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Cuoghi Corsello

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Monica Cuoghi and Claudio Corsello began working together in Bologna, Italy, in the mid-1980s, and in the vibrant, creative climate of that period they soon became the city's best-known street artists. Picking up on the hip-hop stimuli of graffiti, they moved beyond the spare and repetitive modes of street writing and invented stylized animal figures, elegantly applied to the city's buildings and next to its railroad tracks as well as to the walls of friends' houses. At the time, their two most famous tags, the Pea Brain goose and CK8 (a play on the Italian for cooked dog, *cane cotto*), were like ever-present mythological icons in which an entire generation saw itself reflected in a sign of nonviolent protest manifested through a poetic gesture. Then the duo began experimenting unrestrainedly with everything: performance, installations with neon and salvaged objects, wall paintings, photos, videos, music, animations—often staging their work in unconventional places such as squatted factories or large, abandoned industrial spaces, any of which could (as many did) become their home, their studio, their personal gallery, a protective refuge, or a place of fantasy. In such places, they would find, collect, and rework the residues of our consumerist world, "*oggetti orfani*" (orphan objects), as Cuoghi called them, things bearing the mark of time.

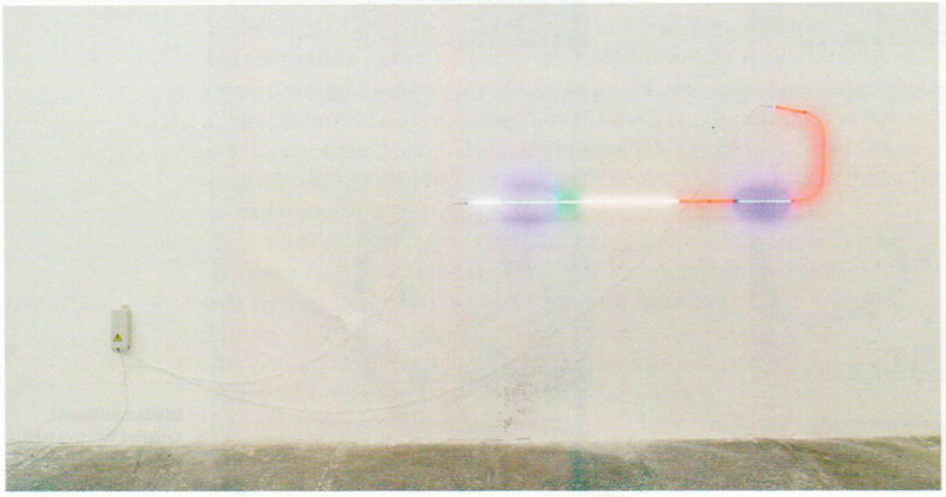
Cuoghi Corsello redeem trash from its fate through aesthetic transposition. From old furniture, suitcases, broken dolls, and used clothing to worn-out carpets, nothing is discarded; everything can be connected once again, thanks to a poetics of aggregation that opens and includes, gives value, looks into corners, and finds new meanings even in the midst of junk. Reappropriating marginal urban spaces, the artists cultivate a new beauty through accumulation and addition, stitching together stories and reinventing them. There is no difference between a found object and one made by an artisan or by the artists themselves, because everything conducts energy and has a poetic and aesthetic potential.

In this exhibition, "MCCC," which brought together works made between 1996 and 2018, playfulness and complexity were intertwined. Within the show's anarchic climate, Cuoghi Corsello succeeded in touching chords of empathy in works such as *Pinocchio*, 1996–2001, in which a small plastic sculpture of the titular puppet holding a kitten sits in the center of a 1970s playpen with two oars wedged into its mesh sides. A fragile vessel, the playpen contains but does not protect childhood and innocence; it is a heartrending, still terribly current object, which connects us to the tragedy of the many migrant children making perilous journeys across the waters of the Mediterranean. And the artists also succeeded, as ever, in bringing together amorphous, patently artificial materials with close-ups of flowers and nature: Here tulips and cyclamen, executed in spray paint, bloom on pieces of old carpet. *Sala conferenza* (Conference Room), 2002, a row of chairs from a Fiat factory arranged in a curving line with an undulating movement, recalled the skeleton of a prehistoric animal and seemed to pay homage to the poetics of Pino Pascali—to his wooden and fabric dinosaurs and his way of connecting to nature through incongruous materials.

In the most recent work on display, *Uncino* (Hook), 2018, constructed from fragments of neon tubing of various colors, the artists have rediscovered the concise grace of their early graffiti art, now fired up by subtle, vibrant, and dazzling neon light. With works that can be coarse or extremely refined, Cuoghi Corsello do not fear paradoxes and incongruities but favor a free artistic practice, outside formal schemes and linguistic boundaries, in a mix of ingenuity and passion.

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.



Cuoghi Corsello, *Uncino* (Hook), 2018, neon, transformers, cables, 5' 6⅞" × 12' 11⅞".