



Bruno Gironcoli
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frieze

Most of the recent exhibitions about Bruno Gironcoli (1936–2010) have featured his huge, ghostly machines, a case in point being the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003. *Cavalcade, sculptures and drawings 1963–2001* offers a more complex view of his oeuvre by including many of his works on paper.

Each one expresses a desire to capture a contemporary image of the human figure. There are people rendered as outlines, adrift in flat expanses and surrounded by everyday objects, some of them gigantic. Our impotence in the face of our mechanized environment is writ large here; in *Ohne Titel* (Untitled, 1963), a thin figure sits beyond a strange bronze platform at the feet of another figure wearing an armband for the blind. The characters – stuck in mythologies and fantasies – seem to confront their pre-programmed aggressions.

In these works, Gironcoli was exploring a theme that concerned many Austrian artists of his generation, especially the Vienna Actionists; at the same time, he was reactivating a specific Surrealist mindset which was reflected in certain works by Roberto Matta and Alberto Giacometti. As in the latter's drawings, Gironcoli's treatment of the line and the surface texture of his paintings on paper – which often have metallic effects – reminds us that he was above all a sculptor.

Focused on the human figure, the artist first purified its three-dimensional representation, as in the series *Kopf* (Head, 1964), and then had it swallowed up by complex machines. Over time, motifs reappear; fragments recur and clump together into increasingly imposing constructions. The human figure – caught in a cruel game of bodybuilding – merges with edelweiss flowers, mechanical elements, scrolls that look like fresh croissants and other everyday objects. While these assemblages offer a brutal slice of reality, they have a fluid monumentality since the individual elements are rounded, purged of rough edges. The sculptures are coated in one colour, which underscores their syrupy quality; they evoke giant versions of the strange bundles of wax elements tied together for casting in goldsmiths' workshops, where Gironcoli underwent his first training.

As the director of the sculpture department at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts from 1977 to 2004, the artist turned several spaces inside the academy into a sprawling storage and assembly depot for his machine parts. Assistants and students shifted parts around or added new ones. This depot was a sort of saturated organ, pumping out what the artist considered to be potential manifestations of collective happiness via an iconography verging on kitsch. Indeed, some works seem to have been reused as material for other ones. Perhaps this possibility makes Gironcoli's oeuvre resemble an assembly of ghosts: apparitions that can vanish as easily as they appeared.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell