ALESSANDRO ROMA
The Political Garden

Barry Schwabsky

Today, as we have widely seen, practices of collage and assemblage have once again come to the fore in art. Exhibitions like the one that reopened the New Museum in New York several years ago, “Unmonumental,” only serve to illustrate this. Yet something seems to have changed when we compare today’s ways of doing collage with those of the period of its first flourishing, what Clement Greenberg called “The Pasted Paper Revolution.” The principal of discontinuity was paramount then; many commentators have spoken of a “shock effect” produced by the abrupt juxtaposition of fragments of irreconcilable or at least incommensurable realities in, especially, the collages of the Dadas. Today there is no shock, though there may sometimes be nostalgia for shock. And a good thing it is, too, that art has foresworn shock. Today, only the most reactionary gestures or statements have any power to shock. Likewise, the power to envisage uncreated realms beyond the real, which was once the privilege of a progressive or revolutionary utopianism, has now been claimed above all by those who wish to create the foundationless simulacrum of an imaginary past. Writing from New York, I need only gesture toward the present contenders for the Republican Presidential nomination, in a struggle that has been polluting the press and the airwaves for some months now. But these are already late-coming epigones of a phalanx that has been at work for some time. I need only cite the famous statement of the notorious conservative activist and publicist Karl Rove, who in 2004 told the journalist Ron Suskind that “guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.’ ... ‘That's not the way the world really works anymore,’ he continued. ‘We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.’” Undoubtedly my readers in Italy will be able to supply examples of similar thinking, only perhaps less imperial in tenor, in their own country. But I wonder if Rove was deliberately echoing (and thereby mocking) Karl Marx, who said, “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” The powerless, however, know that to change reality they have to work on it, and to work on themselves too; only the rich and powerful imagine that their very dreams can change the course of history, and that is often their downfall. To change things, to change ourselves—but how? For some, by starting small, by starting close to home. And precisely because this is far from the best of all possible worlds, il faut cultiver nos jardins. We needn’t be ironic about it, à la Voltaire. It’s not an escape from our real situation but a humbly small-scale intervention into it, a way of trying to start from our
“discernible reality” to make it different without doing too much violence. And in fact I’ve been noticing the imagery or rather the metaphor of the garden arising more and more in contemporary art. Alessandro Roma, whose most recent works employ this theme, is not alone—though hardly part of a movement; he is one of a number of individuals who seem to responding to an inchoate need of the time. We are trying, however gropingly, to rethink our relation to where we stand, to the earth, and realizing that our relations among ourselves—person to person, nation to nation, civilization to civilization—may come to nothing unless the fundamental ground of those relations, the terrain on which we subsist and the water and air that make it livable, can be assured. Today, more than ever, the theme of the garden seems an inherently political one. I have never heard Roma describe himself as a political artist but this may be modesty on his part and perhaps even an implicitly political form of modesty. The theme of the garden proposes that human beings and nature can still collaborate—that culture need not after all be understood as the contrary of nature but as a form of relation to it. At the same time, this relation is never seen to be total or all-encompassing—it always has an inside and an outside. It is marked off with a fence (as we see in some of Roma’s works) and therefore questions of ownership and power cannot be dismissed. Collage, too, seems inherently to take on a political cast today. And Roma is above all a painter but one who wills himself to use collage as a means of painting. He demands of himself this contradiction. But using collage today is no longer, as it may once have been, however, about confronting an apparent unity—the unity of surface of an academically finished oil painting, for instance—with a disruptive heterogeneity. Heterogeneity, today, is the assumed default state. The important issue is more concrete: how to negotiate the differences that we already know to exist—how to find common ground. Here, by the way, I must respectfully disagree with my friend Giorgio Verzotti, who has written (in the catalogue for the artist’s exhibition last year at MART, Rovereto) that Roma’s works “show us a hallucinatory landscape/world because they speak to us of our progressive loss of sense of reality.” My reading of the works is different, and less pessimistic, having to do, not with the loss of reality, but the task of reconstructing it. Yes, Roma builds his works out of fragments of mediated—one might even say synthesized—images of nature. But in handling these fragments, he does not concern himself with the question of their truth or falsity. Or rather, I believe, he works on the assumption that the truth he is concerned with is how true the image-fragment is to the place it must hold in his construction. And in this construction, even were one to grant that it might be possible that in its origins a given fragment might represent a falsehood—but how would one know, really, since its origins can hardly be reconstructed anymore?—that would not count against it. Quite the opposite, in fact, if the work’s tenor is to suggest the possibility that we can still somehow redeem our fallen world. Roma’s works speak wholeheartedly of a longing for beauty—the special beauty that belongs to everything that we succeed in rescuing
from indifference. In this works I see nothing but what I’d swear I’m seeing for the first time. Redemption takes
effort. The garden that Roma shows us—not a Garden of Eden, tragically projected back into some unknown past,
but a Utopian garden, still incomplete and in process for the future—is a place of labor as well as of desire. It is
important that one is always aware, looking at these works, that the mediated nature of many (but not all or even
necessarily most) of the incorporated fragments is secondary: They have been pieced together by hand, as well as
with a cunning eye. These are complicated surfaces, dense with information; the layering of things reminds us that
each element has a verso, that some things must remain unseen. And the pieces fit together, but not easily. Adam
had to sweat to eat after the expulsion from Paradise, and in this new garden under construction he still has to
sweat. It’s not quite home, as the title of one work, Accorsi di essere in uno strano luogo (Aware of being in a
strange place), reminds us, nor is it yet ready to become a permanent abode, as we realize from another, Il sole mi
costrinse ad abbandonare il giardino (The sun forced me to abandon the garden). The abandonment of the
garden is probably not definitive. Even taking global warming into account, one should be able to re-enter later in
the day, when the sun is not so high above one’s head, or later in the season. But the plants one cultivates there
must be adapted to the heat. And to those of us who step into it they give shade and fresh air; however relentless
the sun, it is still always more bearable in the garden than anywhere else out of doors. And besides, that moment
just before one realizes that the sun has become too intense can be an interesting one because you might realize
that things look different than you thought: the scene before you starts to swirl; large things become small and
small ones large; distant ones rush close and what’s at hand withdraws; up is suddenly down—one begins to see
things, perhaps, with the eye of “the sunflower crazed with light.” (I borrow the phrase from Eugenio Montale, of
course—a poet who means a great deal to the artist, as he has told me.) Now you realize that the field of vision is
a sort of collage, a kaleidoscopic gathering of the most heterogeneous things in which each may momentarily take
the place of each. Normal vision meant forgetting this, though it was always true. Everything is foreign to
everything else. Our task may be somehow to clear and cultivate the space in which we can allow them to exist
together. “Here stories are composed,” as Montale has written, “and deeds crossed out in the play of futurity.”
Ruta, painted terracotta and land 55x34x25cm 2012
Bozzetto-sculptura (male fern) 2011 collage on paper 40x30cm.
Il sole mi costrinse ad abbandonare il giardino 2011 oil spray pensil collage on canvas 210x180cm
Avvertivo un movimento tra le foglie 2011 oil spray pensil collage on wood 185x125cm
Francesco Spampinato

