

NAPLES

Seb Patane

GALLERIA FONTI

Anxiety was the theme of Seb Patane's recent exhibition at Galleria Fonti. The show was aptly titled "Abdomen," in reference to the part of the body generally struck by illnesses of emotional and psychological origin, and particularly those traditionally associated with the pathology of hypochondria. Patane's project, inspired by the binaries found at the root of theater (reality and fiction, honesty and dissimulation), was as dense and well-structured on a semantic level as it was radical in formal terms. The presentation was simple: Two installations—one consisting of video and sound, the other composed only of sound—offered a play of verbal and abstract acoustic reflections, through which history and personal experience established a concise, almost symbiotic dialogue.

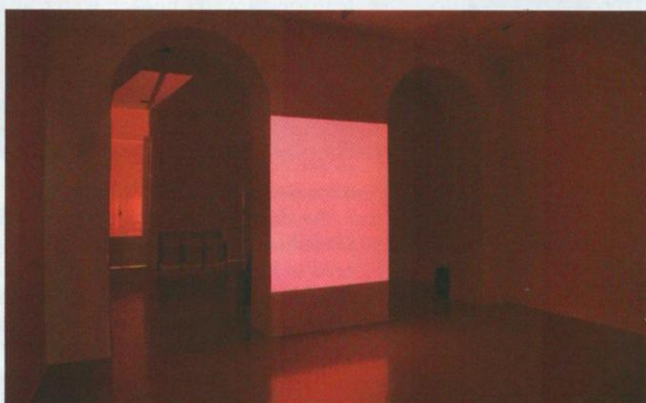
The video installation, *Gustav Metzger as Erwin Piscator, Gera, January 1915*, was displayed in the first room of the gallery, and the sound piece, *Abdomen* (both 2014), was installed so that one could hear both works throughout the space. Transformed into a pseudo-movie theater, the second room was equipped with armchairs, in which visitors could sit to listen to the works. Both pieces were initiated during Patane's residency in October 2013 at the Wysing Arts Centre in Bourn, UK, where he met fellow resident Gustav Metzger. Patane asked Metzger to recite a passage from *The Political Theater*, director Erwin Piscator's 1929 study of the dramatists of the Weimar Republic. The excerpt describes Piscator's memory of the moments before his departure to serve in the military during World War I, and including an account of his poorly tailored uniform, which Patane interprets to reflect the director's disinclination to join his rank.

A recording of this reading underpins both works, but the sound element of *Gustav Metzger as Erwin Piscator*, is accompanied by the monochromatic projection of an intense red color—one that recalls the

viscera suggested by the show's title—onto a central wall. In *Abdomen*, Metzger's telling is followed by a layering of nature sounds recorded in the Cambridgeshire countryside, original music composed by Patane and musician Giancarlo Trimarchi, and artist Cécile B. Evans's delivery of a passage from *The Good Soldier Šveik*, a 1923 novel by Czech satirist Jaroslav Hašek. Concluding the work is a song composed and performed by Patane and musician Andrew Moss, with lyrics that allude to Patane's experiences with hypochondria, some borrowed from the correspondence between the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his teacher Ford Madox Brown. In a letter from 1860, Rossetti wrote to Brown of the artist and model Elizabeth Siddal: "I have been . . . in the most agonizing anxiety about poor dear Lizzie's health . . . as she has seemed ready to die daily and more than once a day." Though it's a most inward affliction, anxiety—as Patane's sonic collage demonstrates—is universal in its attacks.

—Pier Paolo Pancotto

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.



View of "Seb Patane,"
2014–15.

Seb Patane

GALLERIA FONTI
Via Chiaia 229
May 23–September 21



16 Gennaio 1968, 2007, print on PVC, tape, and enamel, 70 7/8 x 51 1/4".

"Violenza D'Avanguardia" (Violence of the Avant-Garde), the title of Seb Patane's first solo show in Italy, refers to a phrase coined by the founders of Lotta Continua, the far-left political movement that emerged in Italy in the 1970s. References to such sensational events and moments are only one point on the path that connects this artist, now a resident of London, to the country of his birth. Patane extracts photographs from period newspapers and chooses nineteenth-century prints, to which he applies graphic flourishes. As a result, the selected images become vehicles for fresh meanings, as if he were pointing the emotional power of history in new directions. One work shows an enlargement of a newspaper photo of the January 16, 1968, arrest of Luigi Bobbio, one of the founders of Lotta Continua. Patane's intervention: obscuring Bobbio's eyes with a simple black strip, in a classic censorship gesture. The act is minimal but surprising. Carried out on such a large-scale photo, the black strip acquires its own specific power, and by rendering the protagonist's face unrecognizable, Patane's gesture makes the person under arrest no longer simply Bobbio, but anyone wishing to oppose an unjust system. Off to the side, a group of works of varying dimensions complete Patane's voyage from past to future. Here, too, a series of transformations of existing images provokes a surprising sequence of effects, which the artist again achieves by overlaying ink or small collages on prints taken from Victorian-era magazines. But this isn't all. In the second room of the gallery, where there are no works on the walls, the floor-bound *The Guilty Versus Monsieur Carnot, 2007*, stands out. The installation is made from two sheets of medium-density fiberboard that are covered with images taken from album covers and graphic interventions that bring to mind the iconography of war. This work is another allusion to the *Anni di Piombo*, or Years of Lead—the period of terrorism in Italy from the 1970s to the early 1980s—and to the somber fascination with war that Patane cites and then annuls. Meanwhile, a series of loudspeakers hidden in the gallery ceiling explode with the installation sound track that gives the show its title. Among the loudest noises, one can perceive police sirens, gates violently slammed shut, and the din produced by an eruption, transformed into a sequence of electronic sounds.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

