

Ruben Montini. *Bearing the Burden, Bearing the Burden, Bearing the Burden*

Prometeo Gallery

Critical Essay by Arnold Braho

To bear the burden of conflicts means, first and foremost, to embrace other levels of understanding and move toward what is shared¹. Bearing the burden of conflicts can signify radically adopting diversity as a methodological condition of subversive proposals², but also as a premise for a project of self-valorization of identity. In the exhibition *Like Fire in a Puddle, Like Extinguished Fire*, bearing the burden of conflicts involves uprooting the idea of heterosexuality as a pre-constructed wall of nature, reducing it instead to merely a language: "a mass of signs, communication systems, coercive techniques, social orthopaedics, and bodily styles."³

Ruben Montini dedicates his artistic practice to placing the vulnerability and survival of LGBTQAI+ bodies at the centre of political discourse. He envisions culture as a forum for creating and exchanging ideas, making his collective activities a space where the boundaries of the socially possible are defined: the heart of a struggle that is, above all, linguistic⁴. In this framework, it is always his body that acts as a catalyst for violence and the sedimentation of cruelty. His approach aims to produce, through performance and installation works, a certain type of awareness and accountability in the audience, exploring a particular idea of "freedom" that Mario Mieli questioned as early as 1972 in the article *For a Critique of the Homosexual Issue*, published in the magazine *FUORI!* (Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Front). The attempt is, once again, to activate theorisation for a homosexual liberation policy, examining perspectives already formulated and those yet to be constructed.

The freedom criticised by Mieli is a freedom limited to ensuring exclusion and repression. It is a freedom that, while legally enshrined, permits marginalisation, oppression, ridicule, moral and physical violence, and confinement to a squalid and dangerous ghetto, as is the case in Italy. A similar condition is experienced by homosexual individuals in other capitalist countries—*Gay International News* highlights how, even beyond Italy during those years, the law served as a guarantor of formal freedom while leaving oppressive dynamics intact.

Thus, queer identities, although "legally free" in many advanced capitalist countries with democratic constitutions, remain practically confined to a kind of restricted circle. This perimeter, often not geographically defined, is nonetheless tangible. A perimeter, a regime, that Françoise

¹ M. Benasayag, A. Del Rey, *Elogio del conflitto*, Feltrinelli, Articcina (RM), 2008;

² A. Negri, *Il dominio e il sabotaggio, sul metodo marxista della trasformazione sociale*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1978;

³ P. Preciado, *Terrore Anale*, Fandango Libri, 2018;

⁴ Ibidem;

d'Eaubonne called phallographic and heteronormative, criticizing "heteropatriarchal" normalization institutions (family, school, hospital, prison) and the centrality of identity-construction apparatuses within capitalism.

This burden-bearing manifests in the exhibition project through various formulations, starting from the domestic. Not by chance, the exhibition opens with *Horny Dick at the Loo* (2024), a work conceived as a mirror with an embroidered penis at its centre, surrounded by sexualized phrases, denying any alternative reflection. It is accompanied by *Vaso di Cazzi (Vase of Dicks)* (2024), created using the same technique that characterizes Montini's artistic practice. At the centre of the room, *Altarpiece UK* (2024) is presented for the first time—a participatory installation where Montini collaborates with LGBTQAI+ groups of various nationalities. Participants use scraps of their clothing to embroider homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic slurs onto fabric pieces representing their countries of origin, in all the languages of the world. "This altarpiece sacrifices a specific language to create an ephemeral community without borders or laws, founded on a shared experience of abjection."

How do we confront a dominant language? With which body? With what weapons? Our relationship with the "totality" of things, or presumed integrity, is often associated with the idea of continuity, constancy, and the association of one thing in succession to another; in contrast, the state of present things is also shaped by the continuity of destruction.

*I Muri del Manicomio (The Walls of the Asylum)*⁵ (2024), a performance by the artist with his collaborator Mattia Ozzy B., shows the relentless attempt to fix the image of a same-sex parental family around the artist's body. This attempt is continuously reiterated and erased by a third entity through a wave of black paint. Finally, Montini's miniature theatres, installed in the exhibition's final room, are presented as conceptual maps where psychological conditions are central, and shaped by the societies we inhabit. These works propose identification with a series of regulated roles within which we are expected to recognize ourselves and format our identities.

There was a time (whose angriest echoes extend to today) when no language existed outside the heterosexual narrative. Quoting philosopher Lorenzo Bernini: "Outside space and time and yet here and now – like a revolution, like a miracle. Martyrs. Remains. Or, aptly, debris. That's who, that's what: perverts of the world, unite!"⁶

⁵ The work was created with students from Kingston University and the Royal School of Needlework in London in 20214

⁶ Lorenzo Bernini, *Asincronie Montini*, 2021;