



Artforum, April 1992
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ARTFORUM

If there's a single work that succinctly conveys the bizarre complexity of Bruno Gironcoli's fantasy, it is an untitled piece in which, on a gridlike bedspring, two creatures—one dark and animallike, the other a kind of pinkish embryonic figure—vehemently spear each other. The former uses a snout of sorts, the latter a gestural spurt of white paint, issuing from its mouth like a well-aimed bit of vomit. Over the whole macabre scene an ominous coil of black paint hangs like yet another abstracted dream creature. This nasty little drama is set against a smooth field of iridescent metallic gold paint, with a few royal-purple splashes to heighten the tension. The combination of incommensurate scenic and formal elements recurs in a variety of ways throughout Gironcoli's work. Shapes that look like machine parts vie with animal forms, loosely united by an expressively winding gesture. The conflicting threesome—mechanical and animal forms, along with the fatally black free-form gesture—recurs in many of the works, as does the textured metallic paint, broad, flat surfaces, and fruity, lively palette. In one work the gesture suggests toy railroad tracks, juxtaposed with an image of a mother pushing a baby carriage, confirming what one had begun to suspect: that these scenes, however distorted and fragmented, depend on flashes of childhood memory. Their vivid, glistening contrasts of brightness and blackness convey the positive and negative cathexes—the life-giving love and death-dealing hate—associated with these memories. The works are fraught with devastating undercurrents of meaning and affect, as though affording one a glimpse of the unconscious of someone hanging onto sanity by a thread—the thin thread of the works themselves. These pieces are psychologized allegories of self-disintegrating conflict.

There is a fleeting acknowledgment of the Vienna heritage in many of the works (Gironcoli has Fritz Wotruba's position at the academy). Indeed, they are characterized by a typically eloquent Viennese mixture of the morbid and the erotic—a Melanie Klein-like demonstration of the paranoid and the reparative. Gustav Klimt-type contrasts and images occur, especially in one visually punning work in which the "bulb" holding a telephone wire in place on a street lamp hallucinatorily becomes a death's-head (again the secret, umbilical communicative connection). Similarly, there is a tendency to pile up detail repetitively until it reaches a decorative crescendo, if one more fragmentary than, and never as consummate as, in old self-confident Vienna. The works also have a generally elegant flair, masking their perversity, which also seems Viennese in character. Yet Gironcoli always remains irrationally himself.

If art is socially mediated irrationality—if the esthetic is the psychotic inside-out, and the pleasure art gives masks its emotional menace—then Gironcoli has stretched our sense of irrationality to a new limit, and in the process, has renewed our sense of art's stylistic and expressive possibilities. Increasingly, the best art is freshly unnameable, unclassifiable, and absurd despite the fact that its sources may be traceable. Gironcoli shows us that the past does not have to be dealt with in an ironic way (as though that alone made it of interest), but that it can still provide the bounty out of which a delectable if insidiously poisonous meal of art can be prepared. But art is also a mithridate where the poison of the irrational is concerned. Consuming it through art, one builds up a certain tolerance for it, enough of a tolerance so that one will not be destroyed by it.

—*Donald Kuspit*