



Embassy of Italy  
Copenhagen

### ***Perfect Tense: We Pronounce everything***

A text by Irene Campolmi on Davide Hjort Di Fabio's solo exhibition at the Italian Residence in Fredericiade 2, Copenhagen.

The event is organised in collaboration with the Italian Embassy in Denmark, the Italian Cultural Institute, Brigade Gallery and Enter Art Fair.

### **Works on display:**

-*Perfect Tense*, 2024 LED Cube, video, colour, no sound (16:00 min, loop)

-*We pronounce everything*, 2024 Gold-glazed ceramic

Davide Hjort Di Fabio's exhibition at the Italian Residence in Fredericiagade is a significant moment in the artist's professional career. It is his first institutional presentation and for the Embassy it is always a pleasure to open its doors to art exhibitions and thus strengthening the cultural bonds between Denmark and Italy. The exhibition, a satellite to the artist's larger presentation at the Italian Institute for Culture in Hellerup, features two works from his existing *corpus*: the LED screen video installation, *Perfect Tense*, and the sculpture *We Pronounce Everything*. These works are showcased in two spaces: the green boudoir and the grand 'red salon' of the palace, both adorned in a late Rococo and Neoclassical style. The 'Italian Palazzo' in Copenhagen was bought by the Italian state in 1924 and then refurbished with art treasures and furniture from the Museum of Capodimonte in Naples and Palazzo Reale in Milan.

*Perfect Tense* consists of a 1-meter length screen LED cube showing high-definition film footage of three settings. The cube represents the digital world we live in by alternating images of the interior decorations inside the Palace of Versailles with satellite images of the Earth and close-ups of naked male bodies as seen in the twilight. It shows us all we want to possess, but might not have, from beautiful bodies, symbols of wealth, a sense of placement, seductive powers and an understanding of our place in the universe. The cube shows images that represent different kinds and degrees of beauty - art, sexuality and nature – that hold the power to seduce and enchant people.

Perfect tense is a verb form that indicates an action or circumstance that occurred earlier and whose results still impact today. In art history, many artistic movements are described using perfect tense because the effects of their ideas, forms, geometries, shapes, colours, and atmospheres are still influential today. Rococo is one of the most fascinating artistic endeavours in art history. Its ideas still speak to our contemporaneity for its daring manneristic artistic approaches that attempted to defeat

nature's spectacle using humankind's spectacularity. Using digital technology and AI, today's digital art is a Rococo 2.0. As much as Rococo artists in the eighteenth century used precious stones, gold leaves, and refined details in the past to create a spectacle of nature, contemporary artists adopt technologies to recreate, alter and make new ecosystems that hold nature's majestic memory.

Davide Hjort di Fabio's artistic exploration is deeply influenced by Rococo's hyperbolic ideas and connection to nature, and it is linked to Versailles for being the building that best exemplifies this style in Europe. The fascination for Rococo reverberates through the style of the rooms in the Residence in Copenhagen, both poetically and formally. In this context, Hjort Di Fabio looks at Versailles as the most iconic royal building containing some of the most detailed, fascinating, expensive and elaborated sculptural examples of the French *rocaille* and its manneristic obsession for encrusting stones, seashells and precious material into sculptural elements dedicated both for indoor decoration and outdoor garden's embellishment.

At the same time, the artist points out that Rococo was characterised by an intrinsic dualism of attempting to embellish and celebrate nature while massively extracting – and thus exploiting - its resources to manifest a degree of control over nature. A perverse relationship with nature to prove humanity attempted to take control over something untamed. Power is a seductive tool, and seduction is a powerful means to achieve power. Davide Hjort Di Fabio indirectly shed light on the similarities between Rococo as an artistic movement which soon turned into an emblem of its own time – the eighteenth century –enchanted by the gold, the crystals and the precious stones, and our current society, seduced by the hypnotic power of images circulating through digital media and the internet, making false promises of beauty that, like a contemporary Rococo, help us escape from a dreadful present. Like the residents in Versailles under Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette's husband, were fleeing famine and famous riots by living in a weird illusion making accurate of their reality, surrounded by luxury, voluptuousness, beauty and power, so too Western societies live a confined digital existence constrained within the limits of what Instagram feeds suggest them to dream about, weirdly making accurate of their reality in a world where millions of people are denied existence because of their passports, war threats and political tensions are becoming more and more recurrent. The global warming caused by the human's massive extraction and consumption of natural resources is no longer a bad nightmare but a consistent reality to which we got anaesthetised. Versailles appears as a ghostly presence through the LED cube's images showing the French royal residence's golden stuccos, ceiling's stunning sculptural details and crystal chandeliers. The cube on the ground invites the audience to observe from top to bottom all these vertical elements, which we usually experience oppositely. Hjort Di Fabio also inverts our sight by displaying the gold-glazed sculpture *We Pronounce Everything* on the floor, creating a continuation between this material presence and the digital images of male bodies that appear in the LED cube. The display gently invites everyone to shift the perspective of one's sight, looking down to the floor to delve deeper into the connections the artist draws between past and present.

With the sculpture, *We Pronounce Everything*, Davide Hjort di Fabio plays again with comparison as a methodology, in this case, using both oral and bodily languages as its tools. It's common knowledge that when speaking Danish as a foreign, the first trick one is taught is that what you read differs from what you pronounce because words' aspiration plays a significant role in the conversation. Instead, we pronounce everything we read in Italian, leaving no letter unspoken. It's also not a coincidence that 'pronounced' (*pronunciato*, in Italian) is an adjective used to describe body aspects that are more evident than others- whether this is a Greek nose, shoulder bone, breast size or the cheeks' height. Pronunciation makes something more present than it was; it is an action through which one states the existence of something: a letter, a prominent facial detail, or a word.

In *We Pronounce Everything*, Hjort di Fabio presents a male gold-glazed bas-relief in ceramic, on which parts of the artist's body have left a mark. The work praises human vulnerability as an essential aspect of the quest for self-identity. Not only does the artist present his own body's traces in the bas-relief, making himself vulnerable as an artist and a queer body, but he reminds the audience how naked one could feel when speaking his adoptive language, Danish, while trying to get rid of the Italian accent and tempo. As the audience engages with both works, they are invited to interpret and 'pronounce everything' in perfect tense, connecting to a past that still actively influences the present through this artistic experience.

The works become cartography, where emotions are marked as a city, mountain, or river on a map. As the audience, we see this work as a cartography in our quest for self-identity. Rather than seeing these moving images or this sculpture as reflections in a mirror, they appear as a lens through which our existence is magnified, put into perspective with the history of the arts, nature and the universe. The work creates an "overview effect" on the viewer, the cognitive shift astronauts feel when viewing Earth from space. This transformative experience helps them look at their own life from a different perspective. I hope this exhibition may have a similar impact—even if only slightly—on those who will experience it.

Irene Campolmi