

Riccardo Baruzzi & Pieter Vermeersch

Resonance

curated by Lilou Vidal in complicity with Luca Cerizza
8 May – 23 July 2021

Riccardo Baruzzi (Lugo, Italy, 1976) lives and works in Bologna. Recent exhibitions include *Sul principio di contraddizione*, GAM, Turin, IT, curated by Elena Volpato (2021); *Quadro Sonoro (Bic Barchino)*, Teatro Storico di Villa Aldrovandi-Mazzacorati, ArtCity, Bologna, IT (2021); *141 - Un secolo di disegno in Italia*, Fondazione del Monte, Bologna, IT, curated by Maura Pozzati and Claudio Musso (2021); *Collezione Macte*, Macte, Teramo, IT (2020); *E subito riprende il viaggio*, P420, Bologna, IT (2020); *Le realtà ordinarie*, Palazzo de' Toschi, Bologna, IT (2020); *Del disegno e del deserto rosso*, The Goma (solo), Madrid, ES (2019).

Pieter Vermeersch (Kortrijk, Belgium, 1973) lives and works in Turin and Antwerp. Recent exhibitions include *Spring*, Fondation Thalie, Brussels, BE (2021); *At Home*, Laure Genillard, London, UK (2021); *Galerie Perrotin* (solo), Paris, FR (2020); *Museum Leuven* (solo), Leuven, BE (2019); *Galerie Greta Meert* (solo), Brussels, BE (2019); *Office Kersten Geers David Van Severen & Pieter Vermeersch i.c.w. Granstudio*, Maniera, Brussels, BE (2019); *Galerie Perrotin* (solo), New York City, US (2019); *NC-arte* (solo), Bogotá, CO (2019); *Genesis*, L.A.C., Narbonne, FR (2019); *Der Duft der Bilder. Werke der colección olorVISUAL*, Barcelona, Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst, Delmenhorst, DE (2019).

Galleria P420 is pleased to present the exhibition *Resonance* by Riccardo Baruzzi (Lugo, Italy, 1976) and Pieter Vermeersch (Kortrijk, Belgium, 1973), curated by Lilou Vidal in complicity with Luca Cerizza.

Resonance is an exhibition of painting which explores one common aspect of the artists practice, less obvious at first glance than that of painting, the acoustic dimension of their work through the process of an exhibition and a vinyl album.

The show features a continuing interaction of the poetics of two artists through works on canvas, pieces never shown elsewhere, new cycles of paintings, structures wavering between paintings and objects, accompanied by a monumental wall painting by Pieter Vermeersch, in his first collaboration with P420.

Riccardo Baruzzi presents *Rent Strike* for the first time, a cycle of paintings that has to do with the metamorphosis of the concept of the home in recent social history. The home as refuge, but also as right, a right denied to many, leading to new social disparities. The painting is surface, map, plan of a set of often angry, sometimes gentle gestures, in keeping with the theme.

Pieter Vermeersch's painting, on the other hand, stems from the transposition on canvas of intentionally abstract photographic images, patiently and meticulously translated into color, into tone, through the technique of oil painting, to use the words of Luca Cerizza. The result is an oxymoronic "hyperrealist abstraction" that renders a monochrome shaded into another tone, a chromatic gradient of pure light that reflects the changing nature of all surfaces. His wall painting *Blue (0%-100%)*, 21,5 meters long, extends like a temporal space of expressive acceleration and becomes a setting for the arrangement of the exhibition.

But the encounter of these two artists culminates in the creation of a joint work, made specifically for this project at Galleria P420.

The series of paintings *Quadri Audiofili* by Baruzzi and the harmonic, tonal movements of Vermeersch suggest a synesthetic transposition – as Lilou Vidal notes – a perceptive transference between the visual and acoustic worlds, giving rise to *Ecnanoser*, or the word *Resonance* read backwards, as the title of the vinyl record co-produced by the two artists.

Suggesting an unknown, futuristic language, a forgotten tongue, an echo of echoes, the vinyl record *Ecnanoser* opens up another path of access to the language of the two artists. This record specially produced on this occasion and published and distributed by NERO, features a paint and graphic interventions and two new soundtracks composed by the artists as well as new essays written by Luca Cerizza and Lilou Vidal.

Cinque Punti, among the soundtracks of *Ecnanoser*, will be performed by Riccardo Baruzzi with the collaboration of the soprano Elena Busni on Saturday 8 May, at the times 12.00, 17.00 and 18.30, for a limited number of visitors, by reservation only.

Resonance / Ecnanoser

(An exhibition and a record)

"What if one changed the needle and directed it on its return journey along a tracing which was not derived from the graphic translation of sound, but existed of itself naturally—well, to put it plainly, along the coronal suture, for example. What would happen? A sound would necessarily result, a series of sounds, music..."

(Rainer Maria Rilke¹)

How to apprehend the work of two artist painters whose approaches are apparently so different, as is the case with Riccardo Baruzzi and Pieter Vermeersch?

Perhaps by concentrating on one common aspect of their practice, less obvious at first glance than that of painting: the sonic dimension of their work.

