

RÄ DI MARTINO: ALL OF HIS STEPS WERE SENTIMENTS, ALL OF HIS TEETH WERE IDEAS

23 March – 29 April 2023

In a twist of fate, RÄ di Martino brings one of Italy's most famous actors and directors back from the dead. Having passed away in 2002, Carmelo Bene is reanimated at the will of a woman – the artist – to perform lines from his archive's notes on a never realised opera, *Il Vampiro*. The undead performs the undead: the writer performs his Dracula, and his victim. But who is the victim here? In these lines and notes the writers' sympathies lie clearly with he of the longer teeth:

"The 'incurable dandy' vampire is an un/conscious projection of his own victims. No more, no less. The victim is a victim of himself. As for the restlessness of the undead, they are truly strange and incurable creatures. A miracle is called for: Our Lady of the Vampires."

To direct is to have a soft sort of power, as is to charm. One ability of the original Dracula character of Bram Stoker is to charm people in a manner between gentility and bewitchment. The ability to influence and inflect someone's movement is something that Di Martino, Bene, and the vampire share. Where Bene's character is concerned though, the fault for this power-imbalance seems to lie curiously with the victim, as: *"Alas, the majority of women [the stereotypical Gothic victims] take a fancy to the 'demon', to the 'other'",* marrying him *"out of the lazy haste of habit, turning him into no more than a pipe-and-slippers figure. Why? Because the 'victim' initially adores being scared, taking on a double-edged role, yet she will not endure the coquetry of such a game for long, and she soon (how very soon!) will call back her fear to heel."*

This is a dated narrative that we recognise all too well. Debated in courts, newspapers, and society at large, it is a question of when an individual becomes a victim. Expertly explored in the recent theatre production *Prima Facie* starring Jodie Comer, this issue leads logically to the worrying question of power and belief: When can our very real 'demons' rely on this ambiguity in court, and why does the same not apply in reverse?

In the light of ambiguity threatening justice, it has to be conceded that both Stoker's Dracula and the vampires that have since been conjured in text, film and TV, seem to hold a near endless allure for a broad range of audiences. Perhaps, as the cliché goes, it is a matter of us taking thrill from a little fear, so long as we can close the book.

Accompanying the central video installation are copies of photographic images from the archive as much as from Bene's texts which Di Martino has extracted and appropriated. A selection of telling moments and gestures frozen in black and white are ripped through with a violent passion only to be theatrically healed in the Kintsugi tradition, suggesting the tears and reparations made to the lives of victims and villains. With regards to Bene, these images of him appearing *"immersed in the darkness of an indefinite space, enveloped in a nostalgic aura"* is perhaps, as Brizia Minerva put it, *"the signs of a life gone by. Perhaps his having become something else, a digital image"* (Brizia Minerva, *"Carmelo Bene. Là dove muore, canta"*, 2023).

Di Martino offers an image of Bene as 'something else' absolute. In an ironic homage to the reputation of the actor/director, Di Martino plays with the permeable membrane between reality and fiction, having Bene appear in the video through 3D reconstruction, with a voice modelled on the actor, Lino Musella. Perfected in the gaming industry, this life-like visual rendering is new to Di Martino's practice. Aurally, she used software and the aid of musician Simone Pappalardo to analyse the harmonic components of her actor's voice, transforming the sounds of each word into the melody of an accompanying score. The result is a musicality closely linked to the text in a process that echoes Carmelo Bene's research on his own voice using the equipment of his day. Across the monitors, while one figure of the actor comes alive and speaks, the others wait accompanied by the music produced from the voice, and subtly fidget in sonic harmony.

Special thanks go to the Archivio Carmelo Bene, Lecce, who produced the video 'Là dove muore, canta', and the original photographic series. An artist book 'Carmelo Bene, Là dove muore, canta' edited by Humboldt books and produced by Archivio Carmelo Bene accompanies the film and research.

Special thanks to Lindsay at IMT & Harriet & Mirren at Jerwood for tech loans

RÄ DI MARTINO

Rä di Martino (b.1975 Rome) deals with our perception of reality and fiction, drawing attention to the absurdity of representing either. The artist's background in theatre and her passion for film emerge not just in her videos, but in photographic and installation work. Sets, actors and props are used variously to pick apart subjects as diverse as human relationships, cinematographic traditions, the theatre of war, and the fabrication of history.

