

Bethan Huws

Galleria Vistamare, Pescara

(30th September 2017 – 17th November 2017)

At 6.30pm on Saturday 30th September, Galleria Vistamare will inaugurate an exhibition of work by Bethan Huws. Three years on from her first Italian solo exhibition, the Welsh artist returns to the seventeenth-century rooms of the Pescara-based gallery with a selection of works that vary widely in their choice of media but also reflect the thematic unity that has, via a focus on certain key ideas, always characterised her work.

Bethan Huws (born in Bangor, Wales, 1961) is a Welsh artist who has long divided her time between Berlin and Paris. Her work is markedly influenced by Marcel Duchamp's vision of conceptual art and makes eloquent references to the work of artists such as Piero Manzoni and René Magritte.

The works on show reveal an ever deeper (even in comparison with her previous exhibition at Vistamare) exploration of the many texts and notes left by Duchamp, along with a desire to give greater prominence to the French artist's still relatively little-known literary work and scientific-artistic research. Huws synthesises a multitude of media and instruments (neon/vitrines/sculptures/photos/large installations) in works that dwell predominantly on the use of language and the re-reading of readymades. She sees language as an essential element of artistic practice, capable of generating a form of art that should be seen not merely as an object but also, and above all, as an experience. Much of her work involving texts is connected with her lifelong trilingualism: messages and puns appear, for the most part, in Welsh, English and French (used alternately), in a demonstration of the differentiated uses and roles of language. The readymade, too, is to be seen not only in its historical role as an everyday object which, when transferred to a different context, becomes a work of art, but also as a translation of the cultural and social contexts with which the object is connected, in an attempt to introduce new readings and interpretations of the object itself. Huws, in this way, renegotiates the meaning of art in society.

The works exhibited at Vistamare are grouped according to thematic cycles or to reflect expressive affinities: one of the gallery's rooms hosts the *Perroquets*, a trio of sculptures in bronze reproducing various forms of coat rack, the epitome of the readymade but also a hymn to the concept of trinity – this, too, Duchampian in origin, the three, according to Duchamp, possessing magical qualities combined with the religious associations of the idea of the trinity. The gallery's largest room is occupied by the *Word Vitrines*. Huws began

to develop this form of “noticeboard” towards the end of the 1990s: two-dimensional, like paintings, these containers are the most striking representation of the use of texts and word games which – always with a powerful sense of irony – allow this notoriously shy artist a space in which to express her ideas freely, a place in which to say things that would be difficult to declare elsewhere, affirmations that reveal a unique and personal line of thinking not always aligned with received wisdom. Also in the gallery’s main room is the large neon sculpture *Queen*, a complex tangle of neon tubes that creates a shifting image of a chess piece. Duchamp’s biographers tell of a man with a great passion for chess, a game that he played for many years, even becoming captain of the French Olympic team. In its use of the colour green and some of its decorative elements, Huws’s gigantic, luminous queen resembles one of the pieces of a chess set that Duchamp designed in the hope (never realised) of putting it into commercial production. The three copper bottle racks entitled *Venus*, which are visible in another of the gallery’s rooms, also clearly refer to the work of Duchamp, again in the use of the number three but also in the material utilized. According to ancient theories of astrology and alchemy, later reprised in Greco-Roman symbology, each planet was associated with a corresponding metal: the sun/gold, the moon/silver, etc.. Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, was associated with copper. Here, as so often, the artistic/cultural system created by Duchamp emphasises the importance of the feminine dimension.

Huws succeeds in combining very different aspects of a wide range of studies and theories in works that, inspired by more than a century of art’s history and via her juxtaposition of the various elements, dialogue with one another.

Bethan Huws won the Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary Art in 2006. Her works are to be found in many major collections and international museums, including: the Tate collection, London; Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the MMK, Frankfurt. She participated in the 7th edition of the Shanghai Biennale (2008) and represented Wales in the 50th edition of the Venice Biennale.

Additional information: Inauguration Saturday 30th September 2017, 6.30pm.

From 30th September 2017 to 17th November 2017: Tuesday to Friday 10.00am-1.00pm, 4.30pm-7.30pm; Monday 10.00am-1.00pm

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