Resonance / Ecnanoser offers a synesthetic experience, a perceptual back-and-forth between visual and acoustic universes in the form of an exhibition and a vinyl album.

"The art of painting and drawing is dependent upon this dynamic structure [resonance], as are all arts of the visible. [...] When it comes to sound—and it is no accident that sound gives us the paradigmatic term "resonance"—this is most properly an appeal: it makes itself heard, which means that in showing itself it also shows distance, the distance from which it originates."²

In this double title, *Resonance*—the name of the exhibition—throws into question the polysemic definition of resonance as well as its qualities of amplification and reduction, spatiality and temporality.

Conversely, *Ecnanoser*—the name of the album—acts as interference. A reverse translation of the word "resonance" (spelled backwards), *Ecnanoser* conjures up a subterranean and little-known aspect of the artist's practice. Sounding like an unfamiliar, futurist dialect, a forgotten language, like the echo of an echo, *Ecnanoser*

offers a different foray into the language of the artists.

The brief history of the vinyl record is closely linked to that of the artistic avant-garde and its methods in alternative creation.

After Edison's invention of the phonograph,³ the first gramophones, and in 1901 the first records with the "His Master's Voice" logo (featuring the famous fox terrier from a painting by Francis Barraud created in 1898),⁴ the electric record player arrived on the market in 1919.

It would not be long before the artistic avant-garde began developing an interest in the medium of the vinyl record as a field and laboratory for new creative explorations, as seen in 1922 by László Moholy-Nagy's text *New Forms in Music. Potentialities of the Phonograph*.

This appetite for the record as object would be pursued by Futurist, Dada and Surrealist artists, whose desire to destroy the classical canons of music listening and search for new ways of plastic experimentation from World War II up to today never ceased, producing a plethora of artist-created vinyl albums.

Both as visual and sound supports, these albums, which explored the area of the cover as much as its interstices, and the object of the vinyl disc, became expansive pieces in themselves.

In addition to visual and graphic interventions by artists, the record became a space for the transmission of practices, as was the case in the art performances of Fluxus, the audio poems of Henri Chopin, the music and sound and spoken pieces by Martin Kippenberger and Lawrence Weiner, the underground poetry compilations of the *Giorno Poetry Systems* collective (founded by John Giorno with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin), and even the songs of Dorothy Lannone (from her artist book-album, *Follow me. I Am Tender, I Am Just* from 1977), to name but a few.

Despite an inevitable slowdown with the arrival of the CD-ROM and the extreme digitalization of media, artists seem never to have lost their

interest in the tactility and freedom provided by the record. Like super 8 and 16mm films, polaroids, photographs and silver-based techniques, the analogue qualities of the record hold an incarnate plasticity that has led many artists today to revisit the medium, while album covers offer possibilities comparable to those of the artist's book.

From an acoustic point of view, experimentation with music by non-musician artists has expanded the horizon of new directions in sound through its creative and liberating dilettantism: "In the end it should be understood that dilettantism is the form through which the new is almost always expressed."⁵

It is precisely this "non-specialist" relationship that Riccardo Baruzzi and Pieter Vermeersch each maintain with music, despite both having played in noise music bands. Riccardo Baruzzi performed with *Juglandacee* in 2008, followed by *Sportswear Revenge*,⁶ while Pieter Vermeersch created his first pieces with his group *SPASM* in 2002.⁷ The concept behind *SPASM* concerts was to play bursts of improvisations lasting ten to fifteen minutes maximum, in the darkness of back rooms of art venues, with no rehearsals beforehand. As for Riccardo Baruzzi, he continued his exploration of music inside the artist studio, in a game of back-and-forth between painting, drawing and music, with homemade invented instruments, reminiscent of Dubuffet's first *Musical Experiences*:⁸

*In my music I wanted to place myself in the position of a man of fifty thousand years ago, a man who ignores everything about western music and invents a music for himself without any reference, without any discipline, without anything that would prevent him to express himself freely and for his own good pleasure.*⁹

The artist remains above all an explorer of possibilities, as Michael Glasmeier points out in his essay *Musique des Anges*: "[...] Artists are practitioners and researchers, like Nanook the Eskimo, who in Robert Flaherty's film of the same name, bites

1 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Primal Sound*, https://archive.org/stream/rilkeprimalsound/rilke_primal_sound_djvu.txt.

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Résonance du sens" in *Spectre II, Résonances* (May 2020): 14–15.

3 The phonograph was invented by Thomas Edison in 1877. Keep in mind that Thomas

Edison, an advocate of theological ideas, developed plans to build a machine "necrophone" that would be able to record the voices of the dead. See on this subject the work of philosopher Philippe Baudouin in *Thomas Edison – Le Royaume de l'au-delà (The Realms Beyond)*

Précédé de Machines nécrophoniques (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2015).

