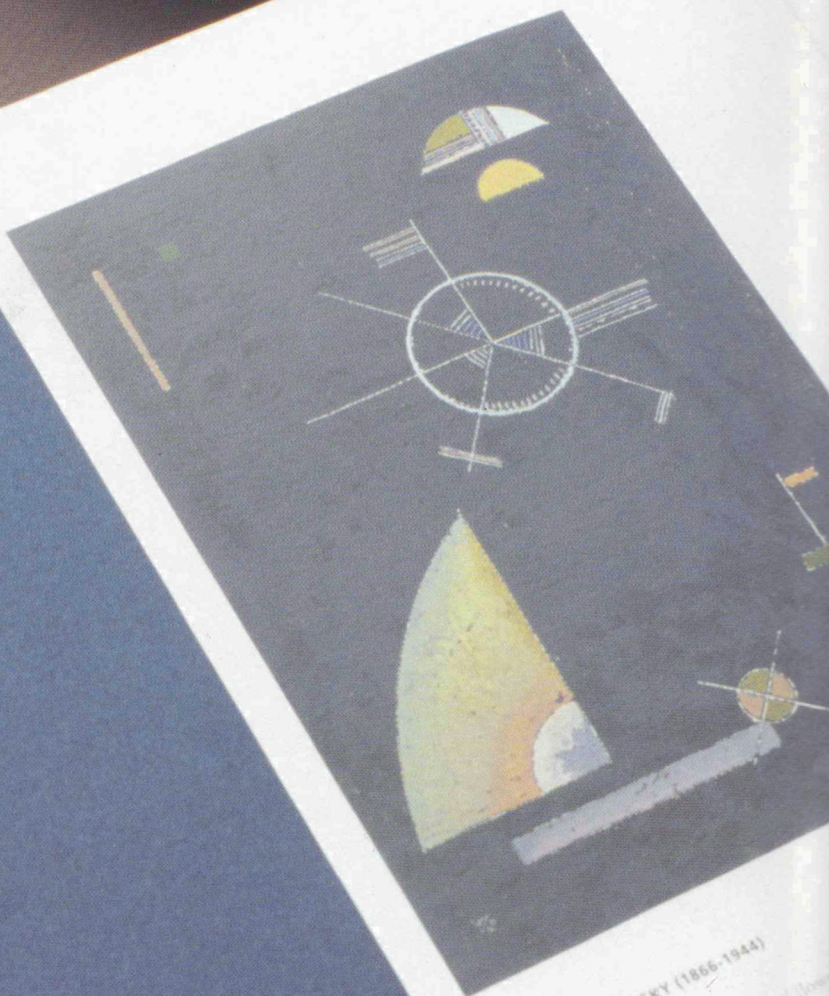


f r i z e

Contemporary Art and Culture

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Still-Life Photography

Kathrin Sonntag: *Project*

Interviews: Barbara Kasten | Elad Lassry

Lynne Tillman on Diane Arbus

Luigi Ghirri: *Portfolio*

WASSILY KANDINSKY (1866-1944)
Stumpfen Kreis

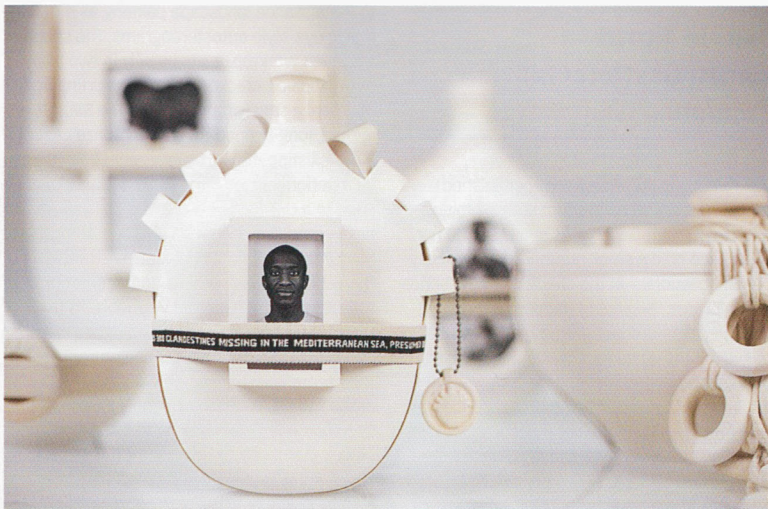
Signed with the initial and dated '90
oil on board
13 1/2 x 9 1/4 in. (34.5 x 24 cm)
Painted in 1930

