (Airplane), 1999, Fiat G-91 airplane. Photo: Hugo Glendinning. Courtesy Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, Galerie Perrotin, Paris, New York & Hong Kong, and Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan

AR *The animals that you have used in the past – the leopards, ostriches, llamas and so on – have come from circuses?*

PP They have been trained animals born in captivity that work in the movie industry.

AR *So it should be pretty easy to find a trained bear.*

PP I think, after the elephant on the Arc de Triomphe and the giraffe on the skyscraper, I'll be done with live animals. But never say never, right?

AR *Are there other animals that you would like to work with? Not live ones, but of your own creation?*

PP Yes, whales and cockroaches.

AR *Really?*

PP Actually, to tell you the truth, after meeting my husband, Karma, who's a Tibetan Buddhist, I find it harder to imagine using live animals in my work, because I feel more for the animal.

I can still do these works, with the same precautions and care that I used in the past, but I find it harder. In fact, the project of the giraffe on the skyscraper has changed into a completely different project, for which I will need to collaborate with an architect and an engineer in the design of a skyscraper. It will still involve a live giraffe, but I reshaped the project to avoid having to make the animal fly.

AR *Are other aspects of your thinking and life changing?*

PP I do believe in change. Changing of one's thoughts is the utmost example of progress and evolution. It is very hard for people to change the way they think.

AR *You do not really talk about your art, do you?*

PP No. Visions are part of my process, and it is very simple, you know, because I think from instinct, from the very deep core of me, where it's not even me any more. That's why when I talk about art, it is like a child talking. I don't have elaborate theories about my art, because I think it is the art that is the interesting thing, and to elaborate on it just doesn't serve any purpose for me. Wow. I have just realised that this is the first time I have spoken about art in... four months. So thank you. But let's talk again when my situation is not so complex...

Paola Pivi: Ok, You Are Better Than Me, So What? is on show at Galerie Perrotin, New York, through 26 October



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Camion Vertical, 1997, photographic print mounted
on aluminium, 182 x 112 cm. Photo: the artist.
Courtesy Galerie Perrotin, Paris, New York & Hong Kong