_Alessandro Roma, Unfolding the Folds_

Among Gilles Deleuze’s theories, a concept more than others has marked my researches, that of the “fold” and the “interstice” which I used as a tool to explore contemporary abstraction. In short, Deleuze departs from the Baroque to demonstrate that our spatial and temporal coordinates are relative. The Baroque, indeed, prefiguring the hereafter, reveals us that our position is well grounded and rooted on earth and that we must search for the “divine” within us.

Baroque painting, but especially sculpture, repositions our body into a new mathematical system not measurable according to the coordinates of Leon Battista Alberti’s perspective, which instead were the basis of Renaissance culture. The weather effects of the ceilings painted by Gaulli, for example, or the folds and twists sculpted by Bernini, make the space deep, a collection of atmospheric forces: rays, explosions, flashes and waves whose origin remains almost unknown.

These forces are brought to life in the works of Alessandro Roma, layers of “masses” and not well identified signs that once we would have imputed to supernatural forces, such as those that the medium leaves on paper during a séance or the automatic calligrams escaped from the surrealists’ subconscious. Here, however, there is something different. The signs left by Alessandro do not come from imagination or dream. Rather they come from a careful observation of the infosphere in which we are immersed.

His landscapes, for example, have neither horizon nor vanishing points. On the contrary, they are rich of folds, like those mentioned by Deleuze, and interstices in which space seems to close. What the eye sees, then, is a system of possibilities: holes, shadow cones, stains and textures of an electronic nature. Space, reduced as it is to such an immaterial stage, therefore, becomes even more real because it is not only to the eye that is delegated its exploration.

The viewer’s brain is called in and asked to unfold the folds and fill them with his own presence. If this invitation is not clear in front of the paintings and reliefs on the wall, already quite extended in space, surely we would not escape in presence of the sculptures. Observing these ever-changing masses, surrounding them with our movements and suddenly changing the direction of our steps, we are called to reconsider our own position on earth.

The chances that Alessandro’s works offer, are endless, and have nothing to do with the formlessness of matter, as we might think initially, but with the inform-act-ion and with the way we see reality. The interstice, therefore, is not a space between things but, if anything, an organism where we recognize things between spaces. Once involved in this eschatological device, we realize that it is not the matter used by the artist which loses shape but our conventions and convictions, what we thought was a landscape and what we thought we were ourselves.
Spoglio la pioggia ed esco 2011 plaster pigment and transparent sheet 40x30cm
Di cosa origina il luogo 2011 graphite spray oil and collage on wood 120x100cm
Subito mi spoglio ed esco mezzo nudo sotto la pioggia 2010/11 resin water plant and enamel 190x65x70 cm. (work in the frame) 2011 fabric spray on paper and collage 55x40cm.
Flirting with fate

Lucie Fontaine, Marco Antonini and Alessandro Roma

Lucie Fontaine: Dear Alessandro, I would like to start with the project we realized two years ago, in my exhibition space in via Conte Rosso, Milan. It was your first experiment in tridimensionality. How did that influence your work and the exhibits you presented after our collaboration?