PROVENANCE:
Galerie Flechthorn, Berlin
Salway James Gallery, New York
Kunsthalle, Bern
Acquired from the above

UK £5.95 US \$10 €1



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Studio Formafantasma
 'Moulding Tradition'
 2009
 Unglazed ceramic, jacquard
 ribbon, cotton ropes,
 glass and framed
 photographic prints
 Dimensions variable

Studio Formafantasma Gallery Libby Sellers London

In recent years, Studio Formafantasma – the Eindhoven-based Italian designers Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin – have made a number of journeys into the past to excavate the meanings which traditional and even 'lost' materials and techniques can possess. Their 'Botanica' (2011) series of lamps and vessels, for instance, revisits early attempts to make 'natural' plastic from plant extracts, resins, blood and even insect excrement. They were led to these materials by 18th- and 19th-century studies of botany. 'Botanica' is not simply an exercise in technological antiquarianism: at the end of oil, another time without it might have things to offer.

Studio Formafantasma's exhibition – the inaugural show at Gallery Libby Sellers – comprised two groups of works, and brought a more explicitly critical perspective to this interest in the past. 'Moulding Tradition' (2009) is a series of ceramic vessels bearing photographs of an unidentified black man and tagged with scraps of data about the migrant labourers who work illegally in Italy. The unglazed lidded bowls and flasks are strung with framed photographs, inscribed loops and labels – additions which seem to reinforce their status as mobile objects. The wine flasks and bowls were made in Caltagirone in Sicily, a traditional centre of ceramic production. With their portraits, Studio Formafantasma's vessels refer to 'Teste di Moro' (Moorish heads), vases which have been made there for centuries. Often grotesque and sometimes comic, these three-dimensional portraits in clay are distant reminders of the fact that not only was Sicily once an Arab island but also that Majolica came to Europe from the Muslim world.

That people and things have always travelled between the Maghreb and Europe is, of course, a platitude for historians. But in light of Italy's ambiguous and often hostile relationship with North Africa, Studio Formafantasma's vessels clearly engage with a more recent past, too. In 2008, Colonel Gaddafi signed a deal with Italian president Silvio Berlusconi to repatriate

African immigrants caught trying to cross the Mediterranean in their overloaded and unseaworthy vessels. This was a controversial agreement: denied opportunities to claim asylum, the human rights of migrants were threatened. As part of the same deal, the Italians committed to invest money and expertise in Libya. Gaddafi could represent Rome's Europeans as reparations for Italian colonialism in the 1930s and, at the same time, Berlusconi could look tough on immigration.

'Colony' (2011), the second series on show, addresses these themes in a direct fashion. Three mohair blankets identify Libya, Eritrea and Ethiopia, former imperial possessions of Italy in the 1930 and '40s. Italy's expansion into North Africa was claimed by Mussolini as 'the reappearance of the empire on the fateful hills of Rome after 15 centuries'. The imperial adventure was an opportunity for artists and architects, too. The new city of Asmara in Eritrea was taken by Italian Modernists as a chance to fulfil all their rationalist preoccupations. Taking the form of monumental postcards, each blanket features an architectural drawing of a building over an Italian plan for an African city. Asmara is overlaid with a line drawing of Giuseppe Pettazzi's famous FIAT Tagliero office in the city (1938), a building which came close to realizing the futurist *aeropittura* fantasy of 'flying architecture'. In another, Tripoli's 'Colonial Home', a Modernist villa from the early 1930s, is accompanied by a passage from 'Accord 19' of 2009 which commissioned Italian businesses 'with the necessary technological skills' to design a system of land border controls in Gaddafi's Libya. Design – the field in which Trimarchi and Farresin were trained at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, and with which they identify – is identified with repression.

Despite the poetry of the Studio's name (which Trimarchi and Farresin translate as 'ghost shape'), there is a strain of didacticism in its 'Italian' projects. It is not heavy-handed or indifferent to aesthetics, but it is there. In their interest in migration, we might detect an echo of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's influential 2000 book *Empire*: 'A spectre haunts the world and it is the spectre of migration'. This said, there is little of these writers' euphoric view of the ways in which nomadism and *métissage* can contest the containment of nation or of race.

David Crowley