

**Money Burn. Where there's smoke there's a smoker.**

“Ah friends, friends, bene, bene, good, good.” I had been sitting with my back to the window in Bar Opera with two young artists in Milan. Sara Ciraci and Marcello Simeone. “There goes Mario Gorni” says Marcello, so I turn around, go out and yell after him. He comes back with a friendly embrace, sits down at the table, pauses and says “Ah friends...” After a drink, in a short while, he goes home to see his partner Zeffi Castoldi. When he leaves Sara says “He is very clean, clean.” When I ask what she means in Italo-English she says “you know, clean, not dirty.” Gorni and Zefferina Castoldi began *Careof* as a group project in a former factory on the outskirts of Milan in Milanino Cusano in 1991. The not-for-profit or alternative gallery has shown many important young, and emerging important artists, mainly from Italy since then. The gallery also has a videotheque, and a donated archive of catalogues and publications from contemporary artists and collectors. For eleven years Gorni and Castoldi have been running a service and an exchange that has been powered by a desire for contact, conviviality and to recognize culture. They recognized something was missing and set about to provide it.

Phaidon editor Gilda Williams calls *Careof* “the best gallery in Milan, because Mario is always there, to drive people, solve a problem, to make a video, assemble and present a compilation or show.” Gorni and Castoldi both talk and discuss the work of artists in an impulsive and ongoing way. Every small detail is re-discussed and re-contested. When *A Constructed World* made a show there we felt Castoldi deeply inhabited the desires and content of the work in a way that that we had never known before. Question after question, not so much critique as a passion for knowing or revealing something that might have just as easily been passed over. Their attitudes and anticipations redeem what the market doesn't yet, or may never want. Not much money passes hands, few sales, funding is scanty. It's a different kind of exchange, the bottom line is a kind of nurture with questions. There is a burgeoning history of *Careof* that keeps creating the next chapter. Gorni drives to three cities to present video compilations and document major shows, events and biennales, and Castoldi works as a librarian in Cusano Milanino as ballast. Her work in the library is just as innovative with presentation, questioning histories, and hierarchies and finding value where others hadn't looked.

It's the opposite of who's hot and who's not, who's in and who's out and who's gonna be the one that everyone else will agree to repress their dreams for. As the tradition goes in Italy we get to hear what the miller thought, his/her tale, It's not so much about great events and great people as what really happened. Or rather what happens as it's happening now.

*Careof*, in, 2001 showed a retrospective of and published a catalogue of Franco Vaccari. Mainly working in video, Vaccari had a *sala personale* in the Venice Biennale in 1972 and had a certain following, yet he wasn't able to organize a show anywhere else in Milan at this present time. The commercial galleries



Zefferina Castoldi & Mario Gorni. Photograph: R. Pinto.

weren't interested so *Careof* made a show with Vaccari being offered the same service (and nurture) as the young and emerging artists. It's like the opposite of *The Weakest Link* – value is tirelessly retrieved. Vaccari's work often pictures him making small and touching interventions into unnoticed or hidden events. His work is political in the sense of the relationship with the person, different, handicapped, foreign, citizens and stupid. He gives flowers to prostitutes (if they will accept), he tours the toilet for graffiti, easily finds value in what is ongoing and outside of “what's hot.” Vaccari also ran a workshop about his work and ideas at Viafarini in the centre of Milan at that time. *Careof* was about eight kilometers from the centre and you even have to change at Cardorna to get a small country train then walk more than another kilometer to arrive in the nineteenth century factory complex. It's a bit like going to see the Piero della Francesca's *Del Parto Madonna* in Monterchi in Tuscany where you have to get the key from the keeper of the tiny cemetery to get in to see the art you came for. It's not disappointing, you arrive into a grubby courtyard with wine, patate (crisps) and a community of culture and discussion. You kinda think, what is going on here?

After the launch of the workshop at Viafarini we went to dinner with twelve or so others and Vaccari. As usual in Milanese restaurants, at a certain point, a Sri Lankan (I think) flower seller will arrive and will attempt to sell you romantic roses. Vaccari asks the guy who is probably tertiary educated, how much? 5000. No, for the bunch? 10000. What about 20000? Well, what about 25? 30? No, 25 will be fine thanks. He has just paid five times what the vendor asked for. No one says anything but everyone seems to feel a bit flushed and lighter. No doubt the artist feels twisted at times that his own work isn't given the value he imagines so he's started a New Economy.

For Gorni it's important to learn something, to find something interesting for himself and others. At the gallery people are always arriving to have their work looked at. "Maybe I am an artist that doesn't work like an artist but with people and the circulation of ideas. I work with all the production of artists. I have no real preference." Gorni says.

In July 2002 they moved *Careof* to Fabricca del Vappore to get closer to the changing bigger audience in Milan and attract sales and funding. They remain however at odds with collectors' instincts because they can find value in most things. The only real disdain I can remember hearing was for a kind of pampered art, intellectually or physically. It's like they are addicted to the grist of others trying-to-become.

