

# PAST / PRESENT

**Elisabetta Benassi (Italy),  
Liliana Moro (Italy), Melik  
Ohanian (France), Namsal  
Siedlecki (Italy/USA)**

20.05 – 10.09.2021

Preview: 19.05.2021

The future torments us, the past  
holds us back; this is why the  
present escapes us.

(Gustave Flaubert)

Past/Present brings together works in diverse media that employ references and that focus on the concept of time and existence. The exhibition, a group show, extends beyond the usual boundaries of images, in their spatial and temporal dimensions, and stems from a reflection inspired by this particular “frozen” time we are living in due to Covid19 pandemia.

One of the many consequences of the pandemic, is the change in our perception of time. The space of everyday life has undergone enormous limitations. The virus, unexpectedly, has put us and our lives on hold. Accustomed to looking at the future, today we live in uncertainty. Prisoners of the present, life has become mere survival, with no projection, if not the individual one. After years of progress, we live within the limits of the present and the impossibility of imagining the future: a great contradiction of our age.

The exhibition explores the means and allegorical power of images, including self-perception, identity, memory and morality, while highlighting the many implications of the experience of time, its essence and its perception. Indeed, over the last year, time and life have shifted and brought us into the limits of the present.



**Elisabetta Benassi**  
**Atlas Shrugged**

2018-2021  
polypropylène artificial  
palm leaf and steel  
24 x 16,5 x 177 cm.  
Ed. 3 + 2 AP

In her work Elisabetta Benassi critically observes the cultural, political and artistic legacy of modernity, as well as broader, often controversial political and cultural themes of our time. Using diverse media – installation, photography, video – she thus engages and questions the viewer while tracing troubled and contested timelines. From the background of her pieces emerges a questioning of contemporary identity and of the conditions of the present. The exhibition presents *Atlas Shrugged*, a work from 2018. At the heart of the artist's line of thinking lie the concepts of 'self-ownership' and the individual's 'absolute sovereignty' over himself, and in relation to the social world. As a central myth of 19th century liberalism, the sovereign individual is capable of achieving an absolute mastery of his destiny, while displaying a mistrust of social bonds as well as any universal emancipation project. In the contemporary debate, the model of an extremely liberalist subject—thoroughly at ease in a smithereened world where all collective passion is blurred and only individual will and private ventures have any value—returns in the form of invisible and indisputable ideology. At this precise historical moment, in which we are experiencing a sort of temporal "suspension" and are devoided of collective projection, this work offers us an imaginary possibility for escaping the chaos of the real world, with its limits and conflicts, with its contradictions between individual salvation and collective catastrophe.



**Liliana Moro**  
**Still life**

2020  
engobed terracotta  
cm 40 dia ca.  
Unique edition

The exhibition features also new works by Liliana Moro: white terracotta sculptures in the shape of pomegranates. Primordial symbol of the cycle of life, of the continuum on which our existence is based, the fruit represents its vital energy. In recent years, ceramics have often returned in Liliana Moro's work, often used to shape objects taken from the natural world, such as fruit. For these compositions, the artist's choice of ceramics, originates from the material itself, and its essence: that is the earth, the mud and minerals. Focusing on the importance of the material as a crucial aspect within the creative process, Liliana Moro leads us to rethink the time of the material as the primary element in giving earth a new shape, as well as what marks its own time into the making, and brings new light on the cycle of drying and cooking, with the beauty of the necessary waiting. Emphasizing the role of time's transforming effect, or - as Marguerite Yourcenar defines it "Mighty Sculptor" - capable of modeling everything, even when the material is us, these round sculptures, crowned with leaves, with a circular opening allow us to perceive their cavity, the emptiness inside of them. And just like Italo Calvino in his American Lessons proceeds by weight subtraction, Liliana Moro as well operates by lightening the fruit, digging into its past and freezing it in a present, powerless time, in which only the relationship with our gaze can project it into the future.

