

A Secret Attraction: New Works by Flavia Bigi

by Marek Bartelik

Flavia Bigi is an emotional artist, one who understands that the enchanting unexpected often takes on a visual form when she relies on feelings while making her art. With the temperament of a peruser in search of unpredictable beauty, she manages to be undisturbed by assessments of the current state of art (made not without justification, but only if we think about art within the institutional system) as "a fecklessly 'transgressive' subdivision of the entertainment industry."¹

Seeking splendid mental isolation in New York City, she paints, takes pictures, and makes videos, and when the works are finished, surprises herself first by realizing that they belong to "the visual wing of the house of poetry."*

As someone who has lived in many places and moved many times, Bigi uses memory as a vehicle for renewal, or more exactly, as a wish for a rejuvenation. That is why her art might look familiar: It touches on our common experiences, while remaining highly personal in endowing forms with timeless meaning. As she represses and reveals at the same time, the unexpected happens--

¹ Expressions borrowed from "At the Crossroads: Peter Plagens on the 'Postartist,'" *Artforum* XLIII February 2005), p. 61-62.

and remains. In her video work, *Greenwave*, 2004, water continuously washes an unnamed seashore in the artist's native Italy, while the waves become specs of light touched by sun. With the sensibility of a Rubenist, Bigi "paints" her sea fluorescent green, using the color of melancholy that a drowned maiden would have chosen for the fabric of her garment had Gogol allowed her to do so. In her painting, *Untitled*, 2004, two boys, apparently lost and frightened, float in a rubber boat. However, the frame cuts out the "bigger picture," preventing us from determining whether the body of water is an ocean or a small backyard swimming pool. Thus, Bigi's *message* is not transparent, for it is impossible to say how much of what we witness is linked to a given reality and how much of it is a visual masquerade. The stones in *Here We Are*, 2004, are awkwardly shaped, and painted with difficulty. They represent a hostile environment for both the artist and the man in the picture, who seems to be blinded by the fire. (Once upon a time, Guillaume Apollinaire argued that "la flamme est le symbole de la peinture."²) Can the man and the woman depicted on board the ship cutting through a sea full of icebergs in *There We Go*, 2005, be bonded together and stay apart at the same time, cut from life spatially and emotionally? Executed "on the surface," the painting speaks of oblivion as a heightened form of memory.

² Quoted from S. Settis, *Giorgione's Tempest: Interpreting the Hidden Subject*, transl. E. Bianchini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 57

Following the multiplicity of disjoined stylistic currents in several media, Bigi's new works reach beyond the anecdotal and exude poetry. Using the word "poetry" in relation to painting has become increasingly difficult in our day, yet the connection is still relevant. As a secret attraction, the maxim *ut pictura poesis*—as is poetry, so is painting—allies the emotional and the counter-narrative, while leaving room for the unexpected in form and content. Remaining in "the visual wing of the house of poetry" might be a form of self-protection against the dehumanization of life, but also a form of self-preservation for one, who while sailing through life, refuses to become a "postartist."*