

IDOL: Mauro Perucchetti

1. Your first major exhibition in the UK was a show called “Cloning and Religion” (2004) at Beaux Arts on Cork Street, now 7 years on you have completed another successful show, but at the Halcyon gallery in Mayfair. How does it feel to exhibit your work in the UK? And do you feel there are different expectations and curiosities towards your work each time you exhibit?

I arrived in London in the early seventies and this country has always been a hub of creativity and new trends. London is one of the capitals of the art world and it is a great privilege to be able to exhibit here.

I don't really feel expectations, if any, from the public or my collectors as I am too demanding and ruthless on myself to notice.

2. The works in the exhibition were divided into three groups: Modern Day Heroes, Hip Pop and Daily News. Can you explain why this was?

I am very prolific with my work and very impatient. When I produce works that I like, I find it very difficult to show some and put some away for another day. Also, if I am trying to say something with these pieces, that's when I want to say it and, if I wait, the spontaneity and the momentum will be gone in my mind.

That is why I curated the work into three groups like three shows at the same time all of which went hand in hand, I thought.

3. In Works such as ‘Michelangelo 2020’ and ‘Modern Heroes’, you take classic Renaissance sculpture and gave it a, some-what pop-art twist, what was the logic behind this?

I spent some formative years in Rome in my youth and remember being in awe of the amazing art disseminated throughout the city. Every time I go to a museum I still feel that admiration and, finally, I had the opportunity to combine that classicism with contemporary issues and my style of art.

The two pieces address the issue of gender which is such a talked about topic and ‘Michelangelo 2020’ is my tribute to women, particularly to their role in history as the “underdog”.

In the broadest sense of the word I LOVE women and I think they deserve a monument.

‘Modern Heroes’ is my monument to the gay community and their struggle for gay rights.

Ironically the ambiguity of this work is something that has been present in classical sculpture for ever.

4. As a surprise gift to you, your wife and PR/ Art consultant Lorena Perucchetti helped you become one of the artist's to feature in the first ever Roma Biennale. How does it feel to have your work be a part of this festival, and is there any added pressure, as it is held in your homeland?

I am an expatriate and this opportunity represents a bit of a return to my roots.

I am very thankful to Lorena and extremely honoured to have been selected by the committee .

5. Your wife works incredibly hard to promote your work outside the UK and, with her help, you have had a series of successful shows around the globe. Can you tell us how your business relationship works and what it has been like since Lorena took over your PR.

Lorena and I enjoy pretty much the same things in life and therefore we spend most of the time together anyway. To be able to put this wonderful partnership to good use in business as well is great .

It is a pure coincidence that we are both from an art background as my wife used to run galleries in LA . We make a good team even though we are so busy that we could do with two of me and two of her.

6. How do you tackle the theme of politics in your work?

Politics are responsible for changing the world we live in, with massive repercussions, as we have seen many times. I find it fascinating how politicians, who are supposedly appointed to manage the interests of people, get there to begin with through intrigues and hypocrisy.

Sometimes they go on to do an admirable job, but often they don't. The rhythm of politics is perennial and reduces to the banal observation that a good politician is a popular one.

We should all try a bit harder with each other.

With the rise of the media and technology, Politics is becoming very intrusive in our everyday lives: Big Brother might well be around the corner.

I generally create art that hopefully makes people think about global issues , many of my pieces are political.

7. What would you say your relationship with art is about?

Visceral

8. Are there any particular contemporary artists that you admire?

There are so many talented people out there that to choose one over the other would be unfair. I don't really follow what other artists are doing, but artists often respond to the same vibes in the air.

I really am not aware of one artist in particular that influenced me.

9. What would you say is the most important quality an artist can have?

Exceptional skills combined with an unusual approach.

10. When did you first realise that you wanted to become an artist?

From an early age I was probably spending more time drawing, painting and making things with my hands than studying. Of those subjects I did study, I loved history, art and geography, all of which supported my imagination and an unstoppable tendency to dream. When, for my parent's sake, I tried to decide what I was going to do in life, I was overwhelmed by all the possibilities. This, I think, is the first unfortunate sign of a creative mind. For the next 30 years or so I lived as freely as possible, whilst allowing for the need to make a living, until, at the age of 50 (eleven years ago), I woke up one morning and decided that no amount of money or worldly comforts should keep me from being creative on my own account rather than just on behalf of other people. I sold my business and my house to finance my move into art.

11. Out of all your works, which would say has proved the most difficult and which has been the most rewarding?

It has to be the JELLY BABIES

I started to use resin initially because it was the perfect medium with which to make the Jelly Babies that I made for my body of work on Cloning. This wasn't such a straightforward process as, when I started, there was nobody out there that I could use to help me. Every time I sought help from specialists I was told that I was already pushing up against the limits of what the material could be expected to do, so I was rather left to go it alone.

It took me some time and a lot of dedication, but I can confidently say that I have pioneered the use of this material.

I love its translucence and light reflective qualities; the effects are both happy and moody at the same time.

I also love the medium I use because this particular resin is relatively unexploited and therefore has the immediate benefit of making my work instantly recognizable. Finally, my medium is technically very challenging; infuriatingly so sometimes, but in an odd way this spurs me on. Creativity has an odd relationship with frustration. That, I suppose, is why people talk about suffering for their art.

12. Apart from your solo show at the Grand Palais in Paris you also had a sold out show in Geneva at Galerie Bel-Air. Could you have ever anticipated that your work would receive such an overwhelming response, and if it had not, how would you have dealt with the criticisms?