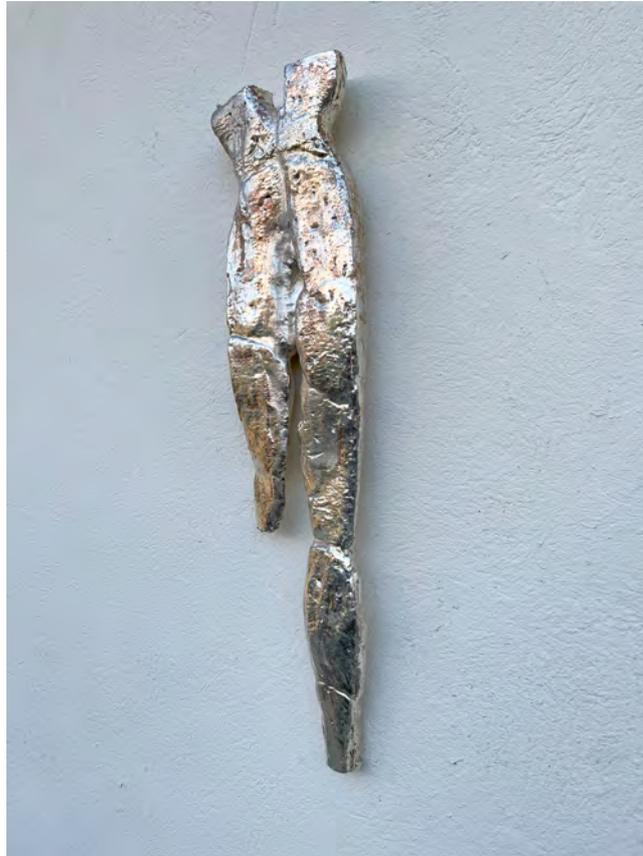


TOMORROW  
WAS

## Melik Ohanian Tomorrow Was

2020  
photograph printed on  
museum etching paper  
80 x 60 cm  
Edition of 5 + 2 AP

Melik Ohanian work explores the mean, supports and allegorical power of the images, reverting constantly to several social, historical, and scientific facts. On view, new works from the series "Tomorrow Was". Without any time nor specific indication, this series meditates on the world's to be aftermath. These photographs do not seek to capture a moment, but to speculate in a reflexive manner with the personal narrative of the viewer. Facing these fragments of life, he/she will have to anticipate his/her relationship with the world. The exhibition features also works from the series "Portrait of Duration - Cesium Series". This work reveals state changes of Caesium 133 (the element whose radioactive decay has been used to tick off the universal second in atomic clocks since 1967) during its process of transformation from solid to liquid state. In this representation of time by matter, each photograph records the appearance of the latter at a time T. Melik Ohanian ponders over the observation and representation of the measurement of time and, more particularly, over his benchmark: the second. Although time, obviously, remains a relative and abstract concept, these images produce "a portrait of time through the representation of the matter that defines it" and the result, he says is a kind of "photographic tautology". Indeed, instead of just telling time, it shows it. It is "a quest for a state of consciousness," he explains; an oscillation between cosmic and mental landscapes. Unexpectedly, they recall the Surrealist landscapes of Max Ernst.



**Namsal Siedlecki**  
**Trevis Maonos**

2020  
silver  
75 x 19 x 5 cm  
Unique edition

Throughout time, the practice of ex-voto has developed across cultures, representing a bonding element with the divine, a way to seek for strength and benevolence of divinities. Appearing in a variety of forms, these ancient forms of prayer are predominantly in the shape of human figures. The exhibition features Trevis Maonos, silver sculptures by Namsal Siedlecki, originated by 3D scans that the artist took in France in 2019, in Clermont Ferrand, where between 1968 and 1971 more than 3,500 Gallic ex-votos carved in beech were found. The ex-votos were thrown into the spring, a sanctuary in nature where believers could go to be in direct interaction with the divinity of the place, Maonos. With this work the artist brings together the Gallo-Roman rituals of ex-votos and the contemporary tradition of throwing coins into the Trevi Fountain in Rome in order to accomplish our dreams and wishes. Indeed, Siedlecki has gathered approximately 500 kg silver coins from the Trevi Fountain, which represent a portion of the 8% of the fountain's annual profit that cannot be exchanged by the Vatican City. After selecting and melting down the silver coins, Siedlecki uses the technique of electroplating. These composite desires show Siedlecki's interest in the symbolic search for divinity that for over 2000 years is crystallized in the gesture of throwing an offering, the result of a promise and a palpable exchange between the human and the supernatural. Two expectations and dreams from different eras blend into a unique and collective artifact, thus becoming a tangible material.

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