

Damnatio Memoriae (or) Creating Memory

goldiechiari • Giacinto Occhionero • Cesare Pietroiusti • Sissi

Curated by Kristen Lorello

June 30 - August 26, 2011

Reception: Thursday, June 30, 5:30-7:30pm

Gallery summer hours: Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery is pleased to present a summer group exhibition: "*Damnatio Memoriae* (or) Creating Memory" with works by artists goldiechiari, Giacinto Occhionero, Cesare Pietroiusti, and Sissi. This is an exciting opportunity to see work by four artists currently living in Italy whose work is rarely exhibited in the United States. The show is curated by gallery staff member Kristen Lorello who was a Fulbright Fellow to Italy in 2006-7. The artists in this exhibition explore instances of personal and historical memory through a diverse range of media that includes video, performance, sculpture, drawing, photography, and painting. Please join us for the opening on Thursday, June 30th featuring a live performance by musical guest Faren and the French Fries at 7pm.

Damnatio memoriae refers to the ancient Roman practice of erasing from public record the memory of a person who committed dishonor to the state. By removing his or her image from reliefs, monuments, and sculptures, the society worked to erase the memory of the transgressor from collective consciousness after his or her death.¹ *Damnatio Memoriae* is also the title of a land art project by goldiechiari (Sara Goldschmied and Eleonora Chiari) which spans from China, to Italy and France; the newest work in this series will grow inside the main gallery during the course of the show and re-visits the United States's role in constructing Italy's political landscape after World War II.

The art historian Charles W. Hedrick Jr. writes:

"To attempt to forget a thing consciously requires one to think of the thing, and to think of the thing is to do the contrary of forgetting it. The paradox of the *damnatio memoriae* involves the same contradiction: if one must constantly remember not to mention a person, then one is surely not forgetting that person...Like Freudian repression, the repression of social memory requires constant effort and vigilance. The *damnatio memoriae* must reinforce memory of the public enemy because the continuance of memory is essential to the repression."²

Each artist in this exhibition tends to the deletion and creation of memory. The exhibition opens with the video *Pensiero Unico* which records Cesare Pietroiusti's attempt to sing words from two Fascist chants until he lost his voice. In the main gallery, goldiechiari's hand-carved ficus tree, *Genealogy of Damnatio Memoriae, Stay Behind*, will be joined with Giacinto Occhionero's new works on plexi, polyethylene, and a selection of works on paper from his personal diaries that have never before been exhibited. Sissi's meticulously outfitted oval 'portraits,' with yarn, ropes, belts, and tassels that she crochets and braids in her studio, suggest the presence of a body outside the confines of the artwork. Citing specific 20th Century art historical and historical strategies, these artists investigate the interrelations between politics, gender, and the self, revealing moments in history that the viewer may have forgotten or never known and offering possibilities for regeneration.

¹ Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004) 1-4.

² Charles W. Hedrick Jr., *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000) 114.