Alessandro Roma: That was a very useful experience: it made my practice more free. I tried to work on tridimensional forms while keeping a bidimensional vision, it was an important development. After that, I tried to maintain a certain freedom in my practice and I believe that this proposition was partly a consequence of that exhibition. If I am not wrong, Marco should have seen that show—or, if you prefer, that adventure—too…

MA: I did. I was in Milan for an exhibition. I remember how somehow I did not “recognize” your work. Or maybe that was just the first time that I carefully observed it… the furniture you used as a “foundation” for your pieces was tangible, recognizable; to me, that was the most interesting aspect. Can you articulate on the idea of “bidimensional vision” you just introduced? Is that something you will say of your flat works as well?

AR: My approach towards thinking forms in tridimensional space was to consider them as on the surface of a white page, as if I was working on paper or canvas. This brought me to stretch bidimensional images into tridimensional forms. On the other hand, my works on paper lean on tridimensionality, expanding from the confined space of the sheet in multilayered surfaces.

LF: The idea of a white surface makes me think of a writer starting a new novel. What relationship do you see between your work and literature and, more in general, how would you describe the relationship between painting and literature?

AR: In recent years, literature has acquired a fundamental role in my work, because it allowed me to abstract myself from reality and utilize narrative as a reflection on what’s contemporary. I believe that there is a very strong connection between painting and literature, starting with the process; as you highlighted before, both start with a white space, whether the sheet or the computer screen or a white surface where a narrative or visual illusion can be brought to life. In my exhibition project for Scaramouche I will depart from a literary clue that allowed me to develop on a particular imagery. Actually, I wanted to ask Marco how important literature is in the work of an art critic.

MA: Literature is essential for me, also considering my relative lack of interest in “proper” criticism. My background is in underground music, in the world of fanzines and DIY productions… criticism only catches my attention when it deals with the immediate reality (my definition of “reality”, of course, is subject to seasonal shifts). As of now, I am working on a second imaginary book (after the first Dust Jacket, co-authored with Andrea Galvani and Isola and Norzi in 2009) and on an exhibition inspired by Natalia Ginzburg’s Lessico Famigliare, one of my favourite books… Speaking of literature, I remember talking about Giulio Verne with you… as a child I was in love with Giulio Verne a Fumetti (1978) a graphic novel edition of some of Verne’s greatest stories, illustrated by Franco Caprioli. I wonder if you ever read it. Caprioli’s quasi-Baroque, style is technically impressive, with fine tratteggio and tones that seem layered over each other… a substance that’s almost independent from the drawing line. His caverns and underground scenarios remind me of the texture of some of your most recent works.

LF: Comics bring Illustration—another genre that I often think as in connection to your work—to mind. What do you think about it? I also think of your works as openings on endless patterns, coming to life
as circumscribed territories. They are necessarily limited by the borders of the canvas, or by the dimensions of a sculpture; another reason why it is sometimes hard to understand your work as bi- or tri-dimensional. What’s your relationship to space in your paintings? Is it more a manipulation, invention, elimination… or what?

AR: I am not a lover of comics, I always found the joint use of written word and drawing uncompelling; it limits my imagination. Illustration, on the other hand is a didactic way of intending image, constricted by certain rules.
I think that the term “manipulation” well adapts to the process that I follow in the construction of my pictorial images. The fragmentation of pre-existing subjects that I paint and then “re-fragment” is used to create a certain distance from the first take on the subject. Therefore, the invention of a subject happens as I get involved in the different steps of the construction process. I would say that I look for the elimination of any didactic or illustrative quality in the subject.

My work is grounded in the illusionistic quality of an open space in the painting’s surface, striving for balance among the formal schizophrenia. There is also an external space of tension, delineated by the surface’s perimeter, whereas the regularity of the work is interrupted by spillings. Probably this is all meant to allow the work to be perceived as not merely bi-dimensional.

MA: Words like “balance”, “tension”, “regularity”, “spillings” seem to betray an understanding of the pictorial space as physical reality… a space of variables and values to be controlled and regulated. This vision has deep art-historical roots. What’s your relationship with abstraction and, more specifically, with the generation of painters directly or indirectly inspired by Hans Hoffmann’s teachings? How has the way we (and you) relate to an abstract image changed nowadays?

AR: I most cases I would agree with Francis Bacon’s words, when he said that he hated Rothko’s painting because his painting and most of all his colors depressed him.

LF: I don’t know why but hearing you talk about Bacon makes me think that each of your pieces are born layer after layer, although with different times, depending on the area of the composition, like stalagmytes in a cave. How do you deal with imagining the finished work, before realizing it? Do you follow drafts, do you have a mental image of what you want to achieve? Or is it rather a series of linked suggestions, a little bit like flirting with fate?