My last solo show in London with Halcyon was a sell out as well but I still wasn't expecting to sell out in Geneva, it was a very pleasant surprise as I had never showed there and didn't know what to expect.

I am very lucky because I am so prolific that I have a very large and diverse body of work. If I had a show in a new Country which achieved poor sales I could think I had exhibited the wrong work for that market : this would soften the blow if it was true.

However it is possible to have poor sales and still have a well received show : this can still be interpreted as a fair success and not a criticism.

13. What is an average working day for you like?

Days and nights blend together without boundaries. To my wife's despair I work all the time.

14. How long did it take you to develop your style?

We all are as different as our fingerprints.

One could say that STYLE is the way different individuals perform the same task in different ways.

Resin is the medium I use most often, a material that I first experimented with as a teen-ager; you could say it is my style of the moment. I have been an artist all my life, but I couldn't afford to do the things I wanted to do before.

This is probably why I am so prolific, as I have a long and, trust me, very intense and unorthodox past, full of experiences.

I definitely would not have the knowledge to produce what I do, constantly pushing the technical envelope, if I was in my twenties and coming out of art school.

15. Can you tell us about a work of art that changed your life?

It must be the very first piece I sold: 'Target 3732'

I was making this at the same time as the Jelly Babies and it was a very ambitious piece as it consisted of 3732 handgun cartridges with M&Ms replacing the bullets. These were encapsulated in 80 KG of resin, a technical nightmare.

To have succeeded in making it and selling it gave me the confidence to carry on : amazing !

16. On the 23rd of December 2010 you revealed your 'Jelly Baby Family' in Marble Arch. Can you tell us about the project and how it feels to have changed the landscape of such a cosmopolitan area?

Again I can't tell you how honoured I am to have received such a privilege and how grateful I am to my gallery in London, Halcyon, who made it possible.

This has particular meaning to me as London has really been my home longer than anywhere else.

I was smitten with it when I first arrived in the early seventies and the love story has not ended. London is so multicultural, with tons of super cool people of all ages and the location, being opposite Speakers Corner, couldn't be better.

I hear the Jelly Baby Family is receiving a lot of attention from the public, which is wonderful.

17. Where do you get your inspiration from; what inspires you as an artist?

I am inspired by the world around us, and especially by current world events and the explosive effect they have had on me and on many other people in our society.

I have a great appreciation for life and suffer a great frustration that derives from the fact that I would like to fix some of the things that are wrong in this world, but I can't and it pisses me off. My art is the result of a cocktail of passions: a conscious passion for life and passion at a much more physical and instinctive level, something I can't describe, some kind of powerful and empowering mix of adrenalin and endorphin which needs to come out. And, finally, a passion for aesthetics.

18. What has been the most influential piece of advice anyone has ever given you?

The owner of an A list gallery telling me I was too old at 50 to start, it had the opposite effect but I never thanked him.

19. Can you let us into what you are currently working on?

In my studio I have a big table with stacks of paper full of sketches and ideas.

These go through a selection process and end up in boxes, all of which becomes a show. I have three boxes at the moment, but one is particularly exciting as it's different from the others: I am preparing an abstract show which is also going to include some work I did when I was much younger.

20. What is your life's Motto?

Not on my dead body !

21. Finally, who is your Idol?

My mother and father: what integrity and resilience!

1. Can you tell us about the logic behind your piece "Cloning Factory" and "Cloning Factory White"?

Around 1999 when I was succumbing to the call for a change of life to follow my passion, there was a lot of talk going on about cloning humans, as there had been some scientific breakthroughs. This caused a lot of debate, which inspired me. 'Cloning Factory' was a possible imaginary scenario.

2. From your point of view, what is the relationship between "cloning and religion" (2002), and why did you use those specific pieces in collaboration?

If human cloning had been approved there is a possibility that we would have been able to produce perfectly formed beings, but how would we have known what was going on in their heads let alone their souls, if any. For most religions the cloning of humans is playing God.

3. What was the main influence/s in your piece "What are we having for dinner tonight" 2006

I once went for a holiday to Cuba. With my traveling friends we went to a supermarket to stock up. A few hundred dollars later we walked out with two full trolleys. This is when I realized that people were looking at us as if we were aliens and, most disturbingly, they were looking with shocked composure at the trolleys overflowing with goods: normal to us but not to people who can't buy that amount in a year and, sometimes, do not have enough to eat. I felt the size of a pea. I went on to make 'What are we having for dinner tonight' and 'Casualties' a piece with Jelly Babies half buried in cracked dry clay like tadpoles in a dry river bed during drought.

4. What would you like to be reincarnated in your next life?

I'd like to have a go at music.

5. How do you tackle the theme of religion in your works? Are you looking to emulate the classic representation of the religious experience, for example Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Theresa or are you looking at the religious feeling one gets from viewing a work of art, such as looking at a Rothko?

I don't think my work lends itself to religious messages unless I am making a comment related to religion and its interaction with society. My work is not solemn enough. But strangely I can hardly go past a church without popping in, they're always full of artistic and architectural surprises and the sense peace in them is difficult to replicate. Definitely an abstract experience.

6. There are quite strong American Influences throughout your work (e.i. "Route 66 Joyride to Brighter skies" 2008) What is it about American culture that intrigues you, and how does the American culture effect your work.

I lived in New York and Los Angeles and America is another hub of creativity. In historic terms, it's like a contemporary work. No other major country started off so recently as a 'blank' canvas (with all due respect to the native Indians who have been there for so long and enjoyed it as it was). I think America is very unique and I always love going there.