Castoldi has managed an archive and library that no one else wanted to collect. The donations from artists and collectors form a resource that is now famous and couldn't really have been brought together any other way. It's an instinct for community and circulation of thoughts and feelings.

They search for what is particular rather than perfect. Gabriel di Matteo first showed his *Nuda Umanita* there under his pseudonym Armando della Vittoria. At the time he had no gallery in Milan and the work has since been shown in five countries. I've seen local community dance with Indian steps, Italian art stars Vedova Mazzei, The Christine Show, a young group of artists working with Aldo Spoldi to represent the Maastricht economy or community. Curators and artists got a beginning there that wasn't offered anywhere else.

Gertrude Stein said a work of art is either priceless or worthless. Castoldi and Gorni work at *Careof* between this axis to represent what happens in a community of contemporary art. They inhabit a sort of exchange that represents an exchange that remains outside of who's hot and who owns what.

### The New Economy

In New York in 2002 we saw a lot of shows ironising and satirising touchy-feely concerned and recuperative acts. Jacques Lacan writes "every altruistic act hides sadistic impulses". People in the US people seem to interpret French thinkers and post-structuralism in the most bizarre ways, like the Gulf War really didn't happen, and people who worked in the World Trade Centre hadn't actually been in Manhattan. Then we saw on television that the important contribution of the New Capitalism is that it has been able to recuperate the venal and the sinful as positive gestures: greed is good, Bill Gates loves pornography, avarice stimulates growth, it's all a matter of how you see it.

We saw a strange little advertisement in the Whitney Biennial Flyer that invited people to come for free hugs, foot washes and dollar bills in the courtyard of the museum on three or four occasions per week. The set of relations weren't quite free because you had to pay to enter the museum and the biennial. In the courtyard was a circular red nylon and metal structure a bit like a cross between a hang-glider and Tatlin's monument. Inside Praxis (Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey) were there offering hugs, foot washes, band aids and dollar bills, and we tried them all, and felt a little high. We hung round as others peered and tentatively ventured in. "What is this?" "Would you like a hug?" "Not right now but my friend would." "Thanks, I really needed that." "How about a foot wash?" "Well maybe..." "Would you like a hug?"

"What is this?"

Well it's called *The New Economy* and the text from the Whitney Biennial catalogue says:

"For the past year, Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey, who form the two-person art and performance collaborative Praxis, has used their storefront East Village studio in New York City to stage weekly afternoon events. As part of their New Economy project, this husband-and-wife team has offered every Saturday a menu of four free services from which visitors and passersby may choose: foot washes, hugs, Band-Aid applications to help heal visible or non-visible wounds, and gifts of one-dollar bills. By receiving the benefits of The New Economy project, participants become a part of Praxis' performance. Though Praxis' language is contemporary, the character of its project draws on strategies from experimental performance art of the 1960s and 70s. Through direct, yet intimate interactions with the public, for example, the New Economy project recalls the activities of Fluxus, the radical network of visionary artists who sought to change political, social as well as aesthetic perception through performances that were often absurd and shocking in appearance yet historically pivotal at the same time."

It's like a hippie masterpiece, close to Beuys and Fluxus, and made for the present rather than history. They also make a prayer work that started in their studio and more recently in Ireland. The artists will pray for you whatever you want: new house, sick relative... All this positive energy naturally leads to others doubting and prodding. Someone in Dublin asked them to pray that they would get a bad review. *The New Economy* hasn't taken hold yet – let's just say we are dealing with a relatively open system here rather than one that preserves the prevailing thinking.

At this point I can think of a lot of phrases and homilies that will easily speak through me:

What's the bottom line?

How do they get away with that?

If it's free who pays?

Where do they get the money?

Every hippie gesture of kindness and "I love you man" has been doubted since it began, like Joan Didion talking about Haight Ashbury in the 60s, saying the hippie movement was over before it began. Thomas Frank in *Commodify Your Dissent* says alternative culture was appropriated by the advertising industry before it began too. Okay let's not hug anyone, let's go back to our own computer terminal and buy something, cleanly.

At *Bed Bath and Table* Brainard Carey was getting \$500 worth of party lights (100% return policy anytime anywhere, no questions asked) to use in an installation for a series of arts projects in a series of shop windows downtown for the Lower Manhattan City Council. As we went through the check out I asked him where artists get money from.

The way John Cassavetes and Spike Lee (and many others most likely) funded their films probably worked like this. What those directors did was to build up great amounts of credit then use it all as cash for a gamble on a film project. Here is the method; you start with one credit card, say with a credit line of 500 dollars. Charge and pay things off for six months and you will be offered a credit line increase, say to 1000 dollars. Take it. You will start getting offers from other credit card companies for more credit cards with a similar credit limit. Take them all. OK, so let's say now you have five credit cards all with a limit of 2,000 dollars each. Draw a thousand dollars in cash from