AR: The words “flirting with fate” seem perfect to define my working process. I leave a fair amount of space to chance, starting from a sometimes foggy idea that I tend to clarify through the various steps. Layering in my work does not just happen via accumulation, but also subtraction, it is the crossing of different work phases, each of which can make me change direction. This means trying to retain a certain control over the initial idea while leaving the door open to eventual changes.

MA: When do you consider a work “Finished”? I would also be curious to know if you assume your works to be permanent, final objects … or if you ever thought of going back and tinker with them, retouching them or letting anyone else do that.

AR: I wouldn’t know exactly, but there comes a time in which you think the work can be done, and the actual reasons can be many. Sometimes it is interesting to keep going, or stopping just a moment before that, to see what happens. This can sometimes lead the work to failure, then you would have to start from scratch; still, such movements are essential to try to get as close as possible to whatever you wanted to achieve. I never thought to retouch my works, neither I would let others do that. Once they are done, I prefer to forget about them!
Vedremo chi la spunterà se l'udomo o la natura 2010 olio, smalto, spray e colalge su carta 105x150cm
Cercar di ricondurre le mie idee alle cose della terra 2010 olio, smalto, matita e collage su carta 100x145cm
Part of installation Sites of the action, Scaramouche gallery New York
Part of installation Sites of the action, Scaramouche gallery New York
Alessandro Roma at the Mart
by Giorgio Verzotti

In his invective against the return to painting in the 1980s, Benjamin Buchloh offsets the idealism of the latter (targeted through an even more violent depreciation of figurative art of the 1920s) with the critical realism of the collage typical of the historic avant-garde movements, cubism and Dadaism in primis. The collage introduces elements of reality functioning as signs and signals into a work, and hence into the dominion of art, referring back to the historic and social context from which they have been extracted. Cuttings from newspapers and magazines, fragments of textiles root the work in its historical moment, making the artist into a potential historian. Moreover, in its fragmentary nature, the collage alludes to the experience the subject undertakes in the world, an alienated and discontinuous experience leading to the impossibility of a unified, reconciled, single, reassuring vision and reflection of the world.

The background collage, remaining within the setting of figurative art, is the proof of the failure of any unsolicited anthropocentric vision sustained by rational thought, which can be recognised in the first instance in a perspective depiction, the famous window on reality that the subject presumes to dominate, depicting it from a single or at least privileged point of view (with the variants that Panofsky has taught us to recognise). The 20th century instead, establishes itself as the agent of an instigation of crisis of this rationality, and the artists express this with their polycentric visions or dynamic co-penetrations or whatever else. Or be rejecting depiction in toto. Or by introducing everyday objects into their art. We are speaking of the 20th century that Buchloh likes: the non-conformist wing, because the neo-regulatory wing becomes instead the receptacle of the most reactionary idealism, from Picasso to Braque, from De Chirico to Morandi. Such is life.

Today, many years after the era in which the diatribe first arose (although ancients and moderns have always been doing battle…) and about 30 years after the ephemeral appearance of a post-modern aesthetic in Europe, there are artists like Alessandro Roma who work principally if not exclusively with collage. It will be interesting to test some comparisons.

To be more precise, we can say that Alessandro Roma dedicates himself to a form of painting realised almost entirely using collages from paper cuttings, in which the paint – oil, enamel or spray – acts as a connecting element and rarely as protagonist. Nevertheless, his style seems to comprise a pictorial use of the non-pictorial element, in which the inserts of various material and chromatic values function like so many brushstrokes, or are at least placed on the surface thanks to a technical skill that resembles that of a painter. Albeit with this spirt, the artist’s favourite material remains paper: using paper, he succeeds in creating small sculptures made of thin, light, coloured cut-out strips that from a distance recall the fabrics, metal veils and spidery forms of Melotti; paper and sometimes fabric or plastic cuttings are woven too into his two-dimensional compositions, which float over the wall without frames or any other protection. In short, the work is a body that from the outset wishes to show itself to be outside the codes and languages typical of the separate disciplines, and which aims towards a world of lightness, through the reduction of physical weight. To the full benefit of a visual redundancy that the multiform, multi-material nature of the work and its chromatic richness help to form. Collage and its genealogy therefore, in which Alessandro Roma slots in, I believe, without excessive problems. As proof, see the paintings and drawings the artist has indicated as being his sources of inspiration or the artists worth following, in the collections of the Mart and noted by him for his one-man exhibition in this museum, all dedicated to the theme of landscape. There are some works by Morandi, of course, and a surreal drawing by Savinio. But above all, we find Balla and Licini, who although using only paint, nevertheless fragment the surface, designating triangular and curved segments or chromatic touches, as one might do with a multi-material collage; and there’s Burri, the multi-material artist par excellence (after Prampolini, of course). But less us keep to the point. The cuttings: the artist uses illustrated magazines or images downloaded from the Internet and then scanned and printed. An important feature is the cutting out of details of images that are then placed alongside other fragments. As we have said, painting serve as a connecting element but it often manually completes the image the cutting gives us as a detail. The material refers to the contemporary reality of mass communication and in particular to digital media; the work comes together through the use of a computer, searching through the web, and through mechanical duplication. The result is for the most part a phantasmagoria that fully replaces “landscape painting” at the very moment in which it evokes it. With a compositional skill wholly derived, we suppose, from his intuition, Alessandro Roma shows us the deconstruction of landscape as genre, just as Francesco Stocchi describes in articulate fashion in this catalogue, multiplying points of view, playing with overlays and matching between visual elements and incongruous materials, providing us with a landscape certainly, but as though seen through a kaleidoscope. In this way, the eye cannot recognise the setting and wanders over the surface, as Paul Klee intended.

