

PIETRO ROCCASALVA

Pietro Roccasalva: *The Strange Young Neighbours*
David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles
11 February – 24 March

Pietro Roccasalva's work poses problems for those seeking legible meaning. Although his visual language of recurrent symbols and metaphors looks very much like it should be in some way translatable, most of its etymologies are so deeply entombed in Roccasalva's eccentric logic that even those closest to him – assistants and gallerists, for instance – are sometimes at a loss to decode it.

Which is not to say that they don't try. The near-1,100-word press release for this exhibition (the artist's first solo in the US) goes into some detail about the source of the large *tableau vivant* in the centre of the gallery (namely, the opening shot of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La Ricotta*, 1962) and the show's title (from a tale in Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*, 1809). But *why* he chose to collide these references is less clear; it may have something to do, as does all of Roccasalva's work, with his Sisyphean artistic quest for simulation by dragging images into the third and potentially fourth dimensions, and in creating images that seem to inhabit these dimensions even as flat drawings or paintings on the wall.

'You never look at me from the place I see you,' laments purple neon text at the entrance to the gallery. The phrase, on loan from Lacan and frequently used by the artist, repeats and twists around on the wall to make a textual Möbius strip; its inverted letters can be read in the glass of the gallery's window.

Markedly different in tone, though perhaps not in spatial effect, are the paintings and pastels that surround the large *tableau vivant*. In muted colours and soft crosshatching, Roccasalva has assembled a crew of waiters, each presenting a silver platter bearing a silver lemon-squeezer. While the waiters' faces collapse into primitivist, masklike abstractions, the silverware is shinily rendered, its surfaces mirroring remote spaces – such as, in the pastel *Il Traviatore* (2011), Venetian arcades. As with the neon piece, Roccasalva

beckons his viewers through a perceptual wormhole and encourages them to look at the artwork from the other side.

The glass in the pictures' frames seems unusually reflective. It is likely that the artist wants viewers to see the installation behind them, *Untitled (Just Married Machine #1)* (2012), even while facing the pictures. A shot of a food-laden table from Pasolini's film is transfigured into oversize sculptural surrogates: a platter becomes a boat, a bread basket is scaled-up into a hot-air balloon and, in place of a bottle, a woman in a wedding dress clutches a modified tennis racket. Her husband (the actors are married in real life) sits in the boat.

The specificity of real objects and real people, however, obstructs the kind of time travel facilitated by Roccasalva's paintings. In an oeuvre in which every image slickly defers to another, the abrupt reality of a *tableau vivant* gives one rare occasion to pause.

JONATHAN GRIFFIN

Griffin, Jonathan, "Exhibition Reviews: Pietro Roccasalva," *ArtReview*, Issue 58, April 2012, pp. 114-115



Pietro Roccasalva
The Strange Young
Neighbours, 2012 (installation
view). Photo: Brian Forrest.
Courtesy the artist and David
Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles