

HAVERKAMPF & LEISTENSCHNEIDER  
**Mattea Perrotta – *L'Ultima Cena Part II***  
31 Mar – 23 Apr 2022

The nine pieces that comprise *L'Ultima Cena Part II* document the artist's return to her older figurative style. The twelve apostles, seen so often reproduced in Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1495-1498), meet at a dinner table where they experience a gender reversal signature of Mattea Perrotta's style. Here they converse about the relationship between music and colour, figuration and abstraction.

Haverkampf Leistenschneider Gallery fills with music compositions by Frank Maston created in collaboration with and inspired by Perrotta's pieces. Friends come together after two years of intense restrictions to enjoy-- in the words of avant-garde medievalist Martina Bagnoli-- a *feast for the senses*. The gallery experience is also accompanied by a limited-edition cassette tape designed by Maston as well as a riso-printed booklet by Justin Bailey of Pagemasters Press. In the booklet, visitors get a glance at the thoughts of the personalities present in the paintings. The two combine to form a portable memento of the exhibition's sensorial expression.

In *L'Ultima Cena Part II* viewers are invited to read each of the twelve apostles as independent characters. The figures are painted as heavenly bodies made of thick colour fields and fourth-dimensional moving faces. Such tableful sees three historical coordinates come to meet: the Medieval and Renaissance imagination, Mid-Century Modernism and the present. The contemporary artist looks onto these disjointed historical periods referencing mainly, yet not solely, two artists: Leonardo da Vinci and Picasso. Both hyper-reproduced, hypermasculine, their styles are reformed in a soft but energetic ensemble of feminine personalities. Meanwhile, the ninth more intimate tableau shows the twelve apostles gathering over dinner to discuss the demystification of Modernist nudes in the contemporary climate. In the exhibition gender flows like water and wine as Jesus becomes Mary Magdalene and Peter is Petra. Unlike Part I of *L'Ultima Cena*— which drew inspiration from Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979) and Devora Sperber's *After the Last Supper* (2005)— in Part II Perrotta's women slouch further back towards the Renaissance as a reclamation of femininity from Picasso and da Vinci's machismo.

Frank Maston's music helps to translate the paintings' figuration into a further state of abstraction. In the tradition of Agnes Martin, Perrotta believes that the profound abstract nature of music is what qualifies it as the highest art form. The paintings offer a representation of the self in all its fragmentations as the colours resonate with specific moments in the artist's past. The choice to represent da Vinci's *Last Supper* above other Renaissance artworks, in fact, is a nod to Perrotta's dinners at her Nonna's house where they were always religiously accompanied by a picture of the *Last Supper*.

Perrotta's cultural baggage roots in music. Punk music's loose repurposing of the gothic in 90s LA is perhaps one source for Mattea's fascination with the Renaissance. This resonates with Maston's youth in LA as well. The six pieces created by the composer in Paris ensemble a soundscape that mirrors the paintings; in this abstract space, each note is an image reflected in the world of things visual.

Maston's instruments echo medieval music compositions and complement Perrotta's take on the colours of Picasso's mid-century Modernism. Like in a scene from *The Graduate* (1967), harps and flutes shimmer alongside pools of flat turquoise where they meet with the shaded figuration of rose and red tones. Both Maston's and Perrotta's compositions resonate with the minimalism of early medieval architectural styles. Sweetness and softness are emptied of a saccharin quality, leaving intimate and emotional impressions on the themes treated in this series of paintings and musical pieces.

The emotional element of the paintings is reinforced by Perrotta's synesthesia which plays an integral part in the assemblage of each painting's composition. It is perhaps through this most intimate perception of the world that Perrotta discusses how figuration and abstraction really merge. Fields of colour, although maintaining a representational character, mark a sculptural awareness as they become shapes in end of themselves.

The psychological quality present in each figure ties in with the artist's perception of history. Her practice is constituted by meditational stratifications of colour that layer the paintings until neither the abstract nor the figurative are ever fully accomplished, nor do they overpower the other. *Tomassa*—the incredulous St. Thomas-- is seen poking through Christ's wound, an ogival/vaginal opening on her chair. The opening references the matter of all things real, recognisable, figurative. Mattea offers an alternative way of positioning the creative self in history. As such, any vision of history cannot exist 'outside' the self; a concept Mieke Bal explores in *Quoting Caravaggio: Preposterous History* (1999). Along this line of thought, Perrotta's work suggests that each painting's historical point of view is a play between determinate and indeterminate elements achieved by means of ambiguous signs, now Modernist, now medieval.

The traditional iconographies with which Perrotta engages are critiques of the over-reproduced, miscellaneous nature of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. If the medieval robes, the chairs and architectural frames are figurative recognisable elements, they are also signifiers of a vision of da Vinci's *Last Supper* as an image reduced to abstract icon, or even, geometric pattern. In the naïveté of *Bathing during L'Ultima Cana*, this process of abstraction happens at the level of figuration and concludes in the flat fields of colour, which due to the nature of oil paint retain psychological depth and a haptic quality.

Those who study the Middle Ages know that time doesn't always flow in a line, and that abstraction is no twentieth-century concept. Furthermore, because they are so difficult to pin down, medieval referents have been appropriated throughout the ages to serve disparate cultural and political purposes. By reinterpreting da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Perrotta shows us two things: firstly, that reproduction holds a power for the dismantlement of traditional ideals, and secondly, that repurposing tradition creates a horizon of possibilities for the feminine to reclaim its spaces in art history. For Perrotta, just like in art history, abstraction sits in conversation with the real, and styles from different historical periods can meet over a table at which figuration and abstraction stew.

Text by Matilde Mosterts de Banfield