—Filippo Romeo

M. F. Seb Patane.

Beck's Futures 2006 Catalogue, April 2006, p39-44.

SEB PATANE

A passion for contemporary music and its relation to tribal and primordial roots is the foundation of Seb Patane's practice. This set of interests implicitly translates into his series of drawings over fin de siècle newspapers and Victorian magazine pictures. The images that he selects as a support all share an atmosphere, conjuring up highly staged, slightly repressed scenarios. All of them are produced in the early years of mechanic reproduction when photography began experimenting with fabricated images for public consumption. Onto such controlled and artificial representations Patane adds a secondary layer through a calligraphic gesture. The original images serve as a platform for staging the emergence of inorganic forces.

The resulting modified photographs linger between the drive to obliterate information – in particular human faces, the locus of personality in the picture – and the adding of a second-degree meaning to the image. While concealing, Patane duplicates metaphorically the photographic recording: he seems to be interested in 'correcting' the images that he sources, uncovering their occult unregistered side. In this sense, his drawings are investigations into photography as a paranormal recording tool. The marks that he superimposes onto the pictures seem to be transcriptions that emerge from within the images' own unconscious. The same technique is also expanded three-dimensionally in *93 Dead Sunwheels* (2005), a work that transfers the same set of concerns into a more sculptural domain that makes clear reference to music's relation to the primordial and reiterates it in the drawings over two album covers by the esoteric band Death in June.

In the installation *Absolute Körperkontrolle* (2006), Patane brings to the fore different strands resonating in his practice. He manages to set up a parallel between mountaineering and marathon dancing as similar enactments of bodily rituals. The work consists of a large picture of a mountain expedition from the beginning of the 20th century and a small vintage image of a couple performing in a dance marathon. In the space between, the artist shows a video re-enacting the different phases of a choreographed performance. Against a white background, two male dancers

M, F, *Seb Patane*.

Beck's Futures 2006 Catalogue, April 2006, p.39-44.

dressed up in mountaineer outfits (designed by Patane) perform contrived exhaustion poses to electronic music the artist himself composed. The dancers' bodies convey the same sense of complete control found in the modified Victorian photographs. The artist orchestrates a similar situation of artificial theatricality, combining various elements of self-discipline hinting at a repressive strategy that ultimately aspires to a liberating finale. The title of the piece clearly sums up this strategy in direct homage to the electronic band DAF (Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft), initiators of EBM (electronic body music), whose track *Absolute Körperkontrolle* is also sampled in Patane's musical composition.