4 How interesting that one of the most famous logos of sound excellence comes from a painting and a voice from beyond the grave. The slogan *His Master's Voice* and the image of Nipper the dog come from

the title of a painting by Francis Barraud from 1898 representing a dog that belonged to his deceased brother, from whom he had inherited a phonograph cylinder along with a recording of this same brother's voice. The painter depicted a scene in which the animal is listening to the phonograph and seems

to recognize the voice of his deceased master.

5 Egon Friedell, *Abschaffung des Genies* (Vienna, Munich: Löcker, 1984), 269.

6 *Juglandacee* was formed in 2008 by Lorenzo Senni, Riccardo Baruzzi, and Enrico Malatesta, followed by the electro-acoustic project

into a record out of curiosity in order to gain physical access to the laws of mechanical noise.”¹⁰

The fascination of artists for this black object with microscopic grooves whose [sound]wave cuts seem to correspond to an enigmatic kind of writing—might it not come from the intrinsic visual and tactile quality of sound? We speak of writing music, of cutting albums; an imprint, a graphic physicality happens in the matter, in this temporal circular space, drawn from the sensual contact of a needle transmitting the invisibility of a single sound information become a reproducible and shared form of listening..

The work of Riccardo Baruzzi and Pieter Vermeersch presented in this exhibition is at first glance silent, just like the vinyl object when not activated by a machine. Yet, by coming a little closer, their inner sound, their profoundly acoustic and rhythmic dimension, is unveiled.

While Riccardo Baruzzi's 2019–2021 series *Quadri Audiofili* (Audiophile Paintings) seems to want to contain the din of complex narratives related to the history of painting with the help of soundproofing panels, in a manner both virtuoso and thrown-together, Pieter Vermeersch's paintings on marble rise up like slabs (discs) of age-old geological records, reactivated through the accident, stratum, and subjectivity of painting.

The meeting of these two artists culminates in the creation of their collaborative work conceived specifically for this project in the P420 space.

The twenty-one and half meter wall painting *Blue (0%-100%)* created by Pieter Vermeersch stretches like a temporal space of pictorial acceleration. The piece becomes a welcome zone in which Riccardo Baruzzi intervenes through different series of gestures and concrete and graphic actions in the degrees of paint, like a diamond-tipped needle scratching across the grooves of a record to draw out a new resonance from its pictorial musicality.

Lilou Vidal

Riccardo Baruzzi *Audiophile Paintings*

The immediate impression one has when visiting the studio of an artist often says more about their practice than any rational attempt at theoretical study.

Stepping through the doors of Riccardo Baruzzi's studio in Bologna, I am from the first room seized by its paintings, first-rate stereo sound system, and agogô, cymbal, and tambourine hanging near a concrete wall covered in late nineteenth-century (stamped) decorative floral motifs.

Everything seems oddly interdependent, the work as well as the domestic environment.

It would indeed be difficult to define the work of Riccardo Baruzzi according to a univocal approach to painting, drawing or music. The strength of his work resides precisely in its refusal to fall into one category or another. Sound, painting and drawing function as one entity.

The *Quadri Audiofili* (Audiophile Paintings) series from 2019 synthesizes the affective and non-hierarchical relationship between these practices. The paintings are audiophile; they love acoustics and are fitted out with materials to achieve a quality of sound. With the structural fulcrum of the painting—the wooden frame—in mind, the artist emphasizes this element by accentuating geometries, in a process that seems as much inherited from the preoccupations of Constructivists, Minimalists or the Supports Surfaces movement as a desire to escape them.

With agility, the artist fabricates a hybrid patchwork of elements that a priori have no common link other than perhaps bricolage. MDF wood, sound-absorbing panels, a metallic structure for shelving, all are embedded in the composition in the same way as are the paintings, drawn on wood or canvas, some semi-abstract, others figurative, surreptitiously evoking master painters of the twentieth century, as suggested by the title of the pieces: *Quadro audiofilo*, *Emil Nolde* (2019), for example.

The visual recognition of these paintings seems filtered by the rhythmic rapidity of their execution, in which the immediacy of the gesture is similar to that of the line of a drawing. The sound-absorbing panels and empty spaces that open onto the surface of the wall invite us to a quiet critique of painting, whose historical noisy brouhaha is muffled and confined in this frame from which the only way out might be the silent white wall towards which the artist draws our gaze.

As I write this text, I happen upon the catalogue of the artist Isa Genzken's first major exhibition in 1979 at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld. The image is an interior view of a closed frame window looking out onto nothing but itself, a white opacity and a turntable sitting on its ledge in the foreground. This could be interpreted as a total reversal of the Alberti metaphor of painting “as open window” in favor of the stereophonic and object-related; an opening toward another spatiality to which the empiricism of the auditory senses might lead us. Just like Riccardo Baruzzi's *Quadri Audiofili*. Or the ready-made antennas stuck into concrete sculptures in Isa Genzken's *Weltempfänger* (*World Receiver*) series from the 1980s.

While the *Quadri Audiofili* assemblages seem to both contain and liberate complex narratives linked to the history of painting, the previously unheard sound piece *Cinque Punti* (Five Points), 2021, that Riccardo Baruzzi created specifically for this vinyl album is rooted in the emblematic power of song, instrument and resonance.