There is a subtle play: a single, central point of view appears possible, and the composition is constructed in such a way as to suggest depth, like in a stage design formed of a series of wings which lead to the promise of a final revelation. Immediately after a first glance, this revelation becomes clearly impossible, unreal, because contra-
dicted by other revelations, as the stage is full of a series of fulls and voids, or more or less rarefied, more or less dense zones that correspond (or seem to correspond) to as many perspective views, as a result of which the openings towards otherness multiply and the eye literally does not know what to seek and where.

Besides, the (illusions of) depth and rarefactions are offset by the density of bas-reliefs in chalk, handled in coloured patches and with the imprint of the textures of the materials pressed into them; here too, the heterogeneous takes the place of the uniform, that is, chalk as unifying material.

Without doubt, Alessandro Roma’s collages refer to the historical context from which his elements are drawn (and indeed, the images and materials are totally recognisable, as they are “contemporary”), and to the fragmentary experience we make of reality: even more fragmentary, this experience here is even hallucinatory. And the vertiginous effect is accentuated by the names assigned the works through pure association of ideas, and which all come from the literary works of Giorgio Manganelli, the most baroque and virtuoso of Italy’s narrators.

Could the young Italian artist’s work appeal to the critical Buchloh?

So long as we agree as to what we intend by real, this term that we use so often, in texts, between inverted commas: for sure, the reality from which the artist draws is totally enveloped by pure virtuality, that of the mass media, the dimension in which it has become impossible to distinguish the real from the false, and that inhabited by the community that lives in the web, that acts and produces effects but which remains suspended in immateriality, in anonymity, in non-identity. So long as we agree in defining the above as “real”, the collages of Alessandro Roma stand out as the closest operation to the sense of the cubist and above all Dadaist research, with one difference: those tending to attach themselves closely to history and historicism; these question whether a sense of history is still possible in the de-realised world in its media double. We can add that while those referred to their own era, seeking to describe it in its essence, those of our own era rather present an imagined view.

Alessandro Roma’s landscapes are not deconstructed for a pure formal reason: they show us a hallucinatory landscape/world because they speak to us of our progressive loss of sense of reality, while the multiplicity of the points of view reveal to us the difficulty of orienting oneself (I was about to write ‘of judging’), because of its inevitable radical relativisation. If the subject reveals itself to be split asunder, it is not for this that it is happier: according to Karl Jaspers, the modern tragedy is exactly the impossibility of effecting a decisive choice between the different options…

The term “original” leads us straight to the lands of myth, so we need not raise the problem, which is inexistent, of the origin. The term “primary”, instead, opens an operative horizon and simply indicates a new place for a start (and one, moreover, without any “supermanisms”), able to construct a possible alternative to the definitive loss of orientation.

Now, it may be coincidence but the latest sculptures by Alessandro Roma, presented here for the first time, while arising from the customary practice of overlays, accumulation and offsetting of heterogeneous materials (coloured resins and polyurethane...) and thus declaring themselves to be the offspring of this world, nevertheless communicate an aura of primacy, in the sense that they seem to refer to a past we may presume to be archaic. The sculptures have a totemic look; they seem to be symbolic objects like those in which an entire community invests particular meanings. A community that the work seems to hypothesise or dream, certainly imagine, but not for this less credible than that totally shadowy one in which we find ourselves, and which this same work had so effectively thematicised to the present day.
La strada sale verso un cielo che sta rinunciando alla luce 2010 collage organza olio smalto su carta 190x165cm.
Posso procedere oppure tornare in ogni caso non posso uscire 2010, gesso e olio 43x30cm
Ho il vago ricordo di essermi lasciato trascinare, 2010 100x150cm olio smalto organza e collage su carta
Veramente il luogo ha qualche cosa di originario, 2010  collage graffite spray su carta 192x100cm
Queste acque non impareranno nulla sull'umano 2010 resina poliuretano smalto, 180h
Part of installation *Humus*, solo show in Mart Museum of modern and contemporary art in Rovereto
Part of installation Humus, solo show in Marli Museum of modern and contemporary art in Rovereto
Part of installation Humus, solo show in Mart Museum of modern and contemporary art in Rovereto
Part of installation Humus, solo show in Mart Museum of modern and contemporary art in Rovereto
Recognition and Mimesis
by Francesco Stocchi

“The question is”, said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

The visionary nature of Alessandro Roma’s imagination finds a justification for cognoscitive urgency in a complex and extraordinarily free formulation. In a constant striving to overcome classic representative formulae, his œuvre puts together the limits and alphabets of perception. A perceptive and cognitive alienation in which the images appear for the first time in a possible reality. The artistic gesture becomes a sign, a bequest, a survival and witness of fantastic images, free peregrinations in places of an absolute self-questioning.

