

PAUL FERMAN

permanent past

curated by Jonathan Turner

opening: Tuesday June 4th, 2019 - 6 pm

closing: Thursday June 27th 2019

opening hours: from Monday to Friday, 4-8 pm

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STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI is proud to present *Permanent Past*, solo show by Australian artist **Paul Ferman**.

The project presents a series of large-scale colour photographs on paper and projections which examine the accretions of 28 centuries of Roman habitation. Incorporating his own photographs of the city, archaeological sites, street maps and manipulated scenes from Italian, American and British films set in Rome, Ferman sifts through the sediment of the city to reveal her spectacular periods of great knowledge, artistic creation, science and superstition. In this way, he identifies the relationship between cultural, social and aesthetic trends in contemporary art.

“As an artist who works primarily in photo-based media, I have been exploring how the layering of knowledge and information can be integrated into the conceptual and physical framework of the images I create,” says Ferman. “My investigations are about multiple readings, physical impressions and the unreliability of memory. This is in turn reflected in the processes I use for image-making. I have created works that splice images of contemporary Rome with those of historical significance. There are layers of revealing and concealing elements drawn from cinema, architectural forms, etchings and sites of pilgrimage.”

Permanent Past is made up from two large landscapes, a paper banner with three images printed like a strip of celluloid, and a 5-metre wide projection of 14 works in a loop. The colours are the bright tones of a circus, with a visceral hue. The viewer needs to excavate details from Ferman’s visual collage of 3D, overlapping images, with the subjects sometimes recognisable, sometimes ghostly. We see Bernini’s sculpture of Santa Cecilia, a crowd at St. Peter’s Square, the banks of the Tiber, cars crossing a bridge, a bronze face of Mercury the messenger, a train arriving at a subway station, equestrian statues and smouldering cardinals. Ferman fools the eye. What at first seems to be a collection of statues of goddesses in a neo-classical setting turns out to be a group of showgirls posed in front of Berlusconi’s Rolls Royce. Ferman’s images have a confidence, a sense of brashness and energy. There are traces of refuse and rubbish. Some of the photographs are blotchy and overexposed, with flares, candles and car headlights.

Meanwhile, the film reference are numerous, starting with a scene from *Cabiria*, a black & white epic from 1916 about a naval battle during the Punic Wars. The perception and ingrained memory of our own experiences in Rome are tempered by the events and attitudes captured

in the many films which Ferman specifically references: *Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Belly of an Architect*, *Mamma Roma*, *Night on Earth*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *La Dolce Vita*, *La Grande Bellezza*, *Spartacus*, *Il Sacro GRA*, *Angels & Demons*, *Roma Città Aperta*, *Quo Vadis*, *Love and Anarchy*, *Una Giornata Particolare*, *Roman Holiday* and *I, Claudius*. In his latest series, Ferman targets the sentimental and the sensational. “In some ways, Rome then and Rome now are the same thing, which is why I have layered so many elements of top of one another,” says Ferman. “History overlaps fiction. It represents the evolution of my research exploring different aspects of Italian culture. I look at Rome through the prism of block universe theory. This suggests that the past, present and future exist at the same time. This possibility was suggested by Einstein, and current scientific thinking seems to think it probable. So while from our perspective it might appear that time flows or passes, in the block universe model, there is no specific present moment. In my photographic series *Permanent Past*, a layering of history is compressed in our “present”. It speaks of a city, on a town, on a settlement, on vacant land.”

Paul Ferman has travelled and exhibited regularly in Italy since 1995. Previous photographic series like *Excavare* (2010), *San Motorino* (2013) and *Particle Decay* (2017) testify to his interest in Italian tradition and culture, and his reflections about the manifestation of synchronous time, when the past, present and future and collide. *Permanent Past*, alludes to the peculiarity of the Roman situation, in which ancient remains and contemporary life coexist.

Jonathan Turner, curator

***Permanent Past* by Paul Ferman at STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI comes with the patronage of the Australian Embassy in Rome.**



Since he emerged on the international scene in the late 1980s, Paul Ferman’s work has been widely exhibited in museums and galleries in Australia and Italy, but also in Ireland, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.S. Using a combination of negative film and digital manipulation, his photographic series have been based on such recurring themes as memory and decay. Since 2000, Ferman has produced different series of works inspired by fragile botany, Roman archaeology, Shakespearean tragedy, the demise of his mother, the cynicism of the mass media, the night-lights of Tokyo and the emptiness of the Australian desert. Solo shows include King Street Gallery and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney, Span Gallery in Melbourne, Galleria Il Ponte Contemporanea and Pino Casagrande in Rome, Bencivart in Pesaro, Anita Neugebauer in Basel, OPTS in San Francisco and Front Room Gallery in Singapore. His works have also been included in group shows at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, Museo d’Arte Contemporanea di Gallese (VT), Manly Art Museum in Sydney, Galleria Lipanjepuntin in Trieste, and Gallery Wessel + O’Connor in New York. Currently his series of superimposed photographs based on a tour to the battlefields of the Western Front in France and Belgium is featured in the *Salient* exhibition, touring to six regional public galleries in Australia. Ferman’s large-scale photographs in black + white and colour can be found in the collections of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, The Chartwell Collection in Christchurch (New Zealand), the Macquarie Bank in Sydney and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, among others.