



Occult Dessert

Conversation by Alessandro di Pietro and Niels Olsen

Niels Olsen: First of all, I'm very curious about your decision to create blackout curtains for your exhibition. Most galleries and artist-run spaces are situated in re-used retail, giving them a public proximity through a show window to the street. Your show decisively blocks the view to the outside. The space becomes an autonomous capsule. What led to this element?

Alessandro di Pietro: Access to the exhibition is designed through a closed curtain. The curtain, which uses technical fabrics selected from the sample book of the GR10K clothing brand, is an architecturally inspired (theatrical/cinematic) seal. Encapsulating the interior All Stars space by preventing natural light from entering the exhibition space was an overtly functional decision.

It is true that visibility from the street is an advantage that art spaces and commercial spaces in Europe predominantly look for. Capitalizing on the frame of the "shop window" provides not only access but extends them into the city surroundings and attracts the attention of the passerby/buyer, allowing them to catch a glimpse of and register the object on display, in turn potentially triggering a feeling of desire or even an urge to purchase it. But your question also makes me think of the example of Japan with its pronounced vertical urban development related to the high population density of population living, where you can find, for instance, totally unusual and concealed record stores selling only Italian punk in a windowless space on the 10th floor of a 9D-scale skyscraper. Or near the center of Milan, where street-side you can always find at the same time oriental massage parlors and temporary multi-brand shops where the showcase windows conceal their contents. This process of concealment trivially creates mystery.

At first glance the exhibition has something quite archaic about it, but simultaneously a museum expression. The objects and works on view have an archeological aura. When you come closer, however, it becomes clear they are very much from now, shaped by technology. Are you interested in this tension?

Yes, the relationship between the museification of the archaeological find and the technology that produced it, rethought as a *modus operandi* of generating an artwork, recurs quite frequently in recent years. If we consider the works as ready-mades on which we then bestow artistic status, we can project them into the future as objects found by a subsequent society that may have lost the historical and cultural reference systems we know in our time. For example, if we think of the discovery a shield from the 3rd or 4th century B.C., made of a metal alloy too weak to be able to defend a warrior in battle, we can infer that it might have had another use, such as in a funeral ritual.

If we consider this same object as future heritage to be preserved, but combined with the aspect of a "contemporary" artwork, future archaeology might allow these "objects" to be re-embodied as items of death design or functionally usable by new tribes according to the needs of their own present.

The *FLX Recorder* series draws on modernist display architecture. What role do plinths, walls and fixtures play in the way you practice?

FLX Recorder is a "non-work," that is it's a display or exhibition-space furnishing device with a specific non-objective functionality.

Its measurements are not standard; in fact it's slightly too tall and has a base that is too narrow compared to its length. This means that in exhibition terms it creates specific conditions that don't match the modernist proportion of the plinth, the intention being to frame the art object or, conversely, to make it disappear. Basically I think it's my responsibility to use the official historiography of the museum's exhibition power and to customize it to my liking—not to be crushed by it—and to position myself as I see fit with respect to the product of my poetics.

This particular "plinth" admittedly serves to always display different works, in this case the *Fade Paw Study*

(*Modern Meteorite*), but along its long sides it has a series of drawers similar to those of jewelers. Their use is set in a protocol, in other words they can only contain a certain series of elements of the space, in which an FLX Recorder is set up, and exchanged with non-belonging others according to the esoteric principle that "all magic requires a sacrifice." Whether I keep the drawers open or closed is also up to me.

On this occasion, the "plinth" will contain the series of original LED bars from the All Stars space replaced with a series of concrete LED bars that serve as the shadow points of the exhibition.

The FLX Recorder, together with the blackout curtain and the series of concrete LED bars in the exhibition constitute a design core without a definite ontological status—they are not yet works with artistic status but become so once they are purchased or kept in a collection. They are the infrastructure that governs the arrangement and viewing of the works on which the *Occult Desserts* exhibition is based.

As an undercurrent, over the years my reflections on exhibition devices, containment, and the possibility of modification of works or un-works have revolved around a narrative project and a historiographical hacking on the work of Paul Thek, which will finally be realized in the coming

The portrait drawings contrast with the seemingly as-found bronze. What is the relation between the drawings and the overall environment?

What is on show are some colored pencil drawings from the *Vampirelli* (in Italian *vezzezziative* for *Vampiri*) series. *Vampirelli* is a sequence of drawings that reflect on the representative limits of the most three-dimensional and psychologically evolved monster in the history of literature and cinema—the character of the vampire.

The subjects of these three-quarter portraits show the neck—the man's point of weakness and desire before the monster and the act of attack, once the transformation happens. They are all people familiar to me, among them the American painter Rochelle Feinstein, my friend, as well as an artist whom I adore. We see them all immersed and stopped in time against a white background, in daylight, which according to the nineteenth-century trope of the pre-twilight vampire is when the demon decomposes if sunlight touches it. I therefore chose to draw them in the moment before that can happen. This is the common point with *Fade Paw Study (Modern Meteorite)*—both are stopped before their deflagration.

Returning to the shape of the paw/meteorite, it is composed of a series of multiplications of planes made up of different molds of a single animal paw. The animal-like form sublimates into a mineral form as a meteorite in free fall toward the modernist-derived structure that supports it. It is presented as a mockup of a future cataclysm in which the ideology of change fails. The formal complexity of *Fade Paw Study (Modern Meteorite)* winks at Umberto Boccioni's futurist sculpture of the figure in *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), and includes a rotten frame of the first airplane before the impact with the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, which happened to coincide with my first day of higher-art education.

Your show is clearly structured in individual elements, which makes me very curious about the way you work. What is your approach? How do you create your starting premises and what would you define as the result?

The All Stars exhibition is titled *Occult Dessert* and starts from the need to relate some cycles of individual works produced between 2019 and 2022 and a series of devices for displaying the works in space, made site-specific.

The methodology of *Occult Desserts* derives from a series of installation environments with a domestic narrative or a metaphysical nature made between 2016 and 2020, in which a psychological profile of a character was "written" and described through the furniture (not necessarily ascribable to works of art like the curtain, the concrete LEDs, the plinth) and technologies grafted into the architecture assimilated to works of art. This process of setting allows me to both investigate what monsters and ghosts I'm fond of and to project my biography through certain themes, such as monstrosity as a utopia in the age of the dictatorship of nomenclature, while at the same time enabling me to delay the action of pointing that gives the objects I produce the status of works of art. I'm interested that the technologies produced in these matrix environments become works as soon as they leave the context that generated them (other exhibitions, collections, museums, in the studio, etc.).

*Matrix environment: *technology* = other exhibition contexts : *work of art*