Following a random score questioning the minor status of drawing with respect to painting, a soprano walks a figure 8 around the space of the P420 gallery, with two metal bells attached to her feet setting the cadence (bells that turn up again in the *Giunchi* sculptures). The soprano sings, vocalizing phrases taken from among the five rare paragraphs where drawing is mentioned in the 935 chapters of Leonardo de Vinci's *A Treatise on Painting*.

Meanwhile, the artist strikes his instruments made from a tambou-

Sportswear Revenge until 2011. “*Sportswear Revenge* implements a wide palette of sounds; try to add to the crackling and buzzing electronic stream of analog particles spat out by Baruzzi's turntable, played with several different objects on the top, the focused and personal way to

play percussions by Malatesta and the digital crispy real time sound synthesis by Lorenzo Senni; improvisation and research among static canyons of sound and extreme music.” See <http://www.q-o2.be/en/event/sportswear-revenge-riccardo-baruzzilorenzo-sennienrico-malatesta/>.

7 *SPASM* was founded by the non-musician trio of Dieter Roelstraete (curator), Diederik Peeters (performer and actor) and Pieter Vermeersch (artist) in 2002. Their last concert dates back to 2010. “*SPASM* have performed live in museums, galleries and art spaces in Amsterdam, Brussels,

Berlin, Munich, Reykjavik and Vancouver among others, and have released a split EP entitled “*Sonderweg*” with Building Transmissions on Curious Records label. *SPASM* have worked with a wide variety of artists, such as Gabriel Kuri, Hermann Maier Neustadt and Steven Shearer; their

peripheral activities include poster designs, publications, installations, a *SPASM*-wear clothesline and DJ-sets (under the “Gog & Magog” moniker).” See <https://spinspin.be/diederik-peeters/spasm/>.
8 See Jean Dubuffet's 1961 text *Musical Experiences* and the album of the same name

rine and cymbal plate placed on top of a loudspeaker, and crochet needles work to vary the frequency of the beats. The shifting, amplification and lowering in decibel of the voice in the course of the soprano's displacement along a loop (8), as well as the total lack of editing, form part of the composition.

The method is both raw and homemade, calling to mind the inventiveness of the *bricoleur* and his tools that Riccardo Baruzzi is particularly fond of. Inherited from the thinking of Levi Strauss in his *The Savage Mind* from 1962, the notion of bricolage is used to describe the construction of mythological thought. Bricolage is a technique that consists in using whatever one has at hand to come up with something new. According to Levi Strauss, in contrast to the engineer, the *bricoleur* works manually and with no forethought, creatively improvising things out of preexisting elements to find a new function for which they were not intended:

The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand' [...]. It is to be defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the 'bricoleur' himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that 'they may always come in handy'.¹¹

The *Giunchi* sculptural pieces, created from bars, metal tubes (some painted), bells, whistles and dried flowers—inspired by the natural, romantic and bric-a-brac world of bamboo forests and hunting and fishing huts on the edges of the Ravenna lagoon (a landscape dear and familiar to the artist)—embody, similarly to his *Quadri Audiofili* or sound pieces, this pronounced taste for the instrumentality and esthetic of bricolage.

The archaic simplicity of the sticks and their potential for displacement,

like a pictorial sign moving through space, seems to be a nod to the "pilgrim" of the avant-garde, André Cadere, and his round wooden bars.

This predilection for the concrete and the improvised returns in his series of "Alphabets" first created in 2014 with *ABCD*, and in the form of an acrostic with letters from the word *Vertigine* in 2017 in Brazil. Each letter corresponds to the process of real actions, experience and depletion of gesture and materials required to complete the drawing. For example, in *ABCD*, the letter *D* is paired with the action *three footmarks and four fingermarks*, and in *Vertigine*, the letter *E* with *difficult depletion of the remainder has been pointed out for a quarter of an hour*.¹² The artist revisits the exercise in *61 – 66 – 68 – 79 – 121* (2021), his latest version, made up of a series of numbers drawn again from the five chapters of Leonardo da Vinci's *A Treatise on Painting*.

In Baruzzi's most recent series of paintings made by watercolor pencils, drawings on canvas, traced nervously and in a quick rhythm (then wiped with a sponge or damp cloth), seem to dissolve into the liquidity of monochrome color questioning the spectral status of drawing in relation to painting.

Despite the immediacy of their aspect, these pieces come out of an experiment in appearance and disappearance, of improvisation and composition more complex than the "laissez-faire" inherent to automatism, rooted in a subtle inverted relationship by which the drawing prefigures and defines the existence of the painting and the color.

