

Atelier dell'Errore  
*FREAK*  
*YOU*  
!

Like everyone, I got to know the works of Atelier dell'Errore (AdE) [Atelier of Mistakes] before meeting its members personally. The exhibition was *Hic sunt Dracones*, at GAM (Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e contemporanea) in Turin (Italy): when I left, I was not the same person I had been when I'd entered. A seed, or perhaps it is more appropriate to say a sort of larval being, had slipped under my skin and taken me as host. The creatures of Atelier dell'Errore, to paraphrase Goya, are monsters that generate thoughts, that do not leave one indifferent. Some time later I spoke with Luca Santiago Mora, who is the artistic director and ambassador of AdE, who narrated to me the 23-year history of the collective, which was born by chance.

A necessary premise

Atelier dell'Errore is a collective of twelve neurodivergent artists residing on the third floor of the Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia. It cannot be said exactly when AdE was born: it was not born from a precise will or at a drawing table. Atelier dell'Errore just happened. It happened that twenty years ago Luca Santiago Mora, artist and now artistic director of Atelier, received a call from an artist friend asking him to replace her for a year in the expressive activities workshop dedicated to the Child Neuropsychiatry department of the public health service in Reggio Emilia. He simply never left. The hours spent with the then-kids have become an experience among equals, where everyone learns and everyone makes mistakes, in the belief that mistakes are just a convention.

From the very beginning, Luca Santiago Mora made the decision to focus on drawing, a technique that not even he had ever explored as an artist, putting everyone at the same starting line. Two other rules were set in place and remain so to this day: the subjects are inspired by the animal kingdom and it is forbidden to erase mistakes and to use an eraser or white-out anything or to change the sheet of paper you start drawing. Instead, please always move forward with what there is and what you are.

With these rules and thanks to endless practice of drawing, the process of metamorphic morphology of AdE's creatures was born. In over twenty years of

activity Atelier dell'Errore has created a bestiary of hybrid beings: partly insects, partly underwater animals, rarely mammals. They are monstrous, disturbing and magnetic creatures, the result of collective work that has challenged large scale drawings for years. In 2018 AdE achieved an important goal: the collective was established as a social cooperative art studio. The then-children, who are now adults, have been since hired as artists. Their salary depends on the sale of the works "without European, regional or municipal funds". As always, keeping away from the world of art therapy and outsider art, the AdE infiltrates more and more into the world of official contemporary art.

Fastforward to today

Atelier dell'Errore has now landed in New York City in the spaces of the kaufmann repetto gallery with FREAK YOU! the collective's first exhibition on the other side of the Atlantic. Keeping to the nautical metaphor, the exhibition opens with *AdEVelaAlpina 01*, a large sail, originally presented at the ninth edition of the Gherdeina Biennale (Dolomites, Italy), accompanied by a domestic version in the main room, *AdEVelaAlpina 02*.

The sails are the most recent result of a history driven by experimentation with alternative support to paper. With the help of a historic sailmaker's workshop, AdE transformed isothermal rescue blankets, a material that in Italy immediately brings the theme of migration to mind, into a sail for the *Edipo Re*, the fishing boat that hosted Pier Paolo Pasolini and Maria Callas and which, at the end of the Second World War, brought the Istrian Italians fleeing the Iron Curtain to safety.

The same shiny, almost mirror-like material has been adopted as the surface for the paintings of the Unknown Pleasures series in the large main room of the gallery. These have been mounted on salvaged silks which have been in some cases hand-painted in different shades of pink. These works mark the return of color, after a long golden age, which had characterized AdE's works in recent years and which can be seen on the lower floor. The explosion of acrylic colors and shades of flesh pink goes hand in hand with the shift in subjects of the latest series of works. The asexual insects of the golden age have become pubescent creatures with new, unmistakably sexual anatomical attributes. The children of the workshops of twenty years ago have become young adults and sex is at the center of their imagination, their thoughts, their impulses. The monstrous creatures that were once conceived as guardian animals against bullying at school immediately become lustful creatures, giving shape to adult desires.

