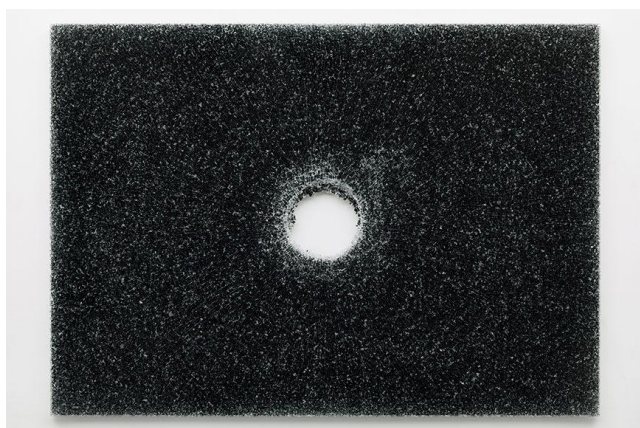


WIDEWALLS

CLAUDIO PARMIGGIANI'S CYCLICAL CREATIVE DESTRUCTION AT
SIMON LEE GALLERY

Art Exhibitions, Review • Abby McKenzie



Although often associated with both the Arte Povera and Conceptual art movements, **Claudio Parmiggiani**'s work enduringly resists any true connection to either. Instead the artist works within a methodology that is as interlocking and mutating as the themes of impermanence, memory and creative destruction in which he works. Born in Luzzara, Italy in 1943, this current exhibition is Parmiggiani's fourth with **Simon Lee Gallery** and represents a continuation of both the aesthetic and conceptual explorations he has been developing since the 1960s.

One of the most prevalent overriding themes throughout the exhibition and Claudio Parmiggiani's broader oeuvre is **an exploration of impermanence and the transience of memory**, both conceptually and materially. Across the spectrum of works displayed currently at Simon Lee, within a number of works the immaterial is equilateral in

importance to the material. This factor can particularly be observed in the series of *black mirror* works created from panes of **layered glass**, smashed and fractured from the centre to create hypnotic voids with cosmological connotations. In terms of their physicality alone, these works are a cyclical representation of the flux of matter – with the memory of prior material forms integral to the conceptual premise of the works. In this regard their principal component of glass in its original state of sand, soda ash and fragments of limestone, completes an orbicular journey into clean transparent flatness and then returned to fragmented irregular shards. In correlation, even from the standpoint of the colour of the works, although initially appearing black, the smashing of the material created gouges and cracks that transform the surface into a myriad of monochromatic tones as light, movement and reflections change – creating an impermanence even within the supposed block base of the piece. From a thematic perspective there is an almost heavy-handed attempt to create pictorial connotations of the cosmos or more specifically the black hole – centred on the large fractures in the centre of each piece. Though on one level, to a degree this feels like a somewhat tired metaphor, or at least another in a line of artist's pre-occupation with portraying the 'infinite' or the 'nature of time'. In this respect, although it is an interesting aesthetic arrangement and exploration of cyclical materials, Parmiggiani's pieces ultimately are not a profoundly groundbreaking addition to the dialogue on the interloping of time and corresponding transformative matter.



Left and Right: Claudio Parmiggiani – Senza Titolo, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London/Hong Kong

Black Smoke and an “Absent” Library

Furthering an exploration of impermanence and memory, Parmiggiani's **monumental library** is a presentation of the artist's 'Delocazione' or 'de-location' style of which he has been producing works of a similar aesthetic and

conceptual vein for the past forty years. Originally inspired by the dust silhouettes produced when Parmiggiani removed objects from a wall, within this spectre of his practice he has created a methodology for this effect that consists of **filling rooms with heavy black smoke** created from burning tyres to capture outlines of objects with the residue of the smog. In this current exhibition this technique has been utilised to create a large 'absent' library across the wall of the upstairs gallery. In this respect, the work is composed by removing the original books to reveal their silhouettes immortalised in soot. Through this method and the negation of the physical object, Parmiggiani creates a twice-abstracted representation — a double weakened print. First in the symbolic skin of the books created by the soot that represents physical form and then through the extraction of this print into a independent object by the act of placing it within the estranged gallery space, the effect is continued distance and mutation from the properties of the original library. Thus, again as with his work in the black mirrors, Parmiggiani displays **a fascination with the possibilities of the immaterial and the transcendence of the material object** both within our comprehension and it's own innate properties. However, beyond this, the work is also a haunting representation of memory itself, a series of reflections, with incremental estrangement from fact. In this sense, the viewer themselves creates the image of the library and by extension the exact form, colourisation, subject matter, design etc. in an adept depiction of the mutation of collective social and historical narratives as much as personal memory.



Claudio Parmiggiani – Senza Titolo, 2017, Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London/Hong Kong

Material and Matter

Within these works and others in the exhibition there is also a tangible continued theme of **creative destruction** explored throughout. It is within this realm that, I believe, Parmiggiani is strongest in the nuanced exploration of this concept. Of particular note is the violence within which this theme is represented. In this regard, throughout the

process of each works' completion the material has been subjected to aggressive blunt force, fire and even nutrient starvation. Perhaps the least obvious in this vein, though most intriguing, is the assemblage sculpture consisting of an hourglass, tree stump, anchor and broken glass window. What is particularly arresting within this work is the combination of material both from nature and man-made in varying states of destruction or rather reincarnation. From the tree stump, cut down and emanating a sense of death as it sits on the cold gallery floor divorced from the earth, we follow its path into a window frame that is then ultimately burned. We can then link this path to the hourglass in that wood that is burned ultimately turns to powdered residue, not unlike the sand within the hourglass, which is itself borne out of molten sand. Thus ultimately the entire sculpture presents a lamentation on the process of rebirth and the concept that creation of all kinds is borne out of the destruction. Where this piece is particularly strong in my belief is that this thematic exploration is grounded within an exploration of material and matter. In this regard, Parmiggiani manages to explore the theme of the cognitive creative process, which can often stray into the indulgent and obtuse, by focusing on material creative production itself.

Claudio Parmiggiani

Simon Lee Gallery, London

On view until April 12th, 2017

Featured images: Exhibition View, Claudio Parmiggiani at Simon Lee Gallery, London, 2017 © Peter Mallet, Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London/Hong Kong; Claudio Parmiggiani, Senza Titolo, 2017, Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London/Hong Kong; Claudio Parmiggiani – Parla anche tu, 2005. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London/Hong Kong.