



**DARYUSH SHOKOF**  
VERLATO

Shokof is a tricky artist, a problematic hiccup in cultural digestion, because we do not know how to read his intentions, his program. With Koons, despite his incessant statements to the contrary, we can still understand the strategy, this is clearly a high art conceptualist working with the aesthetically unacceptable. But Shokof, with his philosophy of maximalism, a quasi-mystic, soft humanist metaphysic, and his mysterious paintings of kitschy spiritualist and symbolic scenes comes across as a perfect new age space cadet to lead us into the mumbo jumbo of the next decade. If a live songbird in a cage, balanced with another cage full of money, was probably the most telling metaphoric touch, the surrounding images of animals and fruit and the occasional aeroplane, floating in wide galaxies of heaven are deeply problematic, to put it kindly. The titles are equally suspicious, with a full frontal naivety, such as *The Holy Nut*, *Dragons=Horses*, *Space Turtle*, or *The Age of Octopus*.

If one's initial fear is that this is the spearhead of a hippy revival, and that Shokof will move into designing Yes record sleeves, there is still a lingering fascination, something magnetic in the sheer creepiness of the project. Whether maximalism is really a movement or merely a way of grouping various figurative painters who play with kitsch, Shokof is certainly intriguing, especially because he seems at first glance instantly dismissable. That said, his work is not at its best in the typical light white gallery, it craves an intimate, darker, maybe even velvet draped salon in which to glow with anima all the more.

**Adrian Dannatt**

**GERHARD MERZ**  
GIORGIO PERSANO

Adolf Loos, a modernist guru I assume Gerhard Merz would respect, stated that architecture regards only the construction of monuments and tombs, virtually setting architects on a pedestal. Merz, by this definition, can certainly claim (as he does, rehashing Boullée) that he "too, is an architect." The solemn, funereal tribute to Giuseppe Terragni in this small cubic space is a veritable mausoleum to both the Italian rationalist architect and the lost ideals of modernism. Just as the modernists, ever since Le Corbusier's eloquent sketches of the Parthenon, cited the classics as their pedigree, Merz piles on the references to the vaguely classical, rational, geometric, Italian, or Greek. Here he literally quotes another lover of the art of a lucid intellect, Paul Valéry (from *Eupalinos, ou l'architecte*), on a billboard outside the gallery, in asserting rationalism's renewed—eternal—validity.

Essentially what Merz is doing throughout his architectural installations since the mid-1980s

is to trace a selective genealogy, connecting the dots across a subjective history of Western rationalism: from Plato to Dante, from renaissance painter Cima di Conegliano to neoclassicist Boullée, from Cézanne to Terragni, Valéry to Benn, and on to Reinhardt, eventually tacking himself, Gerhard Merz, triumphantly at the end. What makes Merz's work important—what distinguishes his work, for example, from that of a very different "postmodern classicist," Carlo Maria Mariani—is how well he has learned the lessons of postwar contemporary masters, inserting conceptual art and minimalism effortlessly in the noble history of high rationalism; how easily Merz has Mies van der Rohe and Piero della Francesca sit side by side with Blinky Palermo, all nodding approvingly.

Like the tyranny of modernism's final stages, Merz's cure for contemporary art results elitist: some would say academic or totalitarian. Nonetheless, Merz manages to set his work comfortably in the Olympus of Western tradition, making a lot of singleminded political/feminist/media artists look like they're aiming rather low in comparison.

**Gilda Williams**



**JOSEPH KOSUTH**  
LIA RUMMA

Visiting Joseph Kosuth's latest exhibition in Naples feels like crossing over a gigantic blackboard. The walls and ceiling are painted slate grey. Halfway from floor to ceiling, running around the entire space, is a thin white line dividing the visible area into two distinct halves. Above the line, functioning as nominator (and ego) of this virtual fraction, are a series of phrases in neon, such as "the portrait of red" in red light, typical of Kosuth's tautological work since the 1960s. The phrases from Ludwig Wittgenstein above the line are contradicted by another series of nine texts, silkscreened directly onto grey slate blackboards, which lean against the wall below the white line. At first sight, this denominator (or subconscious) might seem to a distracted viewer simply a new way of presenting Kosuth's "definitions." Something is written in italics and followed by what seems its definition. It is as if Kosuth, indexing the entire postmodern deconstruction of rationalist thought with its correlated ideal of progress, the roots of which are to be found already in Nietzsche's critique of positivism, is reminding us that it, too, is expressed in language. Is there a contradiction between what the aphorisms are about and how they are conveyed? Contradiction itself is contemplated as a sign of high culture in one of the selfsame aphorisms. So we are continuously moving back and forth from content to context, from Wittgenstein in relation to Nietzsche, from rationalism to irrationalism, from Kosuth to Beuys (the blackboards), which always occurs if one is willing to accept complexity and not to simplify existence unrealistically.

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**