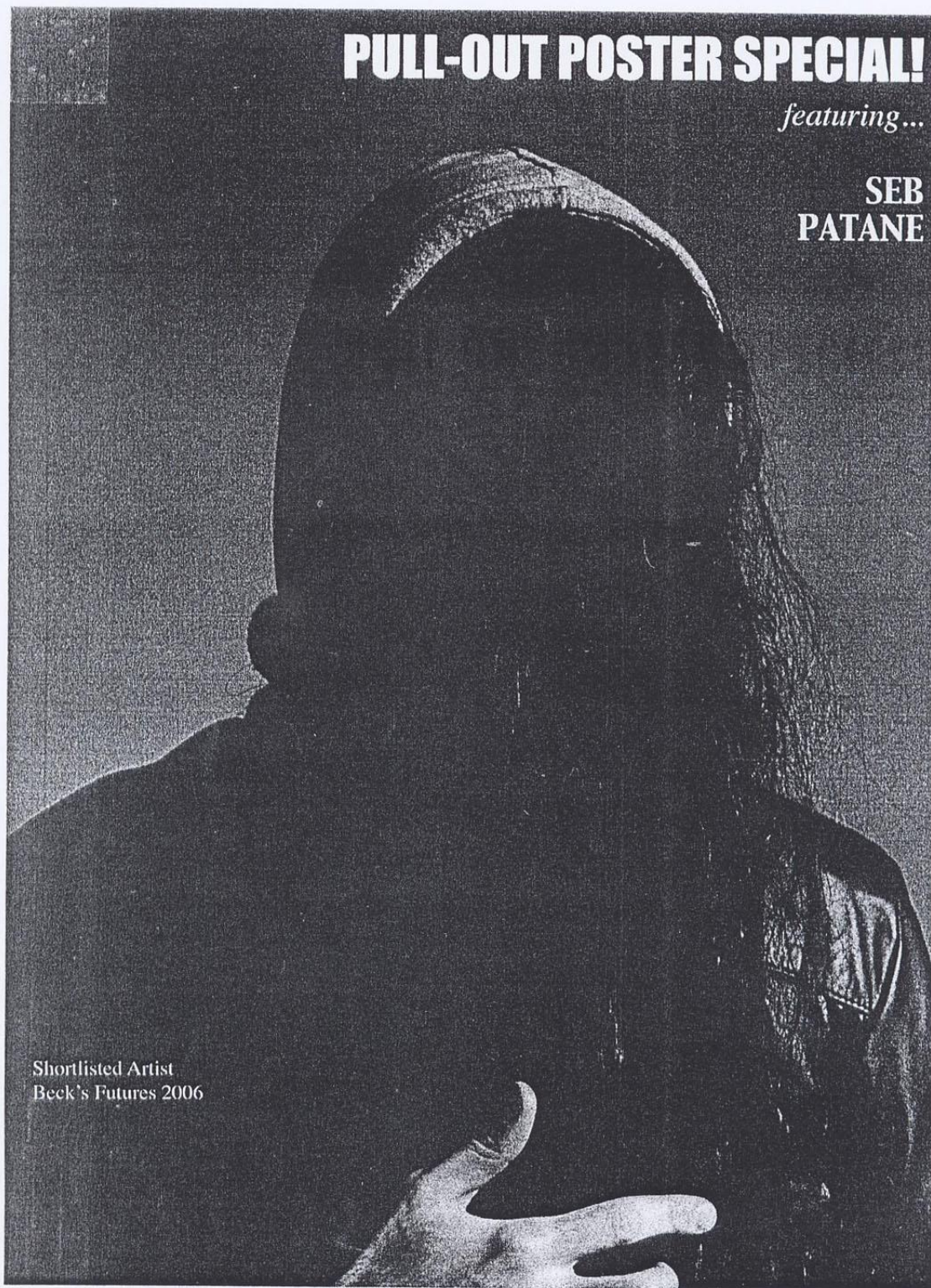
The marriage between dance and mountaineering weaves together intricate links to the occult and hints to culturally acceptable manifestations of archaic impulses. Dance marathons and climbing mountains are both self-imposed competitions of extreme endurance, the former echoing a ritual ceremony of shared perseverance, the latter a more metaphysical challenge opposing human will to natural forces. Patane intertwines these aspects through a substantial although not totally overt reference: the image of the mountain is in fact borrowed from the archive of infamous occultist and mountaineer Aleister Crowley whose legacy can be traced through the entire history of experimental music, from legendary bands such as *Throbbing Gristle* and *Led Zeppelin* back to Kenneth Anger's seminal films *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954 – 66) and *Thelema Abbey* (1955). Patane's hybrid investigations, as well as his fascination for the uncanny in relation to bodily constrictions, expand on the research undertaken in his drawing, mapping out a larger frame of reference that testifies to the artist's passion for the anthropological paradoxes of contemporary culture. (FM)

*Pull Out Poster Special,
Super Super, April 2006.*

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**SEB
PATANE**



Shortlisted Artist
Beck's Futures 2006

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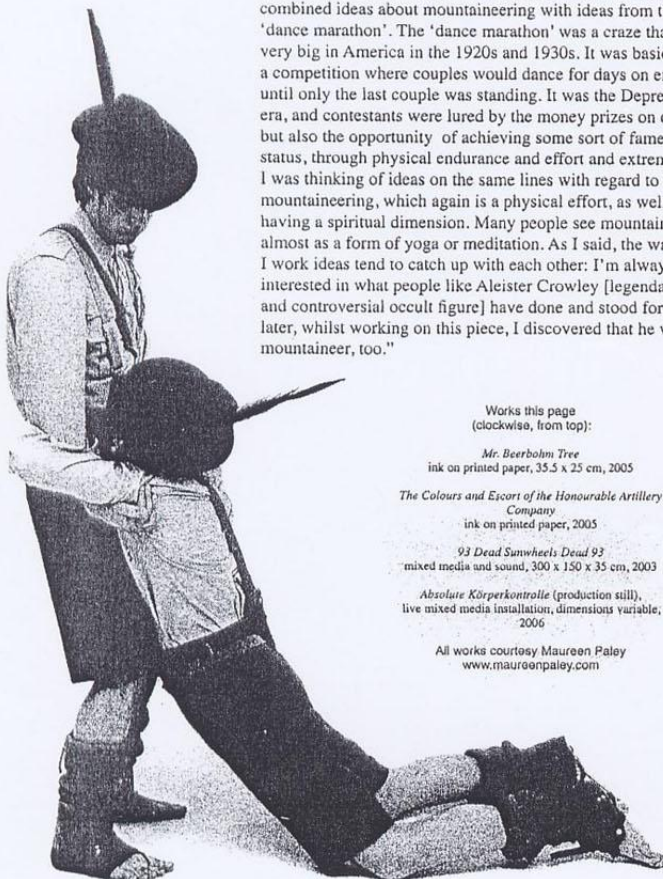
future fun

seb patane

It's a good time for artist Seb Patane right now. Major Museums and collectors around the world are fast acquiring his work, he's represented by one of the most respected gallerists in London, Maureen Paley, and now Patane has been nominated for the prestigious Beck's Futures Award, for young artists, opening this month throughout the UK

