

MIRCEA CANTOR

The World Is Changing

BY NAIMA MORELLI



Mircea Cantor, *Anima*, 2012. Wood, rope. Courtesy l'artista; Magazzino d'Arte Moderna, Roma

“Sic transit Gloria mundi,” words written in burn marks on the white wall of Museo D’Arte Contemporanea Roma’s Enel Room. It is an epigraph that sounds powerful, dramatic, and yet, resigned. It isn’t easy for an artist to deal with decadence. I mean, working on a concept so broad as “The word is falling apart”, one has to be careful, not to be demagogic or didactic. One has to distance themselves from common logic, and your next-door neighbor’s meanderings of yesteryear. Their colloquial remarks resounding: “The world is changing. When I was young, everything was totally different.”

Mircea Cantor, luckily, succeeds in being ecumenical not banal. Recently on view at MACRO, there were three pieces to see by the Romanian-born artist. As always, he uses diverse media.

The first work is a video, full of symbolism. A white-dressed woman unrolls

a coiled string on the hand of bowed man. Then she sets fire to the end of a cord. She continues to unroll the string while the fire travels to the bandaged hands of other men gathered in a circle. At the end, she blows on the flame and everything disappears.

The video is an allegory—a stunning reflection on life, destiny and ritual. How often we try to capture something, hold on to meaning, maybe for life itself, but also get burnt. We can interpret the string, as the connecting thread of human life, one that gets consumed. For Cantor, freedom is just an illusion.

We find the same vision in his large wooden installation nearby. Titled *Anima*, it’s a reproduction of the San Pietro’s Basilica in Rome, except that this one is hollowed out and made of 2 x 4’s, making Cantor’s piece an Ikea version of the religious building. Extraordinarily, the top of the scaffolding contains four big

cords linked to a wooden cross. At first glance this recalls Christian architecture, yet it is actually more akin to the kinds of wooden crosses used by puppeteers to move marionettes, one more time a hidden Deus ex machina.

Mircea Cantor’s third work is called *Epic Fountain*. The piece is a huge DNA double helix made out of golden safety pins and spiraling down from the ceiling all the way to the floor. The installation is pretty self-explanatory: the color gold denotes something very precious and unique; the safety pins recall old child-bearing fairytales.

The entire exhibit highlights the fact that Cantor works in duality; paradox and surprise, revealing appearance and truth, contemplating life and death. Using this formula, he is able to tackle major subjects with a vision that is unpretentious, uncommon and incredibly relevant. □