The range of images alternates between an acceleration and deceleration of faces, hermaphrodite figures, *veduta* landscapes and pop elements... all these subjects are sketched in a latent state of mind and seem to emerge and disappear beneath the pencil strokes, liquid accidents and erasures, leading to the coalescence and appearance of the work. This shift towards a pictorial reality in a liquid, floating state recalls the dream shapes in *clear waters* where fleeting images are born, as well as the obscure

depths of *still waters* where myths and fantasies lie, about which Bachelard writes in *Water and Dreams (Essay on the Imagination of Matter)*: "[...] water is not only a *group* of images revealed in wandering contemplation, a series of broken, momentary reveries; it is a *mainstay* for images, a mainstay that quickly becomes a *contributor* of images, a founding contributor for images. Thus, little by little, in the course of ever more profound contemplation, water becomes an element of materializing imagination."¹³

The tone of these figurative monochromes in pink, red, blue and grey comes from a simple aquarelle pencil, whose reference number along with an atmospheric impression of the day provide the title of the work, like in *3888 venerdì mattina di luce artificiale* [3888 Friday morning with artificial light] and *1600/750 domenica sera senza aperitivo* [1600_750 Sunday evening with no aperitif]. Here again the approach is concrete (the object, the tool, and its reference number) and accompanied by an attempt to evade the classic codes and canons of modern painting, as seemingly implied by the atmospheric title of the *veduta* juxtaposed with the sketch of a stuffed dog cartoon character with the same format: *8835_38 domenica con luce al tramonto* [8835_38 Sunday with light at sunset] or this other one *8835_38 domenica sera con la finestra aperta* [8835_38 Sunday evening with open window], 2020 (both sounding like impressionist painting titles.)

This tangential approach to the normative definition of painting and penchant for the infra-ordinary, the rapid gesture, sensuality and economy of form and means, combined with a desire for the de-hierarchization of painting in real space¹⁴ leads me to what became apparent when I first discovered the work of Riccardo Baruzzi: an affinity with the avant-garde Belgian artist Guy Mees. For Mees, pictoriality was the foundation of his work while never resorting to traditional means of painting. His unique process led him to his major body of work in the 1980s, *Lost Space*, in which, using simple pieces of color paper cutouts,

from 1960–1961 in which Dubuffet performs his chanted poems *La fleur de barbe* and musical creations using odd, rare and homemade instruments.

9 Jean Dubuffet, 1966, quoted in Giorgio Maffei's *Records by artists, 1958-1990* (Ravenna: Danilo Montanari, 2013), 78.

10 Michael Glasmeier, "Music of the Angels" in Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier, *Broken Music* (Berlin: DAAD and gelbe Musik, 2018), 44.

11 Claude Lévi-Straus, *The Savage Mind* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 17–18.

12 The original version in Italian reads "esaurimento difficile-

so del resto punta da un quarto d'ora".

13 Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams, An Essay on the Imagination of Water*, (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 11.

14 Think of the interplay of transparencies, the empty spaces and horizontal displacement of works in the "bilancione" or

"padellone", a type of fishing net, in his exhibition *Del disegno e del deserto rosso*, 2018.

15 Obviously the octave can be further subdivided, and some Indian musicians insist on a division into 49 or even 66 intervals. The 22 *shrutis* correspond to the intervals believed to be perceptible

(with a certain difficulty) to the human ear.

16 Though Tony Conrad has indicated the importance of his role to introduce La Monte Young to the mathematics of overtone series, and as a result for the music of Young's Theatre of Eternal Music (see the text "Lysophobia: On Four Violins",

he merged form, support and color to create an experience both minimal and complete within the pictorial space.

But unlike Mees, Baruzzi seems to want to perpetuate the canvas as support. It is often left untouched, like a blank drawing page, or untreated and hollowed out, with the frame visible, or else covered with a thick coating of oil paint (like cement, in which he speedily and skillfully draws shapes in negative, such as the horses and horsemen in the series *Chili di pittura* from 2016.) With Baruzzi, a painting is constantly revealing its internal organization. The canvas remains a place of experimentation and improvisation, like a score on which the tangible reality of actions and things can be read, just like what is being represented, so there is no need to abandon it for Baruzzi, just to question it unceasingly.

In the series *Mappa fiorita* (2018) Baruzzi engages in a complex double exercise in representation (in this instance, a still life) and the reversal of interpretation: from the wall to the canvas surface. He draws and paints in pastel on the wooden frame itself, letting the white area of the wall appear through, while slipping in pieces of torn paper to form potential patterns for the image painted on the surface of the translucent canvas. This same lightness and play of superimposition, transparency and semi-nudity of the painting resurface in the series *Abaco* (2018), inspired, as the title suggests, by those old arithmetic tools where the rapidity of gestures resembles a random system of notation, recalling Milan Grygar's *Fingerpartitur* (Finger Score) from 1972.

Riccardo Baruzzi's work draws its profoundly poetic dimension from this tense and interdependent relationship to drawing, painting and sculpture. The artist uses sound for its graphic and pictorial qualities, as shown in the sessions he performed with musician Enrico Malatesta. *Mini Strutture Sparse* (2013) saw the live performance of a painting session in which the artist entrusted his materials (a piece of paper, paintbrush, pastel, piece of wood, etc...) to the musician as so many new instruments, to gen-

erate new, graphic, colored and pictorial signs.

A desire for a permeability to the world and a breaking down of the view of painting towards an acoustic and poetic dimension is at the heart of the artist's work.