"I don't think that I can be completely original, and I don't really want to be. I'm not interested in starting with a blank canvas – the idea of the 'artist as genius' doesn't interest me – my work is much more transformative. I want to build up narratives, however dysfunctional they may be, and to give people references in the work that allows them to access this. I like music that refers to other music, for example, and I want to put into visual form what intrigues me in life, my interest in music, film, the things around me, even art. I use references and ideas from things I like and happen across, and from sources I research specifically. The themes intertwine and reappear over time: I like to think of my work as very mixable, where I can take something old and re-use it in a new way, in a new context. Making the work is very much about the edit: It's about making very specific, considered choices: I'm a very specific, considered person!"

"This piece, below left, is a still from a video of a live installation I did recently at the Migros Museum, Zurich, that combined ideas about mountaineering with ideas from the 'dance marathon'. The 'dance marathon' was a craze that was very big in America in the 1920s and 1930s. It was basically a competition where couples would dance for days on end until only the last couple was standing. It was the Depression era, and contestants were lured by the money prizes on offer, but also the opportunity of achieving some sort of fame and status, through physical endurance and effort and extreme. I was thinking of ideas on the same lines with regard to mountaineering, which again is a physical effort, as well as having a spiritual dimension. Many people see mountaineering almost as a form of yoga or meditation. As I said, the way I work ideas tend to catch up with each other: I'm always interested in what people like Aleister Crowley [legendary and controversial occult figure] have done and stood for, and later, whilst working on this piece, I discovered that he was a mountaineer, too."



Works this page
(clockwise, from top):

Mr. Beerholm Tree
ink on printed paper, 35.5 x 25 cm, 2005

The Colours and Escort of the Honourable Artillery Company
ink on printed paper, 2005

93 Dead Sunwheels Dead 93
mixed media and sound, 300 x 150 x 35 cm, 2003

Absolute Körperkontrolle (production still),
live mixed media installation, dimensions variable,
2006

All works courtesy Maureen Paley
www.maureenpaley.com

Seb Patane is showing at Bureau Gallery, Salford, Manchester, March 18th–April 26th www.bureaugallery.com



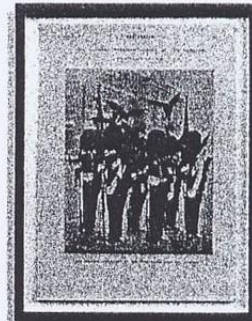
Beck's Futures
Award 2006:

ICA, London 31st March–14th May
www.ica.org.uk

CCA Glasgow 8th April–14th May
www.cca-glasgow.com

Arnolfini, Bristol 13th April–14th May
www.arnolfini.org.uk

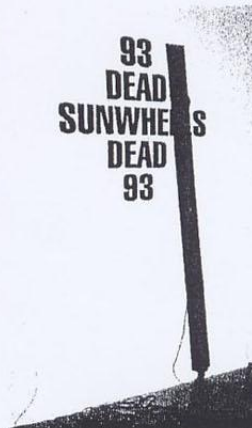
From March 31st (ie once you've actually
seen the work) you can have a say in who
you think should win this year's prize:
Visit www.becksfutures.co.uk
for more info



"I get a good response to my drawings, although they are only part of what I do, of course. I see a lot of optimism, a lot of energy in them – growing up I never associated black with negativity. I certainly don't see them as paintings, or feel the need to be wildly experimental with colours; to be honest I don't even see them as drawings, really. I don't do sketches and sketches. It's very much a case of working with the source material, and then making sense in that context."

"i am not
interested in
creating something
completely original;
I like the viewer to
have a reference,
some sort of
familiarity – then to
put them in a weird
confused state"

"I often use sound with my installation pieces, sometimes like another colour, say, to finish the work, while in other pieces it's more important, a key, specific part of the piece. I make the sound with a friend of mine called Loozoo, who understands completely what I want to do. As with my work generally, the sound is about a process and layering ideas together, so you could almost say it's like a bootleg. I use music that I like and listen to anyway, or that I come across in my research. I often use DAF, a German group from the late 70s. They use electronics in a very sharp, pared down, specific way, which is closer to an art making approach. When you transport different mediums into an art context you really need to be specific, to edit it down. Art is much more pared down compared with cinema or music, say."



Wood, Catherine, *She seemed ready to die...*,
Untitled, February 2005

SHE SEEMED READY TO DIE DAILY AND MORE THAN ONCE A DAY*

Catherine Wood on Seb Patane

Seb Patane cites two specific references for his recent drawings: the first was a photograph of a victorious tennis player from a newspaper, found on the London underground, onto which someone had sketched a 'Scream' horror-film mask. The other was the cult horror film, *The Ring* (2002), or its Japanese original *Ringu* (1998), in which subjects become possessed by the content of a video sequence on tape. The film is propelled by a compulsive drive, within the death threat, to transfer possession onto others.

