

Adrian Paci

07.14.11



Adrian Paci, *Via Crucis, Stazione 10, Gesu' e' spogliato delle vesti* (Via Crucis, Station 10, Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments), 2011, print on Dibond, 34 x 21".

Adrian Paci is an Albanian artist based in Milan. His work explores the boundaries between the personal and the political as well as the identities and rituals that are forged along those borders. Here, Paci explains his process in re-creating one of the most iconic stories in Catholicism, Christ's torture and crucifixion.

IN DECEMBER 2010, I was asked by curator Stefania Morellato to create a *via crucis*, the stations of the cross, for the Church of San Bartolomeo in Milan. Given that it was a *via crucis*, the theme and subjects were already decided: fourteen stations, each with its own scene. And, as if this were not enough, even the technique was indicated: It had to be a photographic *via crucis*. To be honest, in the beginning I had great reservations about this last condition. It risked being one of those choices people make to show that they are "contemporary" but that in the end reveals, more than anything, how much the Church lags behind in terms of the development of a visual language in contemporary art. This gap does exist: The past few centuries have seen

an interruption in a long history of communication between art and the Church, and although there have been various attempts to restart this dialogue, no one has succeeded, especially with large-scale projects.

The *via crucis* has been addressed for more than a thousand years. It is not something you “invent”; Everyone is aware of this. It is rich with iconography. One of my first thoughts was: How do I respect this iconographic baggage without resorting to quotation? The other thing was to think about the intended audience for this work. Christians see the stations of the cross as a moment of comfort, and they recognize themselves in this path of pain and redemption. As an artist, how should I approach this need? Thus my stance was to maintain a level of destabilization and at the same time avoid falling into cheap provocation. You see, making a *via crucis* means addressing the representation of pain. The rhetoric of pain is something that really disturbs me, and I didn’t want to play with this aspect. What I have created is more an abandoned than a brutalized Christ.

As a subject, the *via crucis* belongs to the universal discourse on human pain. I understood that the work had to be brought into a familiar, almost domestic dimension. I decided to create this *via crucis* within my studio, using people close to me to construct the scenes. I avoided using symbols—there is not even a cross—in order to give it an immediate concreteness. I didn’t photograph the scenes but filmed them, then chose a frame from the video. I think doing it this way imparted to the work a certain static quality, characteristic of photography, which gives the narration a careful equilibrium, while also creating a more fluid dimension of time passing, which is the soul of the frame.

One of the goals I set in “removing” detail from the narration was to create a void, a space to be left for possible future development. The choice of video, which is in effect annulled through the decision to stop and use one frame, is also an attempt to allude to a moment that maintains the memory of what was there before and what could come later. Mine is a storyboard *via crucis*. They are stations that you are invited to fill.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— *As told to Paola Nicolin*