If painting were to have a sound, it might indeed be the concrete one of *Sound Painting*, 2021, the most recent sound piece created by Riccardo Baruzzi using homemade instruments he cobbled together, or that of a vocal resonance singing the resistance of "five points" of drawings (*Cinque Punti*, 2021) in the space of a gallery...

Lilou Vidal

Pieter Vermeersch and natural tuning

"Western music is fast
because it's not in tune"

(Terry Riley)

Even before certain musicians defined as "minimalists," such as Tony Conrad, La Monte Young and Terry Riley, drank from the fountain of knowledge of northern Indian classical music (Hindustani), the American composer Harry Partch (1901–1974) had suggested that there was something deeply wrong, or inexact, in the system of harmony applied by western music for over two centuries. The "problem" began with the work of the German organist and music theorist Andreas Werckmeister (1645–1706), who through a slight adjustment of the fifths and, as a consequence, of all the other notes of the scale, found a system of tuning that make it possible to transpose compositions into all keys. Werckmeister's "good temperament" divided the octave into twelve equivalent interval/tones. This made it possible to easily modulate from one key to another, as J.S. Bach demonstrated with his *Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722–44), a true "propaedeutic" application of Werckmeister's system, in two books of preludes and fugues.

Thanks to a compromise, in short, Werckmeister's system corrected the harmonies based on physical vibrations (as we know, sound is produced

by the vibrations of elastic bodies), for the purposes of greater compositional freedom. Able to move without hindrance on uniform ground, without difficulties, music became faster, giving rise first to the classical period, and then the romantic, after which the 12-tone system of Arnold Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School reworked the same idea using different rules, without ever really, "acoustically" casting doubt on its validity.

But music is far more complex than the relationships identified by Werckmeister and so clearly represented by the keyboard of a piano-forte. This fact was well known to other civilizations, outside the West, such as that of India, as we were saying, which divides the scale (*saptak*) into 22 microtonal intervals (*shrutis*).¹⁵ And it was known to Harry Partch, who proposed a system of "just intonation" based on natural tuning, in which the octave is divided into 43 pitches measured in cents (100 cents for each semitone). This system was adopted by the minimalists mentioned above, and other exponents of American "New Music."¹⁶

This long preamble is to say that, although it might not seem like an obvious association, I believe the pictorial (and musical!) work of Pieter Vermeersch is connected with this idea of naturally "tuned" music, so synthetically outlined above. At this point, however, I ought to explain why and how this musical discussion is linked to the language of art in general, and to that of Vermeersch in particular.

Vermeersch's painting stems from the transposition on canvas of intentionally abstract photographic images. Using a grid system, they are patiently and painstakingly translated into color, into tone (to use a term that applies both to painting and to music). In line with a certain Pop-Minimal-Conceptual way of thinking, that through a process-based practice sets out to question the role of the individual-artist-author, Vermeersch defines a series of rules a priori, which he then follows with almost mechanical discipline. This process, which the artist himself has defined with an oxymoron of "hyper-

1996), it remains true that the musical piece that has furnished the most complete and radical response to the western system of harmony made popular by the *Well-Tempered Clavier* of J.S. Bach is the *Well-Tuned Piano* (1964–74) by Young.

17 "The characteristic frequency of a note is simply that of the

fundamental of a series of other notes that are simultaneously present in the base note. These other notes are called harmonics (or partials or overtones). (...) They are important because they determine the timbre of a note, and at the same time grant clarity and polish to the sound" (Ottó Károlyi,

La grammatica della musica. La teoria, le forme e gli strumenti musicali, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Einaudi, 1969 Torino, p.21).

18 "Indeed, the movement from one note to another is what distinguishes Indian music from Western music. In Indian music the transition is always affect-

ed by a delicate hint, a nuance." In Reginald & Jamila Massey, *The Music of India*, Kahn & Averill, London 1976, p. 105.
19 "...a new way of hearing music – as part of the ambience of the environment, just as the colour of the light and the sound of the rain were parts of that ambience," Brian

Eno, September 1975, liner notes of *Discreet Music*, 1975.
20 "And I realised what I was really doing was using music in the same way that you'd use light in a space. (...) And I wanted music that was a steady state like that, where you'd put it in place and it stabilises the emotional climate in a way" (Brian

realistic abstraction," produces paintings in which the almost total monochrome shifts into another tone, as if to reveal the mutable nature of the pictorial matter.

Gradual, very slow movements happen in Vermeersch's paintings, just as the procedure utilized by the artist to spread these fields is very slow. It involves almost imperceptible movements that do not indicate relationships of harmonic proportions, so much as passages of microtonal intervals, or the resonance of a series of "over-tones," of "harmonics" inside a single note.¹⁷ Vermeersch's painting is modal rather than harmonic. Like a continuing, slow vibration, like the movement of the color gradient that changes with minimum variations, his painting in any case translates a sense of slowness, if not of immobility.¹⁸ Like the original vibration of the Om in Hindu cosmology, translated by the sound of the tambura and its drones, the idea is to listen to the multiplicity inside singularity. Vermeersch's painting is slow because it is in tune, we might say.

