

GABRIELE DI MATTEO When great works of art were first printed in textbooks, serious-minded professors feared that students would lose the direct experience of great paintings, their knowledge of them based on mere reproductions: how inferior to the real thing! A century or so later, with Gabriele Di Matteo, painting itself becomes the dreaded reproducing agent, generating copies of images rendered far better elsewhere with mechanical or digital means. In Di Matteo's work, painting is revealed as a lousy medium in the age of mechanical reproduction, painfully slower and less accurate than, say, computer scanning, photography, even illustration. In *ARAFAT I, II, III, IV, V* (1997), a newspaper photo-portrait of the Palestinian leader is repeated in five nearly identical paintings, each slightly different from the next due to the painter's inevitably uneven execution: that is, his inability to be a perfect painting machine. 000 With another series, Di Matteo produced a group of canvases enlarged from the illustrations in André Raffray's little book *The Illustrated Life of Marcel Duchamp*. In one of these, Marcel Duchamp's painted masterpiece, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), having first been reduced to an illustration in Raffray's book, is then further distorted in Di Matteo's painted version. It is as if Di Matteo is literally demonstrating how much painting has lost since Duchamp still bothered to paint. With Di Matteo, painting is far from renewed but quite the contrary: revealed as the old goat it really is. Painting is decrepit, losing the battle with its younger, sexier competitors: high-resolution, high-gloss images spilling out from magazines, the Internet, movies, data banks, the whole highway of digital imagery. Poor old painting, requiring weeks, if not months—rather than milliseconds—to complete a single image; how obsolete, how embarrassing! And the painter becomes a kind of ancient laborer, stained and dirty, toiling away like a peasant still hoeing his pathetic bit of land alongside acres of industrialized agriculture. 000 Perhaps for this reason Di Matteo tends to choose nostalgic imagery: Raffray's illustrations which start in the late nineteenth century; a 1950s photograph of Jorge Luis Borges, his eyes shut tight (*The Blind Man*, 1997); or an ancient illustration from a French horse-riding manual (*Préparatifs d'une course*, 1989). And when painting is not made to play the role of the elderly dull-wit, Di Matteo has it play the clown. The epic "History Stripped Bare" (2000) is a cycle of some 140 paintings depicting scenes from across history, from the Roman Empire to Christopher Columbus to Mussolini, with every figure rendered in the nude: lines of naked troops salute a bare-assed Hitler; Margaret Thatcher, topless, waves in postelection victory, and so forth. In Di Matteo's "History", painting becomes the ridiculous counterpart to the by-now more noble media of historical illustration and, most particularly, photography. While these fast media assume the important, unsmiling function of documenting history, painting behaves childishly, dropping its pants to get a laugh, just to make somebody like him again. 000 Where Di Matteo is the old-fashioned craftsman, painting diligently in the studio, his fictitious alter ego, Della Vittoria is out on the street, an art hustler unafraid of post-painting media. He dabbles in publishing, as editor of the magazine *E il topo*, which, for the 1993 Venice Biennial, printed photographs of well-known art figures, each misnamed in the caption beneath. Della Vittoria is a winner—as his name, which translates as "The Victorious," suggests—an artist who has survived and even thrived upon painting's demise. 000 Gilda Williams

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Born in Torre del Greco (Italy) in 1957, lives and works in Milan Selected One Person Exhibitions: 2003 – Gallery 101, Ottawa; Le Grand Café, St Nazaire, France 000 2002 – MC Magma, Milan; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Limousin, Limoges, France; Collège Marcel Duchamp, Châteauroux, France 000 2001 – Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia; C/O Gallery, Milan 000 2000 – Vilma Gold Gallery, London 000 1999 – Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Valois, Paris 000 1996 – Galleria Placencia, Piacenza, Italy 000 1993 – Galleria Fac-Simile, Milan Selected Group Exhibitions: 2001 – Tirana Biennial, Albania; "The Gift", Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena, Italy 000 2000 – "Fantapop", Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice, Italy 000 1999 – 1st Melbourne International Biennial, Australia 000 1997 – "Il Punto", Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy 000 1996 – "Tradition & Innovation, Italian Art since 1945", National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; "Photopintures", Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg Selected Bibliography: 2000 – Jean-Yves Jouannais, "L'humanité nue", *Art Press*, May 000 1997 – Jen Budney, "Five Paintings", *Art+Text*, May; Giorgio Verzotti, "Gabriele Di Matteo", *Flash Art*, April/May 000 1993 – Roberto Pinto, "Gabriele Di Matteo", *Flash Art*, December/January

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1. *The Assassination of President Kennedy* (From the series "History Stripped Bare"), 2000, Oil on canvas, 11 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches, 30 x 40 cm
2. *The Rome-Berlin Axis: Hitler and Mussolini in Rome* (From the series "History Stripped Bare"), 2000, Oil on canvas, 11 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches, 30 x 40 cm
3. *Marcel Duchamp. Life in Pictures, Illustrations by André Raffray, The Large Glass*, 1993–2002, Oil on ink jet, 74 1/2 x 57 1/4 inches, 189 x 145 cm
4. *ARAFAT*, 1997, Oil on canvas, each: 80 3/4 x 57 1/4 inches, 205 x 145 cm, Installation at Melbourne Biennial, 1999