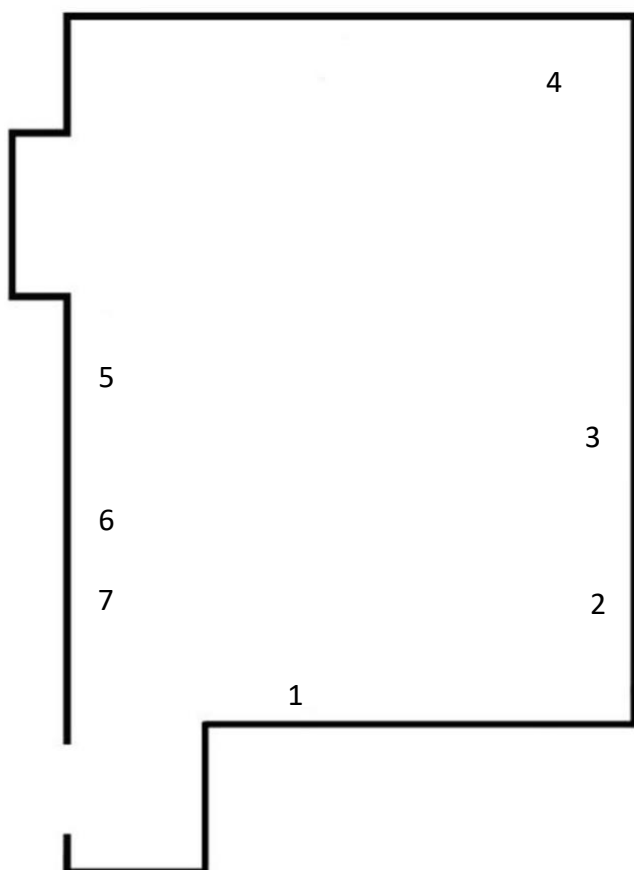
Di Martino studied in London where she graduated with an MFA at the Slade School of Art. She won a fellowship at Columbia University, spending a few years in New York, before moving back to Italy. Her practice explores the passage of time, as well as the discrepancies that differentiate epic narratives from lived experiences. Her works are characterised by a tension between pathos and a certain detachment: a disconnectedness that interrupts the synchronicity binding image and text.

Her films, video installations and photographs have been shown in world-wide institutions, museums and film festivals including: MoMA-PS1, New York; Tate Modern, London; MCA, Chicago; Macro, Rome; Palazzo Grassi-Punta della Dogana, Venice; Museo Novecento, Florence; Artists Space, New York; Museion, Bozen; Magasin, Grenoble; the Busan Biennial; Manifesta; Torino International Film Festival, Kino der Kunst, Munich, Viper Basel and Transmediale Berlin.

In 2014 she presented her first medium length documentary *The Show MAS Go On* at the Venice International Film festival winning the Gillo Pontecorvo award and SIAE award and winning a *nastro d'argento* for best docu-film. In 2018 her first feature film *Controfigura*, winner of the *l'Eurimages Lab Award*, was presented at the Venice Film festival and was nominated for the *Nastri d'Argento* best docufilm. In 2018/2019 she won the *Mibac - Italian Council* and developed the video installation and a monographic book for the project *Afterall* shown at *Mattatoio*, Rome (2020), *Kunstmuseum St. Gallen*, Zurich (2020) and *Copperfield*, London (2021).

Her recent solo exhibitions include *Play it again*, Forte Belvedere, Florence (2022); *Le città di Bolo*, Galleria Valentina Bonomo, Rome (2022); *Rä di Martino*, Museo del '900, Florence (2019), and *Pilgrimage*, Fondazione Volume!, Rome, (2019).

Her group exhibitions include *What a Wonderful World*, MAXXI, Rome (2022); *A LOVER'S DISCOURSE: FRAGMENTS*, Monica De Cardenas, Milan (2022); *Io dico Io*, Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna, Rome (2021); *Simone Carella - Io poeto tu*, Macro, Rome (2021); 62nd edition of *Premio Termoli* (nominated artist), MACTE, Rome (2021); *La Vita Nova*, Museo di Scultura Antica Barracco, Rome (2021); *Around the World in 96 minutes*, Townsend, New York (2020); *Swimming Pool – Troubled Waters*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2020); *Metamorphoses Overdrive*, KunstMuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2020); *Stardust: Convergence – 5 MOSTRE*, American Academy in Rome (2020); *Insieme, mura aureliane*, Roma (2020), and *Wall Eyes, Looking at Italy and Africa*, curated by Ilaria Bernardi, Fondazione Musica per Roma (2020).



1. *Là dove muore, canta #1*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
44 x 57 cm (framed)
2. *Là dove muore, canta #3*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
57 x 44 cm (framed)
3. *Là dove muore, canta, #6*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
40 x 57 (framed)
4. *Là dove muore, canta*, 2022-2023
Five channel video
16 minutes
5. *Là dove muore, canta #7*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
40 x 57 cm (framed)
6. *Là dove muore, canta #5*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
57 x 44 cm (framed)
7. *Là dove muore, canta #2*, 2022-2023
Archival pigment prints, gold leaf
44 x 57 cm (framed)