Painting of this ilk naturally expands in space, it "vibrates" beyond the frame, augmenting its eminently "environmental" quality, where chromatic characteristics (still in the dual meaning applying to music and painting) triumph over those of a harmonic-compositional nature.¹⁹ For this reason, we might insert his work in a genealogical lineage that descends from Monet and his Water Lilies, all the way to Mark Rothko, Yves Klein, and then Ettore Spalletti, and certain paintings and installations by Rudolf Stingel: a genealogy that also takes form through forms of installation and not necessarily painterly materials (James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Olafur Eliasson and Ann Veronica Janssens, among others). But it could also meet with an equivalent in certain "ambient" forms of music, from that of Brian Eno, particularly the "generative" ones, to a whole series of more recent ambient, "glitch" "illbient" and "drone" musics based on a vibrant stasis that makes its own space.²⁰

And so, the instrumental track *Remaining*, composed for the record accompanying the exhibition

Resonance / Ecnanoser, in which Vermeersch's artworks establish a dialogue with the ones of Riccardo Baruzzi, is centered on slow harmonic passages of distorted electric guitar with a "drone" quality, and it is inserted between two calm and meditative moments²¹.

Almost from the outset, in fact, Vermeersch has amplified – again the ambiguity with the terminology of music is intentional – the scale of his painting, first through performative practices where the painting expands in time and space (in the context of the exhibition *Off the Hook*, 2000), then in a series of wall paintings (since 2001) and spatial interventions, where the expanded chromatism establishes a dialogue with architecture and the natural landscape, becoming atmosphere, space, landscape or – more precisely – their stylized illusion. Also outside the museum and the gallery, Vermeersch's hues translate a temporal dimension through imperceptible gradients that vibrate like long drones, like an infinity of harmonics that occupy a space-time. In those projects of an expanded painting, which not by chance nearly always follow a horizontal movement, "time becomes space," as Gurnemanz tells Parsifal in the first act of Wagner's opera.²²

But if the interventions of a more architectonic nature are able to arrive at an immersive character²³, it is also true that Vermeersch does not abandon himself to a consolatory dimension of painting, which we might define as "New Age". While the artist himself states the relationship between photography and his painting on a practical level, it is also true that there is one of a more ontological type, in which the painting translates the "mystery" of photography that lies in its process of development and printing, when an image emerges from a monochrome surface immersed in an "amniotic" liquid. Vermeersch's painting looks to that potential state, that "biological" nature of the image, where the monochrome conceals a promise that is yet to be kept. There is a sort of tension that makes the surface chromatically alive, but opens the

works to a series of other questions of a linguistic nature, which continue to run through his oeuvre.

Especially in recent years, there is a continuing challenge to the status of painting in his works, the function of the artist-author in relation to materials, if not directly to nature and time. From about a decade some of the works put gestural actions (brushstrokes, fingerprints) into relation with materials like marble, or with color fields. Or monochromatic fields are juxtaposed with marble and with fossil wood, conveying the temporal dimension contained within the nature of the materials themselves. The process the artist obtains through human means in his canvases, is substituted with a "ready-made" material already having painterly and temporal qualities.

In short, the sense of slowness if not immobility transmitted by many works by Vermeersch often betrays the difficulty of resignation to this stasis. No small quantity of works, and of the processes behind them, reveal in fact that under (or over) those surfaces, apparently flawless and free of doubts, various tensions are at play: between the monochrome surface and the gesture of the artist, between natural materials and human intervention, between the uncontrollable unpredictability of marble and the mechanical perfection of the painting, between the rationality of the process and the randomness of the accidents called into play by the artist, between the pursuit of a possible ideal and the relationship with reality.

To inhabit the ambient (sound) does not mean escape from the world, or from ourselves.

Luca Cerizza

Eno, *Re-valuation (A warm feeling)*, "mono.kultur", Berlin, p. 35.

21 The relation between Baruzzi and Vermeersch's artworks could be read as a dialogue between an activity on surfaces (playing the surfaces), and one in spaces (resonating in the space). The first one uses

