

Andrea Romano

*Claque & Shill*

28 October – 26 November

Opening: 27 October, 6:30 pm

Gossip, cynism and self-interest is what sustains our exhibitions. Facebook, *Raw material for a theory of the Young Girl*, iCal. Let's look at ourselves: as Witold Gombrowicz would say, we aren't worth half of Shakespeare and a quarter of Chopin—"eternal wannabes, eternal failures, eternally inadequate; servants, imitators and admirers of the Art which, in fact, marginalizes us." And still, we pour out theories, articulate visions, wallow in a certain personal "taste." *We are in the mood*, always and always for the first time. Who's the *chef de claque* tonight? Clap clap clap. Blah blah blah.

*Gasconade is pleased to present Claque & Shill, the absolute first solo exhibition of artist Andrea Romano (1984, Milan), showing a series of five pencil drawings in marble frames to be intended as combinations of drawing and sculpture.*

*The drawings reproduce photo portraits of Kenny, a white tiger born in 1999 to a breeder in Bentonville, Arkansas, and died in 2008 due to its poor health conditions. As a result of inbreeding, Kenny was mentally retarded and had acute physical handicaps. Romano's works are informed by a reflection on both the medium of drawing, to which the marble frame lends a concrete support as well as the promise of greater prestige, and the vulnerability of the subject Kenny, the negative outcome of an experiment aimed at reproducing the beauty of nature, and yet still able to arouse the audience.*

*Claque & Shill is the title of the exhibition and the series of drawings, and aims to recall the ambiguity and unreliability of representation. The claque is an organized group of people who, either for hire or for other reasons, band together to applaud or deride a performance and thereby attempt to influence the audience. The shill is someone who purposely gives onlookers the impression that he or she is an enthusiastic independent customer of a seller and encourages other onlookers or audience members to purchase a particular good or service. Claque and shill infiltrate into a group in order to orientate the taste of its members and manipulate the perception of a phenomenon. The artist's attention focuses on the role of the onlooker, whose impressions, be they spontaneous or not, reflect in the work and contribute to outline its essential intent of triggering the audience's sense of responsibility towards the work.*

*The drawings selected for the exhibition represent the first result of an on-going series in which the symbiosis between drawing and sculpture thwarts the phenomenological definition of the work, making it deliberately ambiguous. The subject portrayed is hyperbolic—Kenny is the symbol of a deceived expectation, a faulty specimen created from an idea of perfection and yet paradoxically made unique by its faults.*

*In nature only a tiger out of 10'000 is albino. The Royal White Tiger, the dream of every breeder, characterised by a white fur, blue eyes and pink nose, didn't exist until it was artificially created in XIX century. Royal White Tigers born without malformations are employed in the entertainment industry.*

This is how symbols and heroes come to life. When we attack, we get prepared to violate and be violated as well. In such dynamics, we become martyrs. We fall under the spell of an image; we steal it and stock it in the most remote file of our computer. We spend months cherishing and copying it meticulously, adoring the Beauty, the Goodness, the Truth in it with the hope that they will manifest themselves before us and others. When we realize that the image represents a deformed animal, it is too late. When we realise that its irregular teeth don't let it close his jaws properly, and that its nose is snub, empathy has already set off. Our performance, our virtuosity or noble principles go down the tubes, thanks to a gesture full of pathetic sentimentalism. We are incapable of affection, and yet we always preserve a gleam of romanticism. It will be useless to set the image in marble and call it "sculpture"; in order to make room for it, the stone will be manipulated to the extent of compromising its own solidity. Who will support whom? Our vulnerability—as artists, onlookers, human beings—is the only certainty we can offer.

We would like to say: Look at us becoming a legend! Look at us wearing our Nike Air, dancing our hardcore music, using our Technogym machines! Nevertheless, we are only poor imitations of Landseer, portrait painters of animals enslaved by money. Edwin Henry was one of the *protégés* of Queen Victoria, well known for his ability to provide the animals he painted with the same emotional attributes of their masters. After several nervous breakdowns, he slowly slipped into madness. He also portrayed a white tiger, which he had seen at a World's fair.

Like Landseer, we are attracted by things-that-appear-as-they-are-not, by artifice and the dictates of style. You can call us *camp* if you will, as we agree that being "natural" is terribly hard . . . We are posers and pursue techniques, such as portraiture, which generate a double reality and thus feed iconology and seduction, theatre and art. We aren't familiar with the moralism of aristocracy, or the strategies of double-dealers. We play a role just for the fun of it.

In front of the Cimitero di Greco in Milan, there is a marble cutter. When we asked him to work for us, he answered: "Hmm, no . . . You know, the dead . . ." One thing is for sure, no one can think we idealize reality to protect ourselves from its most painful aspects! We received a letter; it's hard to say whether the sender is a shill or a *chef de clique*. The text, of only a few lines, ultimately says that we are not who we say we are. When the moon will appear in the sky, we will play the game of the Werewolves of Miller's Hollow . . . Who will be the fortune teller? Who will be the prostitute? Who will die first? For now, the only relief we have is another slap on our back.

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