

# Michele Ciacciofera

## *The Library of encoded time*

February 9 - April 6 2019



Michele Ciacciofera, *Janas Code*, 2018, iron, wool, cotton, fossilized shell, glazed ceramic, modeling material, celtic bronze, (detail)

Michel Rein Gallery is pleased to present Michele Ciacciofera's first solo exhibition.

*The Library of Encoded Time* is the third part of a trilogy devised by Ciacciofera, which questions the relation of signs to matter and memory. The first part, *The Translucent Skin of the Present*, made at the Vitamin Gallery in Guangzhou in 2018, was followed by *A Chimerical Museum of Shifting Shapes*, made at the Voice Gallery in Marrakesh.

The works created for this show, planned as a whole, in which each piece resonates with the next, are the result of a twofold line of thinking about both the erosion and saturation of memory, as well as its creative rekindling. Sculptures placed on the floor and on shelves, mural grids, rods leaning against a wall, works on canvas and paper, all appear like fantasized archaeological objects, installed as if in a real excavation site, "edified" using local elements, like bricks and grids. As in his similar earlier installations made in Marrakesh and Guangzhou, Ciacciofera uses kinds of shelves covered with signs, inspired by cuneiform tablets and undeciphered ancient alphabets, local bricks, and "earth" clay from France. In a process designed to rekindle their memory, he carries out an initial firing which "cleanses" the object's past, and carries on with the task of the craftsman preceding him with forms of writing, made with

needles from the pharmaceutical industry, pigments and water, prior to a second firing. Set on the floor, these bricks forming the library called *The Library of Encoded Time* follow a specific order, as in an archaeological site, tracing a sort of grid with solids and voids, in a rhythm which also suggests a "loss".

The mural grids enclosed by threads, titled *Janas Code* (conjuring up those Neolithic tombs called domus de Janas<sup>1</sup> which are to be found in Sardinia), where objects and sculptures are hung, duplicate this rhythm of solid and hollow, echoing the bricks. They are made with grids from local building sites, used for construction, which Ciacciofera cuts up and processes, for which they trace and also make specific supports, in order to keep them away from the wall like pictures. Decorated with threads, some of which drop down after a deliberate cut, these new "edifices" thus reveal a certain fragility. The sculptures made of resin and ceramic, sometimes in the form of trilobites, and the real fossils and collected objects suspended by threads from the grids—based on a practice obsessing the artist since his youth, when he collected ancient ceramics as well as manuscripts and furniture—connect these works to the quest for universals which informs the artist's work, beyond the western world. This Neolithic head coming from Central Europe, and this Inca head link these grids to a history ranging from the Mediterranean to South America, by way of Africa.

The painted clay rods, incised with signs, and covered with pigments and layers of gauze and fabric, the ceramic heads placed on shelves, and the figurative works on canvas and paper are all connected to a remote past, when the emergence of both signs and figures was imbued with shamanistic rituals, whose mysterious nature today all the more permits re-invention by the work. The painting in which a fish appears (*Holding the Rod Parallel to the Water*), calling to mind the fossils on the grids, was made using the same principle of layering that we find in the rods, by the addition, in a slow process lasting 200 consecutive days, of several layers of pigments mixed with water, ending up by creating a surface calcification.

In this show, Michele Ciacciofera is interested in signs, in particular symbolic ones, and their emergence from the Neolithic period on, some 40,000/30,000 years BCE, as well as ancient languages, some of which are still undecipherable today. These signs which have lost their meaning appear, for him, like holes in the memory, witnesses of a past that we think we control because it has been museified, sometimes in an excessive way.

In tandem with this loss, he starts out from the paradoxical finding about the current saturation of memory. The fact is that the full experience of the present and projection towards the future call, in his view, for a continual updating of the past, a postulate confirmed by his numerous readings on the subject of the work of Kubler, Foucault (archaeology as the only access to the present), and Agamben. In the end, archaeology appears for him as the meeting-point of his other areas of interest, from history to anthropology by way of the political and social sciences. What is more, his attention to signs and to symbolic language lead him to observe the degree to which present-day technologies, in particular the use of emojis with smartphones, are just a continuation of this desire for symbolic language rooted in a requirement of human communication. His relation to technology is less part of a criticism duplicated by a desire to return to the past than of a re-updating of the past in the present, the better to decode and re-invent the universals of yesterday and today.

