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Stefano Arienti: Studio Guenzani

By Alessandra Pioselli

Within the gallery, Stefano Arienti created a forest. Senza titolo (Tulipanini) (Untitled [Small Tulips]), 1998-2003, was an installation piece, a sort of photomural landscape of tall trees with tulips blooming at their feet. The work is made up of twenty identical posters cut up into vertical strips of varying widths, then mixed together, juxtaposed, and superimposed to suggest a variation on the initial image. The final configuration, more than forty feet long, is thus the result of a process of decomposition but also of multiplication; it is simultaneously similar to and different from the original. The eye is stimulated by the play between repetition and variation created by elements that are consistent and yet change, depending on how they are juxtaposed.

The work is simple, a collage. Cutting is one of the processes of which Arienti has often availed himself since the '80s, along with piercing, folding, scratching, and covering preexisting images to create new ones. Arienti has created small objects from sheets of folded comic strips, made "paintings" by piercing sheets of polystyrene, riddled the outlines of photocopied figures with holes, scraped photographic slides before printing them, covered posters with puzzle pieces or modeling-clay fingerprints, and cut up and reassembled posters--the latter a technique he has used since the late '90s. He always employs banal materials, and his interventions are minimal. In an interview, he said that his approach and working methodology is one of "taking away rather than putting down." Even where he adds material, such as modeling clay, Arienti still uses very simple processes, reduced to the essential, to slight gestures. He exploits the intrinsic potential and significance of common materials, detecting their latent possibilities and transforming them. Alighiero e Boetti is an important point of reference, particularly the way his light, disenchanting, and ironic touch could transform anything at all into subtle poetry.

In this exhibition, Arienti also showed two other collages, Aiuola di tulipani (Flower Bed of Tulips) and Muretto con tulipani (Low Wall with Tulips; both 2003). These too are made from series of identical posters, pierced in some areas and glued one atop another in layers, giving a feeling of three-dimensional projection. Images produce images, as the artist subjects serial, prosaic forms to a process of reinvention. Arienti destroys, manipulates, and transforms them through simple manual interventions that, like cutting up or perforating paper, have the lightness of games that one plays to while away the time. In so doing, he emphasizes the images' potential for transformation, but also the power of the manipulating gesture: It takes so little to change the value and significance of an image, to charge a work with a different poetics.

Untitled (Small Tulips) revives and brings to a new level of resolution an earlier collage, Tulipanini (Small Tulips), 1998. Giving preeminent importance to process, the artist often has worked in series or spent years working with the same material. Through his reappropriation of an earlier idea, Arienti once again demonstrates the need to return at times to what has been done before. What already exists--material,

image, idea, problem--cannot be taken for granted; it can still generate further possibilities.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.