The technique Alessandro Roma favours is collage, in the sense in which the word betrays its meaning and becomes a broader gesture. The artist works on the indefinite, on a material and formal matching, aiming to break through the rigidity of a classifiable depiction, generating symbolic suggestions given over to narrative itineraries or personal mnemonics. In the creation of his dreamlike scenarios, perspective is flattened into a kaleidoscopic invasion of forms and colours, a constant mutation of points of observation. Alessandro Roma seems to describe the same ideal mental landscape, offering us innumerable points of view.

The urgency of a vanishing point is overcome and decontextualised by the freedom of a fluid and anti-dogmatic gesture in which reality and literary memories blend into the rewriting of a poetic universe, in a season that seems to have nothing earthly about it. For his collages, the artist implements the choice of a use exclusively of paper, stratified into a composite repetition of suggestions. The images he starts with are altered by a pictorial and semantic gesture overwhelming their original meaning. He introduces a trend towards a straining of the formal that is pushed until the form’s explosion. These are not veritable collages but a reflection on painting using the method of collage. The work of Alessandro Roma feeds from a constant questioning of the nature of perception in an investigative matter ranging from a surrealist lesson to the philosophy of language.

An extreme research into the cognitive categories of perception. Despite starting from a natural datum, in which formally recognizable elements as trees, rivers, rocks, flowers appear, the universe of Alessandro Roma, by implementing a reduction, invites the observer to invert the original point of view, enabling him to attain a receptive capacity to open up to the manifestation of these primary phenomenological data while distanciating himself from the purely naturalistic ones. It is the objects of immediate and sharable recognizability that create that perceptive short-circuit that marks his method of research. It is his raw material of a profound phenomenological investigation that moves his artistic gesture. The naturalistic datum is the first, intuitive experience from which to investigate the nature of the phenomena and arrive at extracting its essence, or absolute. Exploring a perceptive universe, inevitably the artist questions himself in the first place on the overall social nexus of an embodied world, as well as the historic development of a socio-cultural method and the structural character of the social phenomena, giving form to Giorgio Manganelli’s reflection in Isola Pianeta:

A landscape, a panorama presuppose a cultural context, or at least an emotive, consolidated and tranquil one; they are concepts of modest culture, but for this very reason are in some way vulgarizing, offered up for easy and light, restful fruition; ‘nature’ is a more sharply mental concept, and it appears not so much to deny the existence of the social instance as to presuppose it as an alternative or counterpoint. All those concepts presuppose a man who looks, who brings to his manner of contemplating either the joy of having taken possession of the natural fact of having rendered it “human”, or the pleasure of momentarily stepping aside from a society that in reality he never abandons. Nature is a “reserve” in which we go to hunt innocuous phantoms.

This is the basis from which a fundamental part of Alessandro Roma’s research starts: the attempt to investigate and learn the essence of the emotive, perceptive datum of the man who observes. The localization of man within a given cultural context. The turning of the subject to the object upon the act of recognition of a given phenomenon. Investigating the moment in which an object is perceived in its identity. The subject, the man watching, is by his nature an always possible perception, a perception always possible at the initial stage. Observing how the pictorial action, the perceptive data, acts and settles into the imagination of the man who always, in the first instance, triggers an active, positive movement. It is the inevitability of the connections of the historical/cultural landscapes in their traditional meanings that undergoes an interference through an artistic gesture, a cognitive praxis of déplacement. This work of alienation in the observer starts from the use of the works’ titles, literary suggestions, fantastic inspired visions that could live their own life, inspired by the thinking of Giorgio Manganelli. Conscious phenomena and unconscious infrastructure. The works of Alessandro Roma are, above all landscapes, the scan meaning. Decontextualisations of sensorial knowledge. The artist’s works are places of words before; there is no re-visitiation but visitation; we find no interpretation but a bearing of meaning. It is not a translation but a primitive score and with the use of elements bearing their own story. There is no nostalgic sense of lost places, but the evocation of a mental, present and accessible place. Creative and displacement energies are combined; not an appropriation but a re-elaboration of the end as medium. Unexplored places of primary word obtained from an oscillation of the meaning of the original function of the matter used. For his collages, Alessandro Roma makes use of recycled materials, images extrapolated from other contexts that are deprived of their advertising meaning and form the substratum, the pre-existing substratum, the archaic memory of the worldly, the sole bequest of the earlier functionality present in the work before it becomes definitively altered. An unreflected method of forms aiming to penetrate a magma of indistinct, unknown matter. Otherness and Identity rise from the antithetical mirrored poles of a reflection, seeking to probe the spaces and times of the dialectic of recognition and mimesis. Is there a mimetic gesture in Alessandro Roma’s method of working? With what procedure does he tackle the relationship between mimesis and memory? What is the method from which he then implements the investigation into the profound
structures of our memory? How does he investigate the complexity of the symbolic and linguistic systems? Naturalistic elements are embodied in abstract images freed of every descriptiveness, tracing out a landscape in which visions of a futurist present are grafted on to the echo of a legendary prehistory. The whole through a rare inventiveness, effected with ease and richness of suggestions. Gardens marked by prisms of light, trees, rocks, fabrics, horizons of damask water, fragments of flowers, shadows of grafts, geometries of seascapes, signs reflected in altered surfaces, nostalgia of submerged universes, lacework of mountains of light, outlines of trunks, lines of tails, chromatic abandons of desert landscapes. Impressed signs of animal matter, shadows of primitive visitations inhabited by new light. Magical events revealing leaps of vision. The investigation on the manifold cognitive possibilities of mutating universes. Epiphanies of lines chasing the signs of an unexpected, sudden manifestation. The feeling of the cosmos embodied in a matter of mystery propelled as though in an action of temporal suspension. An ellipsis of thought, a suspension of continuity, of linear progressiveness, of chronology and of consequentiarity generating a form of disinformation, of misunderstanding, a constant degree of ambiguity. A phenomenological époche, a suspension of judgment.

