

two parts of the display prompted analogies between the layout of two- and three-dimensional space, and the structure of thought. Like the art school furniture, it suggested that the shape of things and the shape of ideas are inextricably bound. Picking up on a related theme, a large-scale blackboard illustration by Rudy Guedj, summarizing the evolution of the art school from the Academy through Bauhaus to the contemporary, used a series of simple forms to represent complex educational philosophies.

The two non-educational elements of the biennial were monographic shows of the work of veteran Czech designer Rostislav Vaněk and the esteemed Dutch design team Mevis & Van Deursen. Both were prompted by previous honours – Vaněk was given a lifetime contribution award at the 2010 biennial and Mevis & Van Deursen were the winners of the Grand Prix in the professional competition of 2012. While Vaněk played it straight, showing a career's worth of well-crafted identities, publications and typefaces, Mevis & Van Deursen fooled with the format by exhibiting only a handful of pieces and overwhelming each of them with outsized, overly detailed captions. The shows were an effective pair, allowing comparisons of not only the designs produced by the respective studios, but also the designers' sense of their own roles. Vaněk posed as a creator of order, Mevis & Van Deursen as generators of disturbance.

The biennial occupied parts of Brno's Museum of Applied Arts and the Moravian Gallery as well as the ground floor of a third building, the Governor's Palace, which was given over to an 'Off Program' – a revolving selection of workshops, presentations and exhibitions, largely staged by students. The last element of the biennial proper was a statistical study of the genders, nationalities and ages of the winners of the last ten Brno competitions, presented in a book titled *Off-White Paper*. Although its authors, the Korean designers Sulki & Min Choi, claim an interest in 'quantities, not qualities', their title suggests otherwise. The figures reveal a disconcerting consistency in the biennial's previous few outings, most of the winners being men from Europe. Although it could be argued that the 26th edition didn't venture into dramatically new geographical territory, it made a significant step simply by breaking the cycle of professional self-congratulation.

EMILY KING



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ADRIAN PACI Kaufmann Repetto, Milan

Adrian Paci described this exhibition as a return to a more intimate and handcrafted practice. Its title, 'La gloria vostra fu sole' (Thou glory was made of sun), comes from a verse by 19th-century poet Gavril Dara Junior, who wrote in Arberesh, the language of Albanian communities in Italy. Paci planned the show a year ago, after months spent editing his last video, *The Column* (2013), for his retrospective 'Lives in Transit' (which toured from Jeu de Paume in Paris to Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan). He felt the urge to grant a weightier physicality to the fleeting images from his huge archive, which ranges from obsolete VHS tapes to photographs found online. Trained as a realist painter in the Albanian capital, Tirana, Paci started to shoot photos and moving images only in the late 1990s, when the country underwent a dramatic phase of political turmoil and he fled to Milan.

For 'La gloria vostra fu sole', Paci chose an unequivocally heavy material – marble – working with it in mosaic, a traditional technique that the artist first explored a few years ago and has since developed with the help of an assistant. In comparison to the two mosaics, which cover a wall in each of Kaufmann Repetto's two rooms, a series of small paintings – acrylics on wood and watercolours on paper in delicate colours – sparsely hung at eye level on the other gallery walls, appears very light, almost as if the works were floating. The contrast is intentional.

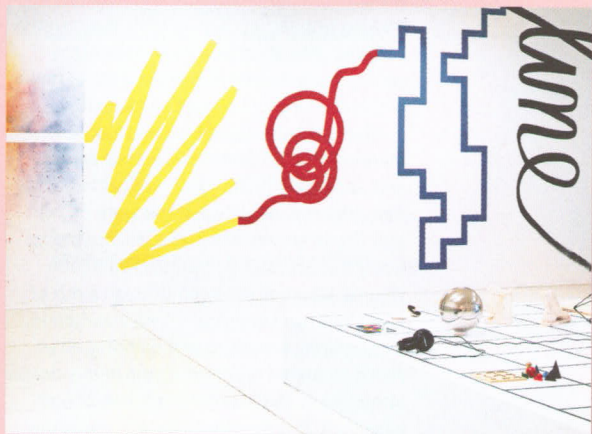
One of the mosaics, *Il salto* (The Jump, all works 2014), in black and white, depicts a soldier climbing over an obstacle; *Facciata* (Facade), in full colour, shows a Romanesque church, with five men on the roof and a white-clad figure standing next to the portal. Both images are hard to decipher and appear slightly blurred, as if frozen in the middle of something, or affected by a loss of definition having being translated from one medium to another. This is, in fact, exactly what has happened, as originally they came from video and film stills: *Il salto* is based on a 1970s documentary on military training

found on YouTube, and *Facciata* on Armenian director Sergei Paradjanov's extraordinary 1968 film *The Colour of Pomegranates*, which was censored in the Soviet Union because of its unorthodox religious imagery. According to Paci, however, specific sources are less important than the ambiguity of the images per se, which is emphasized by their uncertain provenance and visual 'noise'.

The act of abstracting images from their time and context in order to open them up to new readings is a recurring feature in Paci's work. In the past, the artist has sourced footage from Pier Paolo Pasolini's films, private wedding tapes, newsreels, soft porn, documentaries and family photographs. Up close, the irregular tesserae of the mosaic are akin to pixels, but, from afar, the images they form are interrupted by glitches, so that the viewer goes back and forth without being able to focus; only once you see the image reproduced on a smaller scale does the picture finally look coherent.

From the small paintings, other hazy figures emerge: soldiers with outstretched arms, in the manner of a routine at the gym or an act of surrender: *A braccia aperte* (Arms Wide Open); a group of swimmers: *Nuotatori* (Swimmers); an acrobat attached to a rope: *Lappesa* (The Hanged Woman); young street fighters: *I rivoltosi* (The Rioters); a young man's head, eyes shut, enclosed by hands: *Il riposo* (The Rest). The painting is sketchy, the brushstrokes fluid, but otherwise the only link between the works is the presence of figures in a state of suspension between movement and stasis, relaxation and violence. The group of swimmers, in fact, are migrants who, almost two decades ago, crossed the Mediterranean to reach Italian shores – like so many who are still trying, despite the daily shipwrecks and unthinkable body counts. Yet, here, Paci refuses to adopt the clichéd iconography of desperation and grief and, instead, frames his subjects as seemingly normal bathers. 'The body is what we are left with, after all the journeys, the experiences and the wars', Paci told me. In times when we are exposed to instant circulation of brutal imagery of savaged bodies, of soldiers and refugees, kidnappers and hostages, executioners and victims, Paci's approach to figuration and human scale asks for detachment, and reflection.

BARBARA CASAVECCHIA



1
Kevin Cosgrove
Remake, 2014, oil on linen,
1.1 x 1.4 m

2
'Taking a Line for a Walk.
An exhibition about design school
assignments', 2014, installation view
at 26th Brno Biennial

3
Adrian Paci
Facciata (Facade), 2014, marble
mosaic, 2 x 2.6 m