

remembering 'Maurizio Cattelan, Laure Genillard Gallery, London, 1994
2002

Strangely enough I didn't think much of this show when I saw it the first time; now I've come to see it as one of the most moving, most understated exhibitions ever. I was disappointed that I didn't recognize that right away; maybe I missed it because I was assuming that, coming from Maurizio Cattelan, this was mostly a joke, 'another fucking readymade' as he calls them, and a way out for Cattelan of actually having to do any work. And it is that too, but still, there was more.

The show consisted primarily of a large blue cloth bag, filled with the rubble from a bombed building in Milan, Italy, called the PAC. The PAC ('Contemporary Art Pavilion') was Milan's single public contemporary art space; it had always felt underused, delapidated, compromised and inadequate. It didn't really seem to have a proper curator, more a kind of governing director scrambling around to fill the calendar with cheap, more or less plausible shows. PAC had an air of desperation. I can think of no important or memorable show that's ever been there. It's an old, unobtrusive building decaying alongside a city park, and it seemed the least likely target for a terrorist bomb, which hit it a few months before Cattelan's London show at Laure Genillard. The bomb killed a man, a homeless North African immigrant whom I believe was sleeping in the nearby park. The bomb put the lumbering old PAC, already lame and defenseless, out of commission altogether for some years. It seemed a true slaughter of innocents, a random tragedy which cost a person their life, and prevented Milan from the weak claim that it, too, had a contemporary art space, however dismal.

Since then the fashion houses of Prada and Krizia have opened contemporary art spaces in Milan, and these sort of take the place of a public art space. Plus, in the meantime the old PAC has even reopened, so Cattelan's show loses some of its poignancy. But the show still haunts me. The bag itself is the cheapest possible form of luggage, the kind with which an impoverished immigrant could, say, haul their life's belongings to their new country, uninvited. Usually it's full of junk, just like the rubble from the bombed PAC. It looks sort of like a body bag, and it's called *Lullaby* – maybe to soothe the sleeping man who was killed by a stray bomb in a time of peace? The notion of lovingly picking up the pieces of stone and cement off the pavement, stuffing them into the bag, ensuring it got safely to London by careful art handlers, is a beautiful ritual of mourning, I think, as calculated and pointless as the bomb itself. No I don't mind if the rubble isn't authentically from the PAC -- although Cattelan promises that yes, it really is.

There weren't a lot of new generation Italian artists showing in London around 1994, and as a response to the question, 'what is happening in contemporary art in Italy today?', the bag of rubble stands as a forlorn reply. It is not optimistic, or showy, and installed beside Cattelan's neon sign of the crosses of calvary this, his first exhibition in London, looked surprising more like an empty funeral than a new beginning. I always wondered what ever happened to *Lullaby* after the show. How silly to store it somewhere, so valueless and heavy and cumbersome, yet how sad to return it to Milan, where it came from. It'd be like returning heaps of charred metal to Ground Zero – the worst place for it. Did somebody buy it? Equally silly. Maybe the bag was just opened, its contents scattered in a nearby lot, like ashes on the ground.

Gilda Williams