Thus do I implement the phenomenological époche which, therefore, eo ipso, forbids me from also activating any judgment, of any predicative stance with regard to being and being like this and all the ways of being in the space-temporal existence of the “real”. Thus do I neutralize all the sciences referring to the natural world and, however solid they may appear to me, however much I may admire them, however little I may accuse them of anything, I make no use of them whatever. (E. Husserl, Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen philosophie)

In this temporal suspension, we witness the presage of a possible process of mutation and constant alteration of the work. A hyper-sensitive outside in which each element converges on the disturbance of the perception of the collective/shared recognition in favour of experiences revealing the essence of what we are experiencing. A painterly gesture in which accumulation and incision seem to be able to cohabit, together with overlay and subtraction, repetition and anxiousness of the unicum. An obsession of primary imagination, in the instant when a shadow of yet unsayable forms appears possible. Unnamable. The striving for pre-linguistic aspects of the psychic experience, the investigation into a primitive memory. The attempt to come into contact with a lived experience. Imagining the possible forms of sensorial matching in exploded chromatic effects of vanished or not yet structured alphabets. And yet despite or perhaps because of the above, an aspect that remains distinctive in the artistic approach of Alessandro Roma is the playful and anarchic manner of creating a form of divertimento. Divertimento that in this case can remain faithful to its Latin etymology and hence represent a sort of distancing, only if understood as a detour/distraction of perception and not in regard to a possible divèrtere of the artist’s attention from a reflection about his own work. Divertimento shown in relation to the element of lúdus, of game liberated from judgement. A parenthesis of temporal suspension in which the existence of a constant alteration of the quality with which we usually refer to a natural datum is possible. And the freedom of this process gives the work a character of signs with the lightness and grace of an unexpected epiphany, a sense of fullness and depth.

The bas-reliefs and sculptural works of Alessandro Roma embody the legendary breadth of prehistoric monoliths, the ancestral grammar of a lost figurativism, a shadow of a figure never attained but only tragically hinted at. Presences of mutilated sacredness. In the artist’s sculptures, he chooses to work the resin paste, once again attaining a result of profound perceptive alienation, but this time through the metamorphosis of the matter. It may be clay, liquid terracotta, heaps of stones, mud, rocks. Materials as though engraved with moulds of various natures. A compositional mimesis in which probing and testing the possible alterations of an identical material becomes the basis founded in creative experience. Ancient totems inscribed in a grammar of the unknown. Silent peoples without writing. The agony of an eternal life memory in matter of an impossible word, the mute, powerful sedimentation within myth that becomes scream, an imperious gesture of killed colossus. Tragic presences revealing an obscure present. Suggestions of anthropomorphic traces never fully embodied, bearers of proverbial universes altered by ancient signs. The resin paste is associated with hemp or other dissimilar materials such as polyurethane, for example. This dialogue leads to an alienation of the relationship we have with the volume, its colour or its weight. Generally speaking, our brain is able, solely by looking, to determine volume, distance, form and colour and gain an idea of weight. In the case of works such as E chi in questo luogo è eremita?, Queste acque non impareranno nulla sull’umanità or In realtà anche la terra verde ha qualche cosa di malvagio, it finds itself deceived before what appear to us to be presences that change as we pass by.

