

PRESENTATION OF THE SHOW "SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW", AFFITTASI/VENDESI #1, 86 VIA DEL GOVERNO VECCHIO, ROME, SEPTEMBER 2014

In this third exhibition with the For Rent/For Sale format I pick up the threads with India Evans, my leading young artist at the time I had the gallery, with whom I did a personal exhibit in 2005 and took to Artefiera in 2005. "Mother Nature" was title of the exhibit. I was pregnant, was mourning the passing of a loved one, and her work spoke about gestation. Nine years later India Evans returns to Italy with her new artworks, and with her boy, who will be two years old in a few days.

Two years for India, filled with good and bad things alike. On one side Life, on the other Death: the arrival of a son, the loss of a father. And not just any father, an artist, John Evans, a protagonist in the history of Mail Art¹ and American collage, from whom Evans undoubtedly inherited her passion for this technique. So, an exhibit that speaks of joy and pain, of death and life, because Life is Death and Life, always and forever, in a never ending dance. No closure, but a wave, a flux, a passage, a cycle, and thus also a dialogue, why not, beyond death and the boundaries of space and time, through the thing which bonded John and India more than anything else: a love for art, the passion for collage.

John Evans (who was born in Sioux Falls in North Dakota, but grew up in California) moved to NYC in 1963, having recently graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago. In the Big Apple he immediately part of the vibrant local community of poets and artists, befriending of masters of modern art such as Alice Neel. He became a member of New York's Neo-Dada movement, and one was one of the pioneers of Mail Art, exchanging with Ray Johnson, a close friend of his, several creations of Mail Art. Only one year after his arrival to NYC, Evans radically changed the approach to his artistic research. Even if he still worked on large sized canvases, 1964 set the beginning of his methodical daily production of collages, which went on for 36 years. A collection of collages of more than 1340 items; one collage a day during 36 years, with each collage punctually inserted in a folder used as a diary every month. These are unique and absolutely original pieces, assembled while hanging around the streets of the East Village. Any object which caught his eye and attention was collected. Any type of discarded paper, in any form or colour, from subway tickets to labels of wine bottles, from theatre invites to the remains of torn letters, to which he sometimes added a comment or detail, autobiographical elements such as family pictures or postcards from friends. An assembly of pieces delicately re-composed on normal sheets of paper, finally giving shape to extremely refined, elegant drawings, sealed by stamps bearing the date of creation. A mix of hints of private, autobiographical and collective memories, re-assembled in frames. Inside each frame, at the bottom, a drawing of goose, an homage to the artist and writer Ursula Molinaro, who introduced him in the New York art milieu at the beginning of his career.

At the end of the year 2000 Evans stopped producing his daily collages, only to resume his work seven years later, but only sporadically, with larger-sized collages. His pilgrimages around the streets of the East Village did not stop there. From 2000 to 2007 he started to collect a wide variety of small objects found on the streets, which he stored in glass bottles of various shapes and dimensions. When in 2007 he started working on collages again, he went back to the origins of artistic path, and started to work again on large canvases. With his collages, John Evans transforms other people's leftovers into precious fragments of their lives, because beneath every single small piece of paper lies inevitably a private story, a private moment, a thought, an action, pain and joy, the start of a relationship, or a break up. On one side then, there was an

¹Art movement which started in the 1950's with the artist Ray Johnson consisting in sending by mail to one or more recipients postcards and envelopes, re-elaborated in an artistic manner. Mail art is at the same time, the message sent, and the means through which it is sent. Using the postal service as a means for art to circulate, the envelope itself becomes an art piece. John Evans' entire Mail Art collection is kept at the Smithsonian Art Museum.

opening towards the outside world, made of his manic daily meanderings in the streets of NYC in search of the means to his creative process. On the other hand, we can note the intimacy and privacy of his house, his atelier, the place of true creation: of the re-appropriation and re-elaboration of other people's fragments of life, sometimes linked to his own existence. The result of all this is an ensemble of small masterpieces portraying the trends, customary habits, and general mood of a whole generation, in America, and the world.

John Evans was an authentic person, assembling his daily collages was a job like any other for him, which he performed with seriousness and rigour inside his home, since in the Evans household the husband/wife roles were reversed. John worked at home, he took care of the housework and the twins, while Margaret went to the office in the morning and came back in the evening. A lot of love and a stimulant environment for a child who since birth lived among canvases, papers, paint brushes and colours. Among India's most beautiful memories those entire afternoons spent with Honor in her father's atelier making necklaces while he did his collages stand out. A strong imprinting that left an indelible mark, however only after many years did India find herself following in her father's footsteps. While she lived in the US she never thought of doing collages, but once she came to Italy, where she has lived and studied many years, she finally found herself making the first one. It was a way for India to fill in that sense of emptiness, caused by the distance separating her from her twin sister, her family and her loved ones. This explains the recurrent theme of two women in her work. Seeing the art pieces of India Evans again after so many years has really been a big surprise. The paper she chose at the time for her collages weren't larger than 50x40cm, and there was always a same element appearing in them: a postcard of a woman from the beginning of the XX century. From there the process of her research of forgotten dreams, of distant memories started, to bring back an interrupted story to the light, and bring it back to life filtering it through her own experience and sensitivity. This passage was accomplished through the transformation of the starting picture, adding different materials (gloves, elegant fabrics, feathers, butterfly and bird wings, cotton threads, dried flowers, mirrors, letters and fans). Now India Evans also works on large formats, and lately on canvas as well. From 2009 some architectural structures have appeared on her collages too. In them her characters, women only, or men and women alike, move about. "I think that my moving from a context of nature to an architectural one is in part due to my having moved from Italy to New York, where the presence of man-made elements is more relevant than the presence of wild nature", as Evans explains. The atmosphere has changed too. The dream-like component remains a characteristic of her language, but beginning with the series "Birth" (on gestation), to her last works from 2014 onwards, one clearly senses that the artist is moving towards a new and unknown direction imbued of the presence of a strong, I'd dare to say, "metaphysical" dimension. Those are artworks made starting when she became pregnant until her father died (when her son was only two months old) and the last ones. The state of pregnancy, as well as that of mourning and the subsequent elaboration, are after all by definition moments in which the desire to connect with what is Above comes natural. While John Evans, whose collages are a result of making traces of others' lives your own, internalizes the exterior world within himself, in the intimate and private sphere in which he manically goes about his daily work as an artist, in India Evans an opposite process is in place. From the intimate and private sphere in which she takes refuge, a protected place where the creative process takes place, in which the presence of a dream state and of the subconscious sphere, India Evans invites us with each collage to peek through a keyhole.

Two artists who tell a story by describing themselves, and who I could only introduce through this imaginary dialogue that continues beyond death, time and space.

Elisabetta Giovagnoni

Rome, September 14, 2014