one card only. When that amount comes due in 30 days, pay it off with credit card number 2 (the credit card companies love to take the debt from other cards of yours). Then when that card comes due, pay it off with credit card number 3, etc. What you are doing here is floating your thousand dollars in cash from one card to another without ever paying interest. If you stop here you have just gotten a thousand dollar unlimited loan with no interest. If you want to go further this is what can happen; as you float that loan, the credit card companies will see that you borrow and pay back on time, all the time. Your credit limits will be steadily increased and you will be offered more and more cards. You will have the opportunity to increase your floating loan. But let's say you do not borrow any more money, you just keep passing around the thousand dollars – cleanly. By cleanly I mean that you don't start running up debt on all your cards. You keep clearing and consolidating all the debt onto one card that you keep transferring to another. OK, so you have been moving this thousand dollars around for a year or so, now if you have taken all the offers you should have at least 10 credit cards. You can call and ask for a credit limit increase or just wait. Sooner more than later you will have a credit limit on each card of at least 10 thousand dollars, in reality it could be much more if you are patient. So you have your 10 cards all with ten thousand

**Top Left:** Praxis, *Giving people \$ bills*, Whitney Biennial performance, 2002. **Top Right:** Praxis, *Giving Band-aids*, Whitney Biennial performance, 2002. **Above:** ACW, still from *Money Fire*, DVD, 55-second loop, 2003.

dollar credit limits on them. Now you can go to the bank and get cash for all of it, or simply spend it all in a month, a hundred thousand dollars that is. Make your movie or whatever, gamble. If it pays off as with some of the well-known indie filmmakers great; if not, save 2 thousand dollars so you can declare personal bankruptcy and start all over again. The banks calls this kit(e)ing – and it is not legal though I am sure you can see it is almost impossible to find out about while it is happening.

### Who's gonna front the ask? 20 July 2002

At a major institution we asked the Director of Development about money.

*ACW: In what ways are art and money linked?*

L: There isn't such a divide between the two. Art in the commercial sector is a commodity and it's traded, bought and sold. It's a type of money. It's a product that's produced as part of an industry. I think it's a

false divide to try and separate art production from the industry that fuels it.

When I first started in development the department had been nick-named *the dark side* seen as a dirty or sullyng activity seen as necessary but you'd rather keep it away. It's not so much seen as fund-raising now it's about your business development. Your well-being, your ability to trade and exist. Before development I was working as an independent curator. I left that because it wasn't financially sustainable for me. When I was a curator we were always worried where the money would come from.

ACW: *Where does money come from?*

L: With the institution there's five income streams: the commercial sector; the market-driven reasons for funding art; government funding, which would not be enough to sustain this kind of activity; individual giving; philanthropic trusts and foundations. Then there's income generated from merchandising though this doesn't generate much funds because it's so high risk.

ACW: *How do you get money?*

L: You fill out the form and put your case in writing and look to find an appropriate grant for the project. Philanthropic giving takes no benefit they don't get anything back. The corporates will sponsor, but in return for sponsorship there'll be benefits, entertaining or brand association. Or the audience that the institution attracts might be the same target market as the company wants to attract or sustain, or institutions have brand values and if they're working commercial companies will want to be associated with those key values. They'll pin their colours to your mast. It only works though when it's a partnership that's tailored to and you're working together. They might want to buy into your audience but you, just as much, might want to buy into theirs. You might want to buy into their target sector to develop a whole new audience to come to yours. It sounds a bit naff but it only works when it's this creative process.

ACW: *What about from individuals?*

L: It's rare to get an individual to give without knowledge of the gallery or the artist, they want to patronize their goals. They'll already be converted, if you like, to giving. Apparently to ask for money you have to look the person, unflinchingly, in the white of their eye. But the right person has to front-the-ask.

ACW: *Does the funder influence what will be made?*

L: Where I work the program is decided before the funding is secured. Once the artistic department has decided it's up to the development department to go ahead and source the appropriate funding. It can be difficult if there's an artist who's particularly against routes of money. There was one artist who wouldn't take any money from banking or pharmaceutical interests. It was quite a tricky call – most sorts of money pass through those here. We had to find money from individuals who hadn't derived their wealth from either banking or pharmaceuticals. The worst situation is when an institution programs because they know they can get X funding. I thought the Versace show at the Guggenheim was worrying like this. A gift was made and shortly after a Versace retrospective followed. I see this as a worrying trend. It's important to keep some kind of wall between the two departments. Some kind of *Chinese barrier*.

*I remember on the day of reading this I was looking in the window of a hunting shop in Milan. I saw a considerable display of guns in the window. Not having spent much time with handguns they reminded me of the fictional ones I used to play with as a child. Just as if I treated a real gun as toy, the fictions we live by can be easily interrupted by nature and when used by determined people. As the story of Globalism unfolds there seems to be less funding for art, and the funding that there is is much more conditional. It's hard to remember exactly what people that wanted to work inside the system were hoping to change. It's pretty clear this system changes people rather than the other way round. If too much money is given to too many people to speak in different ways the system we have will be seen to be a fiction and won't survive.*

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**ACW live and work in Torino where the food is good. Their next project is *More Fools in Town*, an exhibition space in their apartment organised in collaboration with French curator Charlotte Laubard.**