An essay by the artist accompanies the exhibition.

Born in Nuoro (Italie) in 1969  
Lives and works in Paris

Michele Ciacciofera grew up in Palermo, where he undertook studies in political science, anthropology and sociology. Having took up drawing at an early age, and after a career in professional athlete, which was cut short due to an injury, he returned to his home region of Sardinia, where he studied under the painter and architect G. A. Sulas. Part of a family of writers, from Grazia Deledda to Salvatore Cambosu, he has traveled in the same intellectual circles as writers Leonardo Sciascia, Giuseppe Quattriglio and anthropologist Nino Buttita, who had a decisive influence on his practice. Very early on, Ciacciofera became involved in politics and ecology, and he notably participated in the creation of the Slow Food movement, whilst also developing a culinary practice aiming to make use of local produce, especially foods in danger of extinction. In 1994, he settled in Syracuse, Sicily, where he developed a practice focused on painting, works on paper and installation, including his series « Silence! », linked to a personal history of violence, or his works on the deserts, made following several trips from Africa to Yemen, before eventually moving to Paris in 2011.

Ciacciofera has always been invested in the relationship between human existence and the natural world. Using a variety of artistic approaches, including installation, sculpture, painting, drawing, theater, video and sound, he freely combines media and methods in his exploration of nature, history, mythology and humanity.

Conceptual artist at heart, he is concerned first and foremost with the subject, narrative and feeling that he wishes to convey, with the materials - drawn from a host of sources - following the concept. He constantly calls upon his background in political science, keen interest in environmentalism, and fixation with individual memory, folding in research, activism, and his own subjective reality to create poetic experiences.

For many years he studied landscapes and how humans change them, and human portraits to find their typus. His works have existential themes, with central or appended political and social questions employing a complex, intensely symbolic, visual language.



Michele Ciacciofera, *Sans titre*, 2019, glaze on antique bricks, 2 x 21 x 10 cm (each)

Material for his inquiries often begin with some nexus found in the cross-currents of languages, their literatures, and histories, for example, J.W. Goethe's Sicilian Travels that inspired a collection titled "Sicilian Journey" that toured Europe and the USA. He also spent years exploring questions relating to torture, legal and extra-legal imprisonment. Other themes included that of profound melancholy and desolate seascapes and deserts where the near absence of the humans provide surprising perspectives.

He has also worked in theatre. In 2010, he designed sets and costumes for Medea, (dir. Maurizio Panici, starring Pamela Villoresi), which opened at Tindari's Greek Theater and then toured until 2011, also Oedipus Rex, Helena, Andromaque, and others. Medea inspired his Argonauta series of paintings, drawings and sculptures, which recognized a need to unlock a more intense dialogue with the past. Another set of works were inspired by the Renaissance masterpiece The Triumph of Death fresco in Palermo's Palazzo Abatellis.

With architects and engineers he won two competitions for the artistic and architectural refurbishment of the two container handling cranes located in the Port of Palermo, destined to become the symbolic interface point between the port and the city.

His works have recently been shown in several monographic exhibitions: CAFA Museum Beijing, Museo MAN Nuoro, Summerhall Edinburgh and included in major group exhibitions: Arte Castasegna, Venice Biennale, Documenta, Marc Straus New York, Casa Riegner Bogota, Nel Mezzo del Mezzo Palerme, IMMA Dublin.

He was awarded the Civitella Ranieri NYC Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship for 2015-16.

The artist is also represented by Vitamin Creative Space (Guangzhou/Beijing) and Voice Gallery (Marrakech).

<sup>1</sup> Domus de Janas or "fairy houses", are Neolithic places which, according to legend, were the habitats of mythical women before the arrival of human beings on Earth.