

Oltre il presente. Archeologia del domani
Beyond the Present. Tomorrow's Archaeology

*It is precisely this dialectical tension between the visible
and the invisible, between presence and absence, that
gives my work its utopian and uchronic character.*
(Claudia Peill)

In the vast panorama presented by contemporary art, few names shine as brightly as that of Claudia Peill. An audacious artist who constantly tests the conventional limits of the image and perception, she is known for producing work rich in complexity and emotional depth. Her artistic practice encompasses a fascinating blend of digitally manipulated photography and pictorial techniques – a combination that gives rise to a subtle dialogue between reality and abstraction, between truth and the imaginary, in some ways subverting Benjaminian theory. It was in fact the celebrated German essayist Walter Benjamin, with his revolutionary theoretical vision, who pointed out the conflict between hand and eye, highlighting the gap between vision's rapidity and the slowness of drawing: "the eye grasps faster than the hand can draw". Claudia Peill's oeuvre seems, however, to dissolve that duality, in its place presenting a sort of reconciliation between two seemingly antithetical artistic languages. By way of both the camera lens and painting, the artist effectively brings into being a dichotomous dialogue between mimetic representation and non-mimetic representation, combining images and purer concepts of form and colour. And so Claudia Peill's richly instinctive painting addresses and fuses with the practices of mechanical reproduction, because, if the camera lens borrows and makes use of the artist's gaze, focusing it on a detail, painting permits her a degree of reflection that then evolves into the elaboration of the image itself, opening up previously unexplored emotional and conceptual dimensions. The exhibition *Oltre il presente. Archeologia del domani* (Beyond the Present. Tomorrow's Archaeology) is a paean to profundity of vision and to attentiveness to neglected details. Through the artist's receptive viewfinder, objects as common and apparently insignificant as manhole covers reveal a hidden world of memories and meanings steeped in urban history. Her interest in manhole covers was sparked suddenly and unexpectedly during a stroll through the city of Cosenza, when the sunlight reflecting off a manhole cover caught her attention, transforming an everyday object into an intricate arabesque of light. From that moment onwards, Peill began exploring the subterranean world of manholes, discovering not only their variety of forms and designs, but also that certain attributes and symbols link them in a universal language crossing geographical and cultural borders, from Rome to Budapest and from Beijing to Zurich. Peill's gaze, lowered to the road, invites the viewer to move beyond the surface and explore the depths of history hidden beneath our feet. These manhole covers, therefore, are not just functional objects, but become portals to a past containing a wealth of events and changes. Under Claudia Peill's attentive eye, photography becomes the means via which we rediscover the archaeology of the present, while the artist assigns to painting the task of representing the future, made up of stratifications (or veilings, as she calls them) and voids yet to be filled. In this way, the role the manhole covers play is that of contemporary archaeological finds capable of revealing visual and conceptual layers, and also of acting as metaphors for an evolving urban world that brings the past with it as it moves into the present and onwards, towards a future yet to be defined.

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