10. Mark Manders: Cose in corso

One could say that all the key aspects of Mark Manders's artistic practice – the idea of the artwork as a frozen moment, an exclusively mental place; the transformation of the object into a catalyst of dreams and memories, and its biographical development in realms of memory – could already be found in embryonic form in his 1986 piece *Self-Portrait as a Building*. The artist was eighteen at the time, and it all started with the idea of writing a book, as Manders himself recalls: "With all the writing materials I had, like ballpoints, pencils and erasers, I made a floor plan on the floor. It was a flat building with nine rooms. I called it *Inhabited for a Survey* and it served as the basis for a written self-portrait, which was to be formed collectively by seven imaginary persons living in the floor plan. It was to be a book without a beginning or an end, one that I would always have to keep working on. I thought it was interesting that it was a dry, formal floor plan, in which no movement whatsoever could be observed. I wanted to project a mental self-portrait onto this floor plan, one in which everything would take place only in language. Making a self-portrait seemed to me the most fundamental thing to do. However, while writing it I found I did not like the idea of using written sentences to dictate to the audience exactly what they should think. I did not want the self-portrait to become really personal – it had to remain abstract. I became more and more fascinated by the physical manifestation of the floor plan: how I stood there before it as a human being; how tall I was in relation to the things on the ground; how the changing light transformed a ballpoint pen so dramatically; how I could bring my eye closer to an eraser and what then happened inside my head. This zooming-in created a breathtaking cinematic experience: I could move over these objects, and they dictated my thoughts with their color, language, form, and their indescribable physical coherence. I concluded that making a self-portrait in language wasn't the right thing to do. The world itself is more complex than the world of language which has been embedded in it. I decided to write the book not with words but with objects and to embed the self-portrait into reality like an imaginary building ... If you write a self-portrait using objects it will be read in a totally different way. Viewers – or readers – of the objects construct their own new thoughts, and the result is a self-portrait that is suspended in between the maker and the viewers". It is in this sense that the Italian title chosen by Mark Manders for his solo show at Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia – "Cose in corso" ("Things Underway") – could be seen as a sort of manifesto for his entire oeuvre, from his first to whatever becomes the last work in his series of self-portraits in the form of rooms.

The show is constructed around the piece *Isolated Bathroom / Composition with Four Colors* (2010-2014), a large installation made up of objects from previous works – a white bathtub half-full of clay, two aluminum chairs, a yellow cloth folded multiple times, an armless, legless human or superhuman figure, with a wooden plank running through it and its face pressed to its chest – reinvented here and placed in a new mise-en-scène within a perimeter of iron floor tiles, which create a virtual environment inside the exhibition space. An open-ended work, both temporally and semiologically, it becomes a staging imbued, as Manders writes, with a "conceptual potential narrative in a total frozen theater".
(Text by Antonio Scoccimarro)

10 Mark Manders, *Anthropological Trophy*, 2010. Courtesy: the artist;
Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

10 Mark Manders, *Isolated Bathroom / Composition with Four Colors*, 2010-2014. © the artist.
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