Patane's drawings conflate these notions, of doodled image intervention and compulsion, but he reaches back beyond contemporary pop culture to find sources that are more emblematic. Taking pictures from antique magazines, Patane uses black or blue biro to mine their surfaces [with intense over-drawing] for invisible depths. The biro's roller-balls apply a trail mark of sticky black ink, registering the pressure of Patane's engagement with the surface of the picture. These pictures are always staged and idyllic - often from Victorian London's *The Sketch* magazine. They depict happiness and innocence: women in country landscapes, children playing or lovers embracing on a swing. Patane seems compelled to destroy, by adding to, only the most perfect and fragile images he can find. In *Spring Time* his black pen binds what appears to be two female friends or lover's heads, in an engulfing mass of black hair-like ink drawing that makes ambiguous their embrace. In a piece titled *Scandal*, picturing women chattering over afternoon tea, Patane obliterates the faces and hats of his three lady subjects with similarly intense fine marks. In doing so, the artist obscures the original narrative content of the image leaving us with intriguing gothic blank where a readable story was clearly intended to be. By denying us access to this world, though, such deliberately brutal defacements heighten the viewer's imagining of the romance and preciousness of the original images.

*Rossetti on Lizzie Siddal in a letter to Ford Madox Brown

Mrs Murray Cooke's Tableaux at the Crystal Palace, "the Vestal" elegantly despoils a Victorian engraving featured in *The Sketch* which shows a woman costumed and posed with birds before a painted classical backdrop. The image accompanies a news feature about the then contemporary phenomenon of 'living pictures' - tableaux vivants created by well-to-do ladies as an afternoon diversion. Patane draws onto and darkens the "Vestal's" eye sockets, making them appear hollow, and erases the flock of birds that are posed around her (which we deduce to be stuffed) with black ink transforming them into dark spirits of anti-matter. The picture conflates its ostensible subject - the magic of live presence-as-static image - and the typical posed photograph that appears elsewhere in the magazines pages. Patane's intervention functions both to obscure and heighten the qualities of the original image, making visible an unassailable gap between living self and self-as-image. The photographs and engravings that he selects to work on rely upon slow-exposure photographs or posed scenes requiring unnatural stillness on the part of the sitters, to enable the mechanics of a camera, or an artist, to record the frontal visual plane. Patane's drawings infect these pictures with awareness of a dimension that is not about stillness and thus eludes capture. In this sense, the Crystal Palace tableau, in particular connects with the performance work that Patane makes.

Wood, Catherine, *She seemed ready to die....*
 Untitled, February 2005

The art of the day



The Vestal

In his earliest performance pieces Patane created live installations of Vanessa Beecroft-like boys and girls, their skin tones deadened by make-up, dressed in PVC costumes and artificially hued wigs. The models were arranged in energy-drained poses and in some stagings they vomited fluorescent blue or yellow liquid. Despite the liveness of his subjects, the work was shot through with pallid unnaturalness. His recent performance work transposes the sculptural quality of those early tableaux, and their atmosphere of sick listlessness, into something darker and more virulent. During a performance April 2004, Patane set figures in orange and black hooded costumes on and in-between two wooden crate-like structures. The infectious rhythms of loud techno music filled the space but the performers remained, for the most part, inert.

Occasionally one of them began a slow, deliberate spinning movement - which was not whirling-dervish-like but studied and controlled, with an intensity of focus that gave the effect of sucking energy in to sustain his momentum, rather than expending it. This created a sense that the presented tableau was charged with malevolent potentiality. The performers appeared more as sculpture than as 'live' presence, so this was not the threat of a breakthrough in the audience/performer screen, but rather it was as though the performers were self-sustaining in a curious parallel sphere.

Between his performance works and drawings - as well as the sculpture pieces which incorporate sound - Patane's work subverts visible surface to charge it's appeal, and to allude to a non-visible dimension of ambiguous terror and pleasure. Unlike the tattooed defacements of Dr Lakra, who also draws onto found, historical magazine pictures (though from the 1940s and 50s), Patane's work has a seriousness which does not shift visual codes in any literal way, or satirise his found images as kitsch. Although Patane's work sucks out visual information and corrodes the already fragile picture surfaces, his investment in these pictures derives from a position of fascination and love. Rather than offering any explicit 'alternative' reading of the pictures, as such, his compulsion to cover, and thus reveal, aspects of these images makes them more seductive, and more mysterious.

The ideas of doodling and compulsion with which I began might seem to link Patane's work to a Surrealist conception of automatist expression: the allowing of a repressed subconscious to surface, channelled via the 'involuntary' mark-making of the artist's hand. Patane's drawings and performance in a sense mimic the structure of this concept, but do not indicate belief in its literal narratives of decode-able psychoanalysis. This work does not seem to be concerned with the transformation of consciousness by allowing suppressed matter out, but instead - as was visualised by his performers existing between stasis and movement - with foregrounding the charge which results from setting two unlike states of being, or modes of perception, in dynamic equilibrium.