The Unknown Pleasures series renders these desires explicit. It adopts the deities of Greek mythology, notoriously libertine, in order to express autoeroticism, excitement, loss of control: the triptych of *Sexy Aphrodite*,

*Ares X rated* and *Haephestus has lost control* is the materialization of a sexuality that exists despite its impossibility. In the center of the room, a fourth large work, *Intersex Shamanessan* enriches and completes the triptych with its gigantic male and female sexual attributes and protruding golden Grillz. The minor divinities on the remaining walls are no less divine: the *Empusa Satiro Sumera*, the *Urechis Ero-Thanatos*, the *Porno Amorino Anubico*, the *Polifemico Nosferatu*, the diptych *La Magna Vagina di Gea* and *Il testicolo di Urano*, and the playful *Lesbo Priapa* are unmistakable subjects created by the imagination of the collective's members. As you can imagine from the titles, each of these characters has a story to tell, of which the visual materialization is only the beginning. Some of the stories can be heard directly from their creators thanks to the *PINK! is the warmest color* video which offers a special tour of the exhibition shot in a single shot sequence and visible on the mezzanine that leads to the second part of the exhibition.

On the lower floor the game of mythological references continues. The acronym of Atelier dell'Errore is AdE (in English Hades), the underworld and the divinity that governs it. The collective interpreted the lower floor of the gallery as a chthonic world, inhabited by insect-like divinities. This series belongs to the Golden age that preceded the Pink one displayed on the upper floor: the sexual attributes are not explicit but the swarm of shapes drawn on paper is a generative movement. These Divine Insects, having overcome the male-female binarism reproduce themselves by parthenogenesis. The figures contain larval offspring, which slowly hatch, and proceed in a long line that must once again be indebted to classical antiquity.

Looking ahead

From a visual art workshop dedicated to neurodivergent children, Atelier dell'Errore has become a Renaissance workshop. Here each member of the collective can give the best of themselves, experimenting with new techniques and materials. Although the works are the result of many hands, they collaborate in a harmonious way, giving life to an imagery world that is always unitary and coherent. Like a living organism, AdE evolves and takes upon itself increasingly more ambitious projects, of which *FREAK YOU!* is only a temporary peak. It is thanks to these challenges that the members of the collective have found their profession and their place in the world. Art cannot heal any pathology, but it can transform the lives of those who create it and those who enjoy it. This is perhaps the profound meaning of what art does, and the work of Atelier dell'Errore is a crystal-clear demonstration of this.

Marta Papini

AdE (Atelier dell'Errore / Atelier of Mistakes) is an artist collective dedicated to visual arts and performance, based in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Founded in 2002 by the artist Luca Santiago Mora, who today leads the group as its artistic director, AdE began as a visual arts workshop for neurodivergent children within the pediatric healthcare system in Reggio Emilia and Bergamo.

In 2018, after numerous exhibitions and performances in art institutions and theaters, the close-knit group entered adulthood. No longer eligible for the workshop, AdE transformed into a non-profit cooperative art studio, where each artist is an equal partner. AdE finances itself through the sale of its works and professional collaborations.

In an artistic practice spanning drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and performance, AdE is guided by two core rules: animals are the only subject matter, and during the creative phase, nothing is ever erased, preserving the transformative potential of every so-called mistake.

Today, AdE is composed of 12 neurodivergent artists. They approach their most ambitious projects much like a Renaissance workshop, with each artist specializing in a specific aspect of the work's execution. Luca Santiago Mora often compares AdE's creative process to the functioning of an "organism," where each part plays a vital, essential role. Here, works are not only collective creative endeavors but also part of a larger relational process.

AdE will be the subject of a solo exhibition in fall 2025 at GAMeC-Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo. Other recent exhibitions include Silente Conversazione [Silent Conversations] - Italics: Art and Landscape. Panorama - Monferrato (2024); Errant Psalms (performance) - Nottilucente, Piazza Duomo, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano (2024); Idolo (Idol) - Laboratorio degli Angeli, Bologna (2024); Die Werskstatt - Richard Saltoun Gallery, Roma (2024); Die Goldkammer - Palazzo Nuñez-Torlonia, Roma (2024); Hic Sunt Dracones - GAM-Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Torino (2022); CHUTZPAH - THSN, Generali Foundation, Venezia (2021); In the Gloom, the Gold Gathers the Light Against It (performance) - Teatrino di Palazzo Grassi, Venezia (2021); Red Light Gold Light - MASSIMODECARLO, Milano (2021); and The Guardian Animals and Other Invisible Beings - Moretti Gallery, London (2016).