

Sam Taylor-Wood

Fondazione Prada

Milan

19th November 1998 - 6th January 1999

On Thursday 19 November at 6.30 pm, the Fondazione Prada will present an exhibition dedicated to the English artist Sam Taylor-Wood (b. London 1967), one of the most widely discussed and intriguing exponents of "YBA- Young British Art", the most vital and resounding tendency in contemporary art of this decade. Born on the "Freeze" exhibition, which was put together by a group of very young artists from London in 1988, and by now a part of the history of contemporary art, the "YBA- Young British Art" group includes about 20 British artists, including Sam Taylor-Wood, who operate in diverse artistic styles yet share a radical and non-conformist spirit. The so-called "Freeze Generation" has marked the beginning of an intense and enthusiastic period of contemporary English art. Which has forcefully imposed itself on the international scene.

The presentation, designed by Sam Taylor-Wood expressly for the exhibition spaces of the Fondazione Prada, includes, the premier showing of a recent video, a series of five new large format photographic works and an amazing video installation.

The video "Histeria" (1997,8') is dedicated to a female figure who is experiencing a violent emotional state, which the absence of sound and the slowmotion of the film make impossible to distinguish as uncontrollable laughter or torrential sobbing: two conditions which represent, according to the artist, alterations of the soul, ritualized emotions which tend to overlap, expressing the same pain and lack of control.

The new series, "Soliloquy" (1998), is represented by five large format photographic works, casting the central figure in the upper part of the representation, with a sequence of smaller images located below. The title harks back to the soliloquy of the Shakespearean actor, who during the more complex scenes, addresses the public to explain what is happening within his soul. There is a more immediate reference in terms of iconography to 14th and 15th century painting, with the visual separation of the cycles of celestial affairs in the upper part of the representation, and the earthly events below in the predella.

In this work by Sam Taylor-Wood, the principle figures in the images are captured on film in a condition halfway between oneiric and unreal, where the photographic predella is like the scenery in a dream, as if the artist was able to read the mind of the figure to the point of nightmare and insanity. "In the 'Soliloquy' series", the artist explains, "I wanted to depict the same separation, the different formal sense between above and below, between sublime and physical, immaterial and material, and I sought to bring them into line in a whole that would produce a sort of focus on the unconscious. Above is the individual who thinks or contemplates and below, his oneiric and anguished reflection"*The fusion between the central that the figure and the predella allows the work to be read as a whole, so much that the figure above often flows down below, or in both parts slight changes appear in the details, rendering the work surreal and ambiguous: "Perhaps" - says the artist - "it reveals an attempt to

communicate that this is a montage, or an open-ended story; in fact, the sequence gives the idea of an infinite event, one that never concludes, or that can wrap around itself, at three hundred and sixty degrees.”* The five “Soliloquy”, while forming a whole which documents varying states of mind, are each stylistically different, thus revealing divergent image scripts.

“Noli Me Tangere” (1998, 3’45”) is her new video installation, complete with sound, set up in one of the internal rooms of the Foundation. Sam Taylor-Wood while explains: “I filmed a human being with a perfect athletic’sv or acrobat’s body, while he stood on his hands for as long as possible . I thought he would stay in this position for at least the minutes, but that was an impossible length of time, and the most he could endure was five minutes. At the end of that time, his arms trying to bend, until he fell. Once taped, I reversed the image so that he is supporting the ceiling, like Atlas.. Walking into a dark space, the immediate perception is of a perfect body that is supporting the weight of the building.”*

The classical representation of the telamone is put tyo question here as rather a fake, fictitious image, where the strength of the transform itself into weakness: “Once again”, declares the artist, “I’interested in the idea of vulnerability that is discovered through experience. The presence of the body is strong and serene, it reaches monumental dimensions, to the point where it can support the ceiling of a building. He is a giant, something extraordinary, it looks wrong. The effect is of the weakness of strength.”*

A 1990 graduate of Golsmiths College, Lodon, Sam Taylor-Wood initially devoted herself to sculpture. However, it was while working for the Royal Opera House that her interest in the cinema as a medium for explring daily life developed. She began making films using a variety of formats to illustrate various situations. These films had this in common: they concentrated on the isolation of human emotion - hence the recurrent themes of discomfort, solitude, provocation, euphoria, aggression and sexuality in the artist’s work. The critics have labelled her output “art-film hybrid”, since it incorporates elements of photography, film, video installation and sound. In 1993, she received the “Barclay’s Young Artist” award, and she began to exhibiting her work in 1994.

She held exhibitions at the Chisenhale Gallery of London in 1996 and in 1997 at the Fundació La Caixa in Barcelona. In 1996, she took part in the “Life /Live” exhibition at the Musée D’Art Moderne de Paris, while at the 47th Biennale in Venice, in a exhibition entitled “Future Present Past”, held at the Corderie dell’Arsenale, she received one of the two prizes available to young artists. Her work also appeared in “Sensation. Young British Artist from the Saatchi Collection” at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. She has recently been short-listed for the most prestigious award in contemporary art, the Turner Prize, which will be presented in December at London’s Tate Gallery.

The Fondazione Prada, in presenting the work of a young artist who specializes in new technologies and languages, including film, video and photography, continues its tradition of reviewing the most significant and emblematic trtends in contemporary art. “The decision” - declare Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli - “to exhibit the work of the artist Sam Taylor-Wood reinforces the direction of the Fondazione Prada’s programme previously demonstrated in it’s collaboration with Laurie Anderson (and as will be seen in the future with the work of Mariko Mori). It is responding to the

necessity of exploring a technological and science-fictional imagery in which the natural and artificial, the personal and the impersonal, become intertwined and difficult to distinguish. With these artist, the sensory experience becomes increasingly immaterial and virtual, without becoming devoid of emotional or personal history, passion or mystery. The research carried out by the Foundation can be includes the art of Louise Bourgeois, Laurie Andeson, Sam Taylor-Wood and Mariko Mori, creating a vision that spans America, Europe and Asia. Theirs is a multi sensory and mutli cultural vision which belongs to our present, and inspires by the continuous mutation of linguistic and creative boundaries so that the gap between architecture, video, film, performance, sculpture, painting, photography and music, no longer exists and that we no longer differentiate between territory, religion, ethnicity or race.”**

To mark this exhibition, the Fondazione Prada has published a book dedicated to Sam Taylor-Wood with text in either Italia and English. It contains an interview with the artist by Germano Celant, as well as critical contributions by Michael Bracewell, Bruce Ferguson and Nancy Spector, together with an exstensive iconographic supplement.

*From the interview by Germano Celant in the book published by the Fondazione Prada.

** From the preface by Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli in the book published by the Fondazione Prada.

Exhibition Info

Title: Sam Taylor-Wood
Opening: 19th November 1998, 6.30pm (by invitation)
Duration: 20th November 1998 - 6th January 1999
Location: Fondazione Prada
Address: Via Spartaco 8, Milan
Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-7pm; closed Monday
Entrance: Free
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