SEB PATANE

Playing Hard *to Get*

Protest music, Gothic Romanticism and urban rumbles
combine in art that is as elusive as it is beguiling

words MARTIN COOMER

SEB PATANE AND I ARE LISTENING TO A NEW PIECE OF MUSIC that forms the centerpiece of the exhibition of his work that is currently on view at Tate Britain's Art Now. The commission represents a shift in gear for the Italian-born London-based artist who has gained a reputation over the past few years for installations that ambitiously combine different media and a range of historical sources, but his response hasn't been to scale up or overelaborate. Far from it. The music we're listening to is an exercise in frustration, a perpetual introduction: just as scattered, sampled voices and electronic beats build into thumping 4/4 time, the piece loops back to its sparse beginning.

Patane calls this a protest song of sorts. The third time round I begin to shuffle awkwardly, feeling a little uncomfortable, which in the world of polished surfaces that Patane's work seems initially to inhabit might be regarded as a kind of involuntary bodily dissent. Patane often builds a sense of viewing discomfort into his work. Resting a cool hand on the fiery touchstones of Romantic art and Victorian Gothic, hip bands of yore, as well as images of flareups on the street, he argues for a kind of decorum, an unnerving stillness that scrambles codes as it heightens the aesthetic experience. As well as a protest song, the cauterised soundtrack we're listening to might be thought of as his anthem.

Despite the layered electronica that intermittently blasts the room, nothing much happens either in the 2006 work *Absolute Körperkontrolle*, a version of which Patane presented in that year's Beck's Futures exhibition at the ICA, London. Nonetheless, in this piece a range of thoughts and emotions are provoked by a handful of elegantly arranged elements. There's anticipation encapsulated in a beautifully grainy enlargement on the wall of a vintage photographic image depicting mountaineers dwarfed by their objective. End-of-the-evening enervation is conjured by a smaller photograph on an adjacent wall showing a couple clinging to each other during a dance marathon; though their exhaustion is evident, a denouement – did they win or lose? – is withheld. On video, shown on a small monitor placed on the floor, these images are reinterpreted by Patane as an endurance

embrace, a performance between two young men in lederhosen and fancy feathered hats who stagger a little, their weary, almost somnambulant actions suggestive of a shared secret that seems to shield them, and the work, from interpretation.

To consider the various parts requires both stamina and a certain fleet-footed approach, not just in order to manoeuvre effectively between different media (Patane's installations always comprise a number of bespoke components that might include music, costume, text, appropriated photographic imagery and drawing) but also to channel the different modes of consciousness that each installation transmits. Here, as often occurs in Patane's work, there are leaps through history and between different types of activity. Extreme states – mental and physical – and an erotic undertow thrum or bubble up, but to fully understand the forces at work, Patane seems to suggest, might require a shapeshifting leap into another realm – induced by exertion, sleep, love, drugs or perhaps some other mysterious energy; it's surely not inconsequential that a member of that party photographed on the foothills is none other than occultist Aleister Crowley.

Talking to Patane, the conversation rolls, as pleasant conversations do, picking up layers of reference that at the time seem perfectly rational. Retracing your steps, however, reveals a series of, if not broken, then at times tenuous links that beg the question: 'how on earth did we get to this point?' "[*Absolute Körperkontrolle*] started off with the archive image of Crowley," Patane explains. "At the same time I had the idea of the marathon dance. For me the idea of marathon dancing and mountain climbing makes sense for reasons of spiritual search and enlightenment, so everything eventually came into place with the guys on video dressed up in Alpine costumes and the sound which had very physical and tribal textures to it." While the parts suggest various paths to enlightenment, explanatory tidiness oversimplifies Patane's approach.

"The work often starts to make sense in an unconscious way," he says. "Things seem to throw themselves at me in a sense, and it can be surprising how ideas connect. I can be researching something



and find that it's really connected to something else I'm interested in. I didn't know Crowley was a mountain climber as well as an occultist, for instance. I was drawn to him because he gave mysticism a very strong visual identity; he saw himself as an artist, not just a magician. It's the same with the bands I'm interested in, like Current 93, Death in June... these industrial bands from the early 1980s. I'm interested in what they did because it's so 360 degrees in a way, they really didn't just make music. For them as well, the visual aspect was an important part of the whole project."

Though he admits to feeling suspicious of their iconography, Patane has often quoted these defiantly uneasy-listening bands, which he has been into since his teenage years. The whip-hand motif used by 1980s 'apocalyptic folk' icons Death in June featured as a small part of *Kollapsing New People* (2006), an installation that orbited around ideas of protest and resistance, shown at Maureen Paley Gallery last year. Its starting point was an image of a plainclothes policeman during the 1981 Brixton riot, a photograph that struck Patane as "almost a bit sexy, you know, he's fashionable, with leather jacket and tight jeans. I don't deny that sometimes the attraction is pretty straightforward." Connected to this were images of rioting – including an enlarged photograph of that

staple of the street riot, an upturned, burning van – which in turn led the artist to consider the use of different kinds of noise in experimental music. An arrangement of speakers made loose reference to the noise intoner machines of Italian Futurist composer Luigi Russolo, but somewhere between prop and contemplative object, this remained enigmatic.

