

Stefano Minzi, 'Aria', Galleria Lorcan O Neil 15 April-7 May 2011, Rome, Italy

Galleria Lorcan O'Neil's Lungara Space – which is positioned some 20 meters from Lorcan's main gallery and a short walk from the Vatican – has featured the work of Carsten Nicolai, Michael Dean and Eddie Peake, amongst others. The latest young Italian to be shown in the small, cuboid gallery is the Berlin-based artist Stefano Minzi who has produced a subtle and thought provoking exhibition. A departure from earlier more directly political, anti-Berlusconi works – some of which were included in Ugo Ferranti's group show 'Bianco e Nero' earlier this year – the prints which make up 'Aria', whilst at first glance coming across as uncharacteristically passive, give way to a sense of unease on closer inspection. Such subtle interplay prevents a slide into political hyperbole, whilst engaging with pressing contemporary concerns.

The five works in the show were made using a simple xerox transfer process whereby hand mixed ink is offset from printed paper to canvas in four stages, employing the CYMK colour system. The result is a loosely controlled photographic image, subject to random deterioration in form. This incorporation of chance links to layered themes that run throughout Minzi's recent works, including politics, mysticism and warfare.

Bombardamento aereo (Aerial bombardment, 2008) marks the departure point for the artist. A four-paneled piece arranged in landscape format and measuring just 40 cm in height, its dimensions are that of a scaled-up holiday photo, which effectively it is, although with one crucial modification. The mountain scene, which captures a couple smiling for the camera, features a sinister aerial formation in the background. Based on fears that have manifested for the artist as various nightmares since childhood, the image depicts the terrifying indifference of military machines to human life; even when so-called 'intelligent bombs' go astray they might destroy a vacation, a wedding or a funeral. What is evoked in Minzi's work, beyond a disgust at warfare, is the sense of inevitability that accompanies even the most random disaster. An interest in apocalyptic premonition – which for the artist is more of an obsession than a passing muse – underpins this fascination with fate, as reflected in the other

works on display.

The title of the show is taken from the Italian for 'air', one of four elements in the Hellenic philosophical tradition and represented astrologically by Gemini, Libra and Aquarius. Another four-paneled piece – *Acqua, Aria, Terra, Fuoco* (Water, Air, Earth, Fire, 2010) – arranged as four small canvases in a row, each featuring an individual landscape, links the four elements via the ethereality which results from Minzi's working method. By now, the rich array of influences upon the artist's work may be apparent, yet Minzi pulls them together in a concise manner. The three works *Gemini, Libra* and *Aquarius* (2010–11) depict printed seascapes overlaid with hanging plexiglass screens and images of F-16 warplanes flying in the formation of astrological constellations. The largest of these is *Aquarius*, made up of 12 small canvases; it marks the culmination of Minzi's preoccupations to date. Influenced by a dream in which the artist awoke and opened his window to be confronted with an ocean, rather than the urban landscape he was used to seeing, the planes recall those he saw flying in formation towards his stranded home, growing bigger and more numerous in number until they finally blotted out the sun. None of this is made apparent by simply looking at the work, yet the pairing of plexiglass – manufactured and clinical – and printed canvas, together with the combination of the senselessness of warfare, and the inevitable rotation of the astrological cycle reflects the surgical and detached nature of aerial warfare.

As allied forces embark on another military campaign, the sense of destiny – though not acceptance – which accompanies what could and should be prevented is rendered as both oddly reassuring and terrifying by Minzi. Evoking a hope for something we hope will never take place – Armageddon – Minzi's work occupies a temporal space somewhere between the apocalypse and its possible delay. Meanwhile, rendering catastrophe in an aesthetically pleasing manner does nothing to dampen the political urgency present in the artist's earlier works. A risk that has paid off.

Mike Watson