

The approach

Adelaide Cioni

True Form

23 May – 22 June 2024

Preview: Wednesday 22 May, 6-9pm

“O image of mine, may you endure for the sake of my name, that everyone may love you, that people may stretch out their arms for me, bearing rich bouquets... You are here for me, as a shelter. You are my true form.”

This is what Panehsy, Royal Treasurer from Memphis, under Pharaoh Ramses II writes more than three thousand years ago, in his dedication to the statue that will represent him after his death. It can be found in the section on Ancient Egypt within the British Museum. The text reads like a love song to a statue. It has, of a love song, that total identification with the object of love and at the same time the hope that it will outlive us forever.

True Form interrogates what goes on between us and the images we create or surround ourselves with. The paintings come from life drawings of statuettes that I saw in different archeological museums – in London, in Sicily, in Turin, in Bologna. I made these drawings as I was standing in front of the statuettes, and then I translated them in even simpler lines. A translation of a translation, stripped down to the bare minimum.

When I first read Panehsy’s dedication I was shocked and didn’t understand why exactly. Still now, every time I read that last sentence, “You are my true form”, I feel knocked out. Somehow Panehsy has touched on a concept that lies at the core of my relationship with art. It’s one of those sentences that Paul Valéry would have described as “poetic”, as it keeps ringing without ever exhausting itself. This idea of a true form holds something magic, for really if you think about it, a true form does not exist outside of the original – Panehsy’s body, in this instance. When he says you are my true form he implies that the statue is a perfect translation of him into stone, in fact, the statue might be truer to him than his own body. And here is where I fall. For an ex-translator like me there is something paradoxical in this; for any translator knows there is no such thing as a perfect translation, a *true* translation. It’s a wish. It can only exist in our belief. Art then is a game of make-believe. I am speaking to the image I created, I say you are me, I want you to be beautiful and loved in my place; I want something that is impossible. What Panehsy is really touching with this single, simplest sentence, is essential to art. He is talking about absence; the statue he speaks to consoles him from the unbearable idea of not being there one day. The statue gives him the possibility to pretend that everything he wants is still there. Nobody has died, there is only presence. But in the paradox offered by Panehsy there lies another question: if the work of art is a translation of an original, it’s rather easy to see how figuration works, i.e. a statue can be a translation of a human body, but what if I work in abstraction? What is the original I’m referring to then? A circle is a true form of what? A grid is a true form of what? What is the original lying behind all the art that we make?

In the Annexe this meditation moves into abstraction and colour, here too trying to strip down everything as much as possible. It is an immersive environment that puts us directly inside the work, barefooted. This is an open invitation to abandon all narrative efforts and simply perceive primary colour and shape.

– Adelaide Cioni, 2024

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True Form is Adelaide Cioni's debut exhibition at The Approach and coincides with London Gallery Weekend (31 May – 2 June) where Cioni will be presenting a newly commissioned performance work as part of the LGW Performance Programme in collaboration with UP Projects. There will be two performances presented at 2pm and 5pm on Friday 31 May in the garden at St James's Church Piccadilly. The performances will be followed by a short conversation with the artist

Adelaide Cioni (b. 1976, Bologna) lives and works in Spoleto, Italy. She studied drawing at UCLA, Los Angeles, and received a BA in Sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome (2015). With an MA in contemporary history and a master's degree in Literary Translation, for ten years she translated American literature (John Cheever, Lydia Davis, David Foster Wallace, among others). Selected recent exhibitions include: *Drawings for Myself*, P420, Bologna, IT (solo); *Infinita infanzia*, Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto, IT (all 2024); *Il mondo*, Commissione Centro Pecci 2023, Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, IT (solo); *Italian Painting Today*, Triennale, Milano, IT; *Teatrino*, Museo del Tessuto e del Costume, Spoleto, IT (site-specific installation); *Ab ovo / On Patterns*, Mimosa House, London, UK (solo); *Recent Acquisitions and Eternal Loves - Part I*, Nicoletta Fiorucci Collection, Principality of Monaco, MC (all 2023); *An Incomplete A to Z for Art and Poetry*, 30 Old Burlington Street, London, UK; *Prayers to Jupiter*, Fondazione Memmo/Gasworks, London, UK (performance) (all 2022); *And the flowers too*, Fondazione Volume, Museo Orto Botanico, Roma, IT; *Tout Court. Un aperçu de l'art contemporain italien*, l'Istituto Italiano di Cultura a Parigi, Paris, FR; *Painting stone*, Villa Lontana, Roma, IT; *141 - Un secolo di disegno in Italia*, Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna, Bologna, IT; *Io dico io (I say I)*, Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Roma, IT (all 2021); *Shape, color, taste, sound and smell*, Adelaide Cioni/Guy Mees, P420, Bologna, IT (duo); *Six or seven*, Madonna del Pozzo, Spoleto, IT (solo) (both 2019); *Pink punk performance*, with Fabio Giorgi Alberti, da Franco, Roma, IT (2017); *à propos de bacchelli*, MAMbo, Bologna, IT (solo, 2015).