A highly stylised spectacle such as this reveals a complicated relationship between the spheres of art and politics. On the one hand, political protest and civil unrest give rise to sensational events and images with obvious appeal to the artist. On the other, when these pictures are edited and confined to the gallery, and coveted by a contemporary art world, their power is altered, the subject matter in one sense becoming ignoble by its transformation into artworld bibelots. Through various distortions and constrictions, Patane dramatises this complication. "Obviously I wouldn't use images that I didn't find attractive in some way," he says. "I'm not setting out to be political. I think it would be a mistake for me to say that. There's a mixture of me researching what images mean and my attraction to them.

"I'm interested in the failure of dissent – I find something quite romantic about it, quite beautiful," he says. The jumping-off point of his





“I don’t deny that sometimes the attraction is pretty straightforward”



first exhibition in Italy earlier this year was a photograph of Luigi Bobbio, one of the founders of Lotta Continua, the extreme-left movement of the late 1960s and 70s. Patane enlarged the image of Bobbio, flanked by policemen, and added a thin strip of tape that obscured his eyes. It was a simple gesture, striking as art but deliberately ineffectual as censorship. In his drawings (though he doesn’t really think of the activity as such) Patane embellishes a range of photographic imagery, usually sourced from the medium’s infancy and often depicting forgotten actresses found in old theatre weeklies such as the *Sketch*. His process is to obscure his subjects’ faces by adding blobs of ink that he sometimes teases around the edges into hairy tendrils or feathers, as if the beings were demonic or possessed. This is not done as a gesture of defacement – the results are sometimes mistaken for a Chapman Brothers-esque provocation – but as a kind of rehabilitation. “I guess I believe in the idea that an image can go beyond the meaning that we originally give it, that it can have a second or even a third meaning according to the person’s sensibility and their level of interaction.” Through these images, Patane also dabbles in a type of abstraction that, of course, might be regarded as another kind of magic, a means of channelling energies and conjuring states and emotions decipherable to a privileged few.

There are works on paper in his show at Tate Britain, but the focus, along with the sound piece, is a video of a young man juggling fire, another kind of drawing in a darkened space. “You know, at any festival there’s always a bunch of people juggling fire,” he says. “They annoy me in a way. But I’ve always been quite fascinated by them at the same time. Why do they do it? It’s really quite beautiful. I like the idea of these people, kids usually, believing that they might challenge authority by introducing this very tribal, performative element.”

What seems important here, as everywhere in Patane’s work, is the sense of delay, of anticipation that builds with each revolution. Implicit is a commentary about the difficulties of finding pleasure in political and historical imagery, and presenting the results of lengthy research in aesthetic form. Tacitly acknowledged is the fact that art, as accentuated by a tightly ordered system of gallery display, forever anticipates or succeeds the explosive moment. In Patane’s hands, this state becomes hypnotic. :

Art Now: Seb Patane is at Tate Britain, London, until 13 January. See Listings, page 118, for further information

WORKS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Kollapsing New People (detail), 2006

2 inkjet prints on paper, record sleeve, framed digital c-type print,
inkjet print on canvas, digital c-type print, wood, MDF, speakers, sound
dimensions variable

Razzia, 2006

pressed flowers on printed paper
21 x 28 cm

Live in Pankow, 2007

inkjet print on canvas (82 x 120 cm)
loudspeaker (10 cm diameter) mounted on MDF
(100 x 170 x 2 cm approximately)
courtesy Maureen Paley, London, and Rec, Berlin

Kollapsing New People (detail), 2006

2 inkjet prints on paper, record sleeve, framed digital c-type print,
inkjet print on canvas, digital c-type print, wood, MDF, speakers, sound
dimensions variable.

all images courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Seb Patane

CHAIN REACTION

Catherine Wood

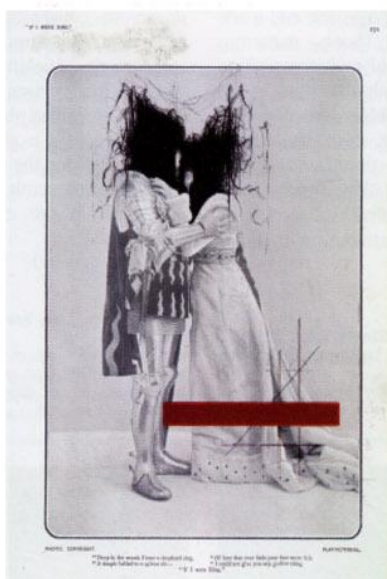
CATHERINE WOOD: *Your recent work refers to or features images of men from political organizations in the '60s and '70s (such as Lotta Continua). What is it about those groups, and the images they created, that you would have seen in the media that attracted you to appropriating them?*

Seb Patane: What attracts me about these organizations is their conscious decision to operate in a political field yet using a strong visual component. The Lotta Continua founders for instance described their *modus operandi* as 'violenza d'avanguardia' (violence of the avant-garde) thus lining themselves along ideas of a specific kind of performativity. They had a definite visual identity that they exploited to achieve their extreme political goals. Some of these images eventually became historically iconic, for instance the image of Italian politician Aldo Moro, kidnapped by the Red Brigades and photographed in front of a banner depicting a pentagram, a symbol they had adopted. It is an image that is burnt forever into my subconsciousness and I am sure in that of many Italians.

