

Mark Manders *Cose in Corso*

Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia 9 March – 28 September

Sitting outside his exhibition at the Collezione Maramotti on a quiet March afternoon while waiting for a photo shoot to end, Mark Manders talked softly, flipping through the pages of *Cose in Corso* (*Things in Progress*), the artist book printed on the occasion by Roma, his own publishing house. I was lucky to see the book before the installation inside, *Isolated Bathroom/Composition with Four Colors* (2010–4), because it made palpable how the Flanders-based artist's work unfolds on a continuum wherein single elements (sculptures, installations, drawings, fake newspapers) evolve and reappear down the years, as both mental and concrete characters of a plot that also serves as an ongoing personal diary. A 'self-portrait as architecture', as Manders defines it – or a *Mind Study* (2010–11), as was titled the main installation ('a short three-dimensional poem', he wrote in the caption) of his Dutch Pavilion at the last Venice Biennale.

Cose in Corso is a collection of photographs, all taken by the artist in his atelier. On the first page, as an ode to organic growth, is a sculpture of thin metal rods with twigs, branches and herbs attached to them. On the second, a corner of the studio containing a 'draft' of *Isolated Bathroom*, made from a couple of wooden beams, polystyrene sheets, plaster, two chairs, a towel

and a sculpture. On the third page, the same corner with the same installation translated into different materials, in a version closer to the final one. The rest of the volume documents other works and details (including a book opened on a scene from Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo) in no obvious order, except Manders's own. Here – as with Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–9), nowadays surviving only in the form of documentary photos of the original panels, as Warburg immortalised his mosaics of images phase by phase before modifying them – photography keeps the record without freezing the flux. And it further complicates Manders's play with mimesis, since the materials he uses are made to look like others. It's an endless 'precession of simulacra' – as Jean Baudrillard put it in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) – whose self-proclaimed matrix is the artist.

Isolated Bathroom/Composition with Four Colors is a room on its own, located right at the centre of the exhibition space. On a floor made of metal tiles, four characters of sorts stand like pieces on a chessboard: a bathtub filled with wet clay with a yellow towel on a side; a chair covered with a pink cloth right in front; a light blue towel rolled up; and a green chair on which rests

one of Manders's signature armless sculptures, modelled in clay on a wooden beam, the head gently tilted up. Things are obviously not what they seem: the towels are painted canvases, the bathtub is painted aluminium, the clay is painted epoxy and the apparently mass-produced chairs are handmade in iron and aluminium, while the green fabric supporting the sculpture is in fake newspapers in offset print, painted green. Painting is thus the explicit protagonist onstage. Finally not afraid of red, yellow and blue, Manders has here allowed some bright colours to appear, instead of adopting his usual palette of greys and browns.

It's a lively work, akin to a *sacra conversazione* as well as to a mundane conversation piece, with a hint of light parody to it. The bathtub looks like the sarcophagus of another famous fresco by Piero, *The Resurrection* (1463–5) in Sansepolcro, with Christ rising from his grave, in a pink robe, above some soldiers asleep in front of it, dressed in green and blue. Art and immortality are old bedfellows, as Manders must know. As he writes in a booklet tucked into the book: 'All my works, also my figures, always stay things. They are dead objects... What I want to keep alive, though, is the artist who made all these works'. *Barbara Casavecchia*



Isolated Bathroom / Composition with Four Colors (detail), 2010–14, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: C. Dario Lasagni © the artist. Courtesy Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York