Transcending in any case the medium used, when faced with a work by Alessandro Roma, it is hard to find a focal point. The works on paper and the bas-reliefs seems landscapes that emerge from the wall; they are not supported by display cabinets, frames or are protected by glass, and in like manner, the forms of the sculptures seem to grow from beneath the floor, free, not subject to any real control. There are no supports separating the object from its context: velcro used as an instrument of mimesis is associated with a natural propensity towards flight from a unique form. There are no straight lines, clean forms or definitions of space. What we are looking at are the material layers of a phenomenological humus, as in Büfel’s Chien Andaolu, in which we are subjected to natural elements that become magnificent when they enter into dialogue amongst themselves. Given the richness and freedom of the creative procedure, this expressive impetus does not bring with it a centre of attention but reveals to the eye of the observer a succession of focal elements that cancel out in their multitude and are replaced by the next one. It is a magical, reflecting world, formed of repetitions of mental modules referring back to the use of decalcomania within a surrealistic context. Oscar Domínguez, the first surrealist to make use of them, liked to define his work as “decalcomania without preconceived object”; Domínguez was followed by Hans Bellmer, Max Ernst and Richard Genovese, who introduced the practice of photographic decalcomania. Alessandro Roma has an empathic feel for the existence and truth of these experiences. Couplings of abstract forms with naturalistic references echoing the atmospheres of Ernst’s Jardin au gobbe avions. These shifts in meaning are combined with a wide series of images and Schwit-
ters’ propensity for accumulation. Alessandro Roma effects a *Merzbau* of Hannover kaleidoscope on paper without the geometric repetitiveness, replacing it with a creativity of consumption. The images’ essence, seeds of fantastic suggestions, is devoured by painting, the artist’s true starting point and expressive pedigree. A use of pictorial style adopted in a broad sense, loaded with much inventiveness, operative proficiency and richness that, following the traces of tradition, looks towards that same landscape undergoing constant change.
A questo punto del mio percorso tutto l'orizzonte mi si svela, 2009 tecnica mista su carta 140x100cm
Che forma può avere il dio che governa questa terra, 2009 collage, olio smalto tessuto su carta 100x150cm
Se l'anatra è buona allora anche tutto il resto è buono 2008 mix media wood miroir 110x50cm
Regione piatta solo cornacchie che mi gridano intorno (44) 2008 mix media on collage 160x150cm
Un arcobaleno laggiù mi da improvvisamente fiducia, 2008 collage and mix media 170x190cm
ALESSANDRO ROMA
Born 1977 Milan, Italy

EDUCATION
2000 Academy of Art Brera, Milan

AWARDS
2009 Residence Künstlerhäuser Worpswede
2007 IV International Painting Prize, Diputación de Castellón, Museo de Bellas Artes de Castellón, E

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2012 “Il sole mi costrinse ad abbandonare il giardino” Brand new gallery, Milan
2011 “Unfolding the Folds”, Galerie Alexandra Saheb
“Humus”, Museum Mart Rovereto I, curated by G.Verzotti
“Sites of action”, Scaramouche gallery, New York
2009 “Vicarius”, Galerie Alexandra Saheb, Berlin
2008 “Il sogno è anche un luogo ideale per il desiderio di giustizia”, Lucie Fontaine, Milan
2007 “Alessandro Roma”, Galerie Alexandra Saheb Berlin
2005 “Alessandro Roma”, Gallery Marabini, Bologna
“Alessandro Roma”, Gallery Artra, Milan
2004 “Alessandro Roma”, Gallery Artra, Genova

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2012 “Estate” Marianne Boesky gallery, curated by L Fontaine, New York
“Never before a girl done so much with so little” The Suburbans curated by L. Fontaine, Chicago
“Lacune” Archaeological Museum Eno Bellis, curated by L. Lanteri Oderzo (Tv)
2011 “Partita a quattro una riflessione sulla scultura”, Gallery Lorcan O'neill, curated by L. Pratesi, Rome
“Scultura lingua”, Marsellèria Milan, I, curated by B. Meneghel
2010 “Impresa pittura”, Centro Internazionale per l’Arte Contemporanea, curated by R. Gavarro, Gennazzano, Rome
“Route tournante en sous-bois”, Upload Art Project, Trento
2009 “Unreachable is just close enough”, Galerie Alexandra Saheb, Berlin
“Snooze”, Scaramouche c/o Fruti and Flower Deli curated by M. Antonini, New York, NY
Prague Biennial 4, Expanded Painting, curated by E. Kontova and G.Politi
2008 “Il rimedio perfetto”, Gallery Riccardo Crespi, Milan, curated by M. Tagliaferro
“Interiors”, Grusenmeyer Gallery, Deurle, B
2007 IV International Painting Prize Museo de Belles Artes de Castellon, E
“Scuola di Pittura”, curated by O.Berlanda e G. Montesano, Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea di Trento
“Expanded Painting” Prague Biennial 3, curated by E. Kontova and G.Politi
“Re-Enacted painting, preview A.T. Kearney”, Milan, curated by M. Farronato
2006 “La giovini Italia”, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, curated by Renato Barilli

BIBLIOGRAPHIE
I.Bonacossa, Flash Art Italy, November 2012 pp 44-46 and cover
M.Herbert, Art Review May 2012 pp 29
A.Pioselli, Artforum summer 2012 pp 334-335
I. Bonacossa, Flash Art n.302 May. 2012, pp 70
B.Schwabsky ”Il sole mi costrinse ad abbandonare il giardini” catalogue Brand new gallery 2012
L. Pratesi, New Italian Art, l'arte contemporanea delle ultime generazioni, Castelvecchio editor 2012 p.216-