

TOMMASO CALABRO

GALLERIA D'ARTE

# SOFT POWER

ROSSO - MORANDI - ZIEGLER

APRIL 3 - JUNE 15, 2019

*"There are certain painters who self-consciously make images that work on two levels: they can be totally figurative and totally abstract at the same time. In their work, there is an image, a subject matter, but this image simultaneously falls apart. There is another level, another image underneath it."*

Toby Ziegler

Tommaso Calabro Gallery is pleased to announce *Soft Power: Rosso - Morandi - Ziegler*, an exhibition where six new paintings and two new sculptures by British artist **Toby Ziegler (1972)** will present his personal reading of the work of two Italian masters, **Medardo Rosso (1858-1928)** and **Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964)**. In spite of temporal, geographic and intrinsic differences between their oeuvre, Ziegler detects a common denominator: a fluid dialogue between figuration and abstraction, which also stands at the core of his own work.

Throughout his career, Medardo Rosso experimented with the infinite potential of matter, reproducing a limited number of sculptures in different media (bronze, gesso and his iconic wax). By continuously repeating the same subjects with slight variations, he longed to capture the fleeting moment. The contours of his sculptures seem to evaporate; it is unclear whether their subjects are emerging from or sinking into unformed matter. In photographing his own works, blurring their contours and altering their dimensions, Rosso was a pioneer in addressing ideas of authorship, originality and reproducibility of the work of art.

Image repetition and alteration also characterises the oeuvre of Giorgio Morandi. From the 1920s, the artist devoted himself to painting few recurrent objects: bottles, vases, pitchers, glasses and jars. Morandi's choice to constantly depict these subjects originated from the awareness that the structure of reality is nothing but a continuous mutation within the present. With their vibrant brushstrokes and trembling contours, Morandi's still lives are representations of themselves, of the surface of reality that coincides with that of the canvas. By painting recognisable objects and depriving them of their original function, Morandi narrates the abstract reality of painting.

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At the core of Toby Ziegler's art is the digital circulation, transmission and transformation of images, especially of works of art, and the resulting loss of their original meaning and content. Blurring the lines between figuration and abstraction, his work speaks of the disappearance of the mother image, which survives in its various forms of reproduction. As to Morandi, figuration is to Ziegler the fundamental means for investigating an abstract reality. Like Rosso's sculptures, Ziegler's creations seem to inhabit a liminal space: are they losing definition or assuming a shape?

The works conceived and executed for the exhibition at Tommaso Calabro Gallery draw inspiration from the continual oscillation between figuration and abstraction within both Rosso and Morandi's oeuvre. In the first room of the show, a video projection examines the disruption of an image's original content due to digital circulation. Ziegler subjected a sequence of images to a pair of image recognition algorithms. The first identifies shape, color, tone and subject matter in an attempt to find images similar to the original. The results differ dramatically from the mother image and are at times completely dissociated from it. The second algorithm dissects the image attempting to detect and classify the elements and relationships depicted. The resultant captions show the shortcomings of image recognition software and, simultaneously, open up unexpected new meanings and content.

In the other two rooms of the show, Ziegler's paintings form a dialogue with three still lives by Giorgio Morandi. The source of Ziegler's works is Georges de La Tour's *Saint Jerome* (1630-35, Museum of Grenoble). Rendered in translucent oil paint on aluminium panels over a long period of time, the original painting's image is inverted, desaturated and fragmented. The painted surface features a grid-like pattern floating on the picture plane, which obliterates the composition and brings it to the brink of collapse. Ziegler's two sculptures converse with Medardo Rosso's wax *Enfant au soleil* (c. 1918, from original dating to 1891-92) and his *El Locch* (1881-82). Drawn as three-dimensional models and executed by a 3D printer disrupted by intentional glitches in the process, Ziegler's sculptures distort the image of an ancient reliquary. They speak of the degradation of the matrix and its survival in new shapes and media.

The title of the exhibition refers to the expression "soft power", coined in 1990 by Joseph Nye to indicate the ability to influence people through appeal and attraction, rather than coercion. Ziegler metaphorically uses the political implications of this expression to underline the uncertainty associated with today's fruition of images, to which new content is constantly, and, implicitly, given. "Soft power" can also be interpreted as the charming power of figuration, which, tacitly, implies abstraction.

With *Soft Power: Rosso – Morandi – Ziegler*, Tommaso Calabro Gallery presents the work of Toby Ziegler for the first time in Italy and aims to direct its exhibition activity towards a growing

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internationality. Through the unusual dialogue among Rosso, Morandi and Ziegler's works, the gallery promotes an unexpected reading of two great Italian masters through the lens of contemporary art.

## TOBY ZIEGLER

Toby Ziegler was born in London in 1972, where he currently lives and works. His work has been exhibited internationally and has been the subject of several solo shows, such as *Toby Ziegler. Your shadow rising* (2018-2019) at Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art, *Toby Ziegler - The Genesis Speech* (2017) at the London Freud Museum, and *Toby Ziegler: Slave* at the Salisbury New Art Centre (2017). The artist is currently represented by Galerie Max Hetzler and Simon Lee Gallery, which have dedicated numerous solo shows to his research over the years. Ziegler's works have entered international private and public collections, including The Arts Council of England, The British Council, Tate Britain, the François Pinault Foundation, the Hudson Valley Centre for Contemporary Art and the Museum of Old and New Art.

## Press

Elena Caslini

[elena@tommasocalabro.com](mailto:elena@tommasocalabro.com)

+39 02 49696387

## Instagram

#softpower #rossomorandiziegler #tobyziegler

@tommasocalabrogallery

## Website

[www.tommasocalabro.com](http://www.tommasocalabro.com)

## Opening times

Tuesday - Saturday

11 am - 7 pm