

In (Rich) Human Relations We Trust

By Nicolas Mavrikakis (independent curator and art critic)

“Trust”... “Embodiment”... “One pivotal point”... “To be moved by”... “Let down your defenses”... “We fill the void with what we can”...

These are but some of the words and phrases that the visitor will discover in the paintings, notebooks and cardboard series that make up Massimo Guerrera’s installation. And though these pieces are only a fragment of the artist’s work – he also exhibits sculptures, drawings and paintings without writing – they are nonetheless indicative of his artistic approach. The words and expressions he works with are taken directly from conversations between the artist and visitors of his work. After meeting with them by appointment in his workshop, the words that resonate with him are often inscribed in ink on various materials. Other words arise later, upon reflection, yet are still nourished by these discussions.

In this way, from one exhibit to another, Guerrera has amassed a collection phrases, words and reflections. This particular exhibit is part of a larger project that has evolved since 2007 and is itself part of an overarching artistic approach that the artist calls, *La reunion des pratiques* or *The Reunion of Disciplines*. Through this repertoire of selected words, the artist renews our understanding of poetry. His stance against the functional and normalized use of language is poetry in the strongest sense of the word. If a word is efficient or produces meaning it is because of its opacity, its resistance to being employed as a purely descriptive tool. To cite the theoretician Roland Barthes, one could say “that each poetic word is thus an unexpected object, a Pandora’s Box from which the infinite potentialities of language fly.” These words, cultivated and collected by Guerrera can also be seen in terms of psychology or psychoanalysis...

What do we mean when we talk about being touched by art or another person - superficial catchphrase or true transformative experience? What should a person hear when someone speaks to them of trust? What do we desire from the listener? The word *trust* has an undeniable economic resonance, echoing throughout the titles of Massimo Guerrera’s work: *Les ailes de l’économie* (*The Wings of Economy*), *Siège social temporaire* (*Temporary Headquarters*)... Guerrera points to the “emotional reach of speech and words.” He is, in a sense, an anthropologist of human interactions; presenting us, in his work, with the economy of our social relationships. The words and expressions that he collects work to trace the connections that he develops. Like a stranger attempting to understand the collective existence of a society that his not his own. Each moment of contact in an encounter with another human being is, for him, a source of study, reflection and fascination.

The Language of the Gesture

In a previous exhibit titled, *Darbora*, which he developed and explored over the course of ten years, Guerrera grew plants from mango pits and orange seeds - saved from the fruit his visitors ate during their discussions - and then systematically incorporated into ensuing installations. His work interrogates the connections and rituals that exist between us as human beings: eating together, drinking tea, discussing, growing close and creating together... The network of wires embedded in the ceilings and walls of a gallery could be interpreted as the materialization of these secret and invisible points of contact that exist between us all. For Guerrera, the gallery is a space for meditation, to reflect upon our social connections as well as our actions. It is a way to question our

most profound motivations, our reasons, however diverse, for being together. The titles of his paintings, his sculptures and drawings provide further insight into this approach: *Le comportement de l'ensemble (The Behavior of the Whole)*, *Sculptures méditatives (Meditative Sculptures)* *En contemplant avec sincérité nos carnets d'intention (Sincerely Contemplating our Agendas of Intent)*, *Mais comment arrêter de se débattre avec la fluidité de l'existence (But How to Cease to Fight the Fluidity of Our Existence)*...

In this way, Guerrera interrogates language, but also the language of the gesture and the intelligence embodied in therein. He calls attention to the very notion of embodiment; the ways we have of speaking, of moving, of interacting with each other as well as the impact of the collective, which penetrates our private worlds. In other words, he points to a “solitude habitée”, or an “inhabited solitude”.

In an artistic period where the notion of interaction has become banal, where everything or almost everything is interactive and the expression *interactive art* has become a way of reassuring galleries and museums desperately in search of a public, Guerrera carries out a real working dialogue. He does not simply provide the spectator with a semblance of power by inviting them to push the buttons on a machine. Guerrera meets with every person for an hour two in order to establish a dialogue, to be moved by the people he speaks with and, who knows, perhaps move them as well. Guerrera begins his meetings with a moment of meditation, establishing a rapport with the visitor and with time itself. Another rhythm or a slowing down of time evolves from there, which, he says, “allows him and the visitor to better observe what is really happening.” In these encounters, the relationship between Guerrera’s body and his visitor’s undergoes a gradual transformation. Through creative acts, which they perform together, the visitor and artist learn to let go, to trust each other. Over the course of these meetings, sculptures, organic in shape, are almost mysteriously created. These sculptures, the “in-between spaces”, are imprints often taken from points of contact on the visitor’s body. For example, like a piano concerto composed for four hands, *Prise à quatre mains (or Molding made with Four Hands)* traces the physical position that Guerrera and his visitor took while placing, holding and molding a mass of clay.

This approach may well appear astonishing. In a world where the most insignificant moment is quantified, endeavors such as these may seem an enormous waste of time. Our societies have taught us to be concretely and reductively productive, almost always with short-term vision. We must, we are told, profit from every second, do two or even three things at a time. In Guerrera’s long encounters with the public, there resides a deep desire to affirm a temporal experience that is counter to that which prevails today. Guerrera explains that, for him, as a reader of the philosopher Michel Foucault, social change often begins with oneself. “If we desire great changes or revolutions, they must first pass through profound personal work. On a small scale, art can perform this transformation. When large systems try to apply themselves to large collectives, it is very difficult to achieve viable transformation. When, however, a sufficient number of individuals undertake real individual progress, then something happens. Art has the ability to contribute to this process. Though on a microscopic level, these transformations are profound as the integrity of art is powerful. In this way, cultural and artistic platforms can serve as valuable laboratories for real transformations.”

If you are interested in an appointment, please contact meetmassimo@gmail.com. There will be three appointments available each day from Thursday-Saturday and two appointments on Sundays. Appointments will be 60-90 minutes in duration and will be scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. You are welcome to bring up to two people with you to your appointment; appointments will only consist of one party of related individuals at a time. Please indicate how many will be in your party when requesting an appointment.

Text translated by Lorraine Price