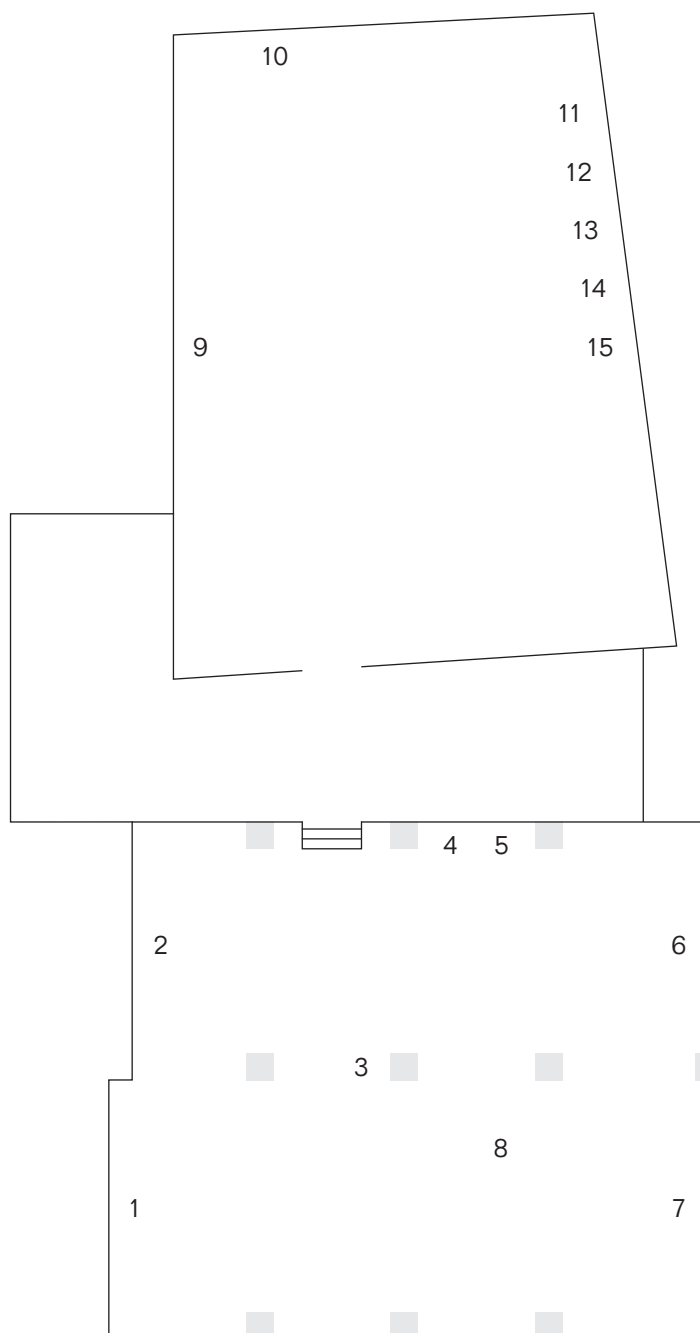
a fast pace, the second a slow one.

22 These words are followed by a change of scene in which the forest vanishes to make room for the Hall of the Grail Castle.

23 "A raga, therefore, must 'dye the mind in colour,'" in Reginald & Jamila Massey, op cit., p. 104.

Exhibited works

- 1 Riccardo Baruzzi, *Quadro audiofilo (Floorplanner)*, 2021
acrylic on canvas, spray on wood, pencil on wood paper,
noise-absorbing panel, 240 × 174 × 8 cm
- 2 Pieter Vermeersch, *Untitled*, 2019
oil on canvas, 3 panels, 285 × 148 cm each
- 3 Riccardo Baruzzi, *Giunco (Floorplanner)*, 2021
iron, spray and rattle, 320 × 40 × 107 cm,
variable installation
- 4 Pieter Vermeersch, *Untitled*, 2021
oil on petrified wood, 60 × 28 × 2 cm
- 5 Pieter Vermeersch, *Untitled*, 2021
oil on petrified wood, 60 × 28 × 2 cm
- 6 Pieter Vermeersch, *Untitled*, 2021
oil on canvas, 230 × 170 cm
- 7 Riccardo Baruzzi, *Quadro audiofilo (Floorplanner)*, 2021
acrylic on canvas, spray on wood, pencil on wood paper,
noise-absorbing panel, 240 × 174 × 8 cm
- 8 Riccardo Baruzzi, *Giunco (Floorplanner)*, 2021
iron, spray and rattle, 320 × 40 × 107 cm,
variable installation
- 9 Riccardo Baruzzi, *Giunco (Floorplanner)*, 2021
iron, spray and rattle, 320 × 40 × 107 cm,
variable installation
- 10 Pieter Vermeersch, *Untitled (Blue 0-100%)*, 2021
acrylic paint on wall, variable dimension
- 11 Riccardo Baruzzi, *060 Rent Strike*, 2021
watercolor pencil on canvas, 160 × 120 cm
- 12 Riccardo Baruzzi, *060 Rent Strike*, 2021
watercolor pencil on canvas, 160 × 120 cm
- 13 Riccardo Baruzzi, *060 Rent Strike*, 2021
watercolor pencil on canvas, 160 × 120 cm
- 14 Riccardo Baruzzi, *060 Rent Strike*, 2021
watercolor pencil on canvas, 160 × 150 cm
- 15 Riccardo Baruzzi, *060 Rent Strike*, 2021
watercolor pencil on canvas, 160 × 120 cm



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Opening times during ArtCity

Friday 7 May:
10.30–13.30 e 15–19.30

Saturday 8 May:
10.30–19.30

performance in the gallery at
12, 17 and 18.30

domenica 9 maggio:

10.30–13.30 and 15–19.30

Entry permitted only with
mask, up to a maximum
number of visitors at one time.
Visitors must comply with
safety regulations to prevent
the spread of Covid19.

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