CW: *How does the 'aesthetic' aspect of those protest movements relate to your practice as an artist?*

SP: It's an appropriation that I like to make in order to suggest ideas that question the power of so-called political artwork. Some of the kind of visual choices adopted by those protest groups like banners or the use of what I call anti-portrait seemed to relate to issues I am somehow trying to address myself in some of my pieces. To be precise, I never really set up to be explicitly political, in fact my approach to those issues is almost one of a 'lazy learner.' Through researching the visual iconography of those revolutionary years, I started getting closer to the motivations behind the need to make work, or indeed to propose a social statement that is trying to convey some sort of message, however successful or unsuccessful or constructive or destructive that very message may end up being.

CW: *What is your relationship to the photographic image? You often use historic images and manipulate or obliterate them in some way, as though there's a sense of violence towards them, that you feel compelled to partially destroy them?*



Deep in the woods I hear a shepherd sing, 2008. Ballpoint pen, enamel and colored pencil on printed paper, 29 x 21 cm.
Opposite: installation view at Tate Britain, London 2008.
All images, courtesy Maureen Paley, London.

SP: My initial attraction to these pictures is usually pretty visceral; what I mean is that I experience a kind of transport that is almost like a gut reaction. I suppose one could also say that there is already some kind of violence inherent in that relationship, but it's more like my consciousness has been contaminated by that image.

Eventually, my interaction with those images is in fact an act of respect rather than subversion, but it feels like that as a reaction to that psychological violence the outcome ends up looking like a need for abstracted concealment of some sort, almost to balance out that sense of devotion towards the image. It's a game of contradictions.

CW: *Is there any parallel between how you see the use of these 'out of control' aspects such as the black biro effacements in the earlier drawings or the 'censored' marks in recent pictures with the introduction of music into the space?*

SP: I guess it's like a chain reaction. Because

I often work within a very rigid framework — you know, the MDF panels, the tight spatial arrangements, the sparse feel of most of the installations — I eventually feel compelled to give things a different dynamic by introducing for instance sound, which by definition is intangible therefore volatile and more anarchic. Ironically I have ended up introducing that kind of censorship iconography you mentioned just to balance that in turn; the earlier drawings feel very organic and disordered, which coincidentally is a dynamic that seem to address a specific relation between anarchy and the organic described in some '60s theories that I am reading about at the moment. But the censorship images have a sense of enclosed frustration about them... so it's almost like a circle, starting with a very definite image that gets interfered with freely, then gets straightened out a bit... a constant shift.

CW: *You ran a unique nightclub event called "Nerd" for some years, it seemed to me very much a part of your art practice in the way that it created a space for participation and performance by both artists and club-goers who were involved, with events such as Spartacus (formerly Lali) Chetwynd's performance Thriller or artist DJs.*

How was the creation of this social space for performing certain alternative identities related to the depiction of political movements in your work?

SP: "Nerd" felt like some sort of best kept secret. People who came made it their own and always used to say to me how much they enjoyed that feeling of community and exclusivity. There was something unique about the feeling that within that container anything could have happened, like when Spartacus proposed to perform her *Thriller* piece. That night at one particular point we filled the room with fake smoke and 'zombies' started appearing from all angles; people had absolutely no idea that this was going to happen so it felt really anarchic and out of control. I guess alternative political movements retain a similar agenda, like that uncontrollable, exhilarating feeling you get when you feel like you may be able to change the world, if only for a minute.

CW: *Is there a link between your interest in contemporary subcultural 'style' and the secret/coded nature of these operations historically?*

Wood, Catherine, *Seb Patane: Chain Reaction*,
Flash Art, March 2009, pp.72-74.



Wood, Catherine, *Seb Patane: Chain Reaction*, *Flash Art*, March 2009, pp.72-74.



SP: I see those subcultures like providing society with something akin to an ongoing durational performance. It's almost like secret agents, hidden performers acting within crowds to achieve a subtle sense of displacement. When I think about these ideas of rebellion, protest and revolution I actually never think about loud fights or violent wars, it's more like a quiet but incisive time-based infiltration of consciousness.

CW: Could you say something about the 'chain of references' that links different aspects of your work in the last 5 years, and how you decide upon the found material that you appropriate?

SP: Well it all happens organically. I think it's all part of the subconscious, of which I am a great believer. Although my work may appear aesthetically as very thought through, in fact most times I act in a very instinctive way. True, eventually this instinct is usually filtered very carefully but I am surprised as much as any viewer on how different aspects of the work end up relating to each other. I don't set myself up to do only work that requires a found object, but sometimes I feel like we are inundated with so much visual stimuli that it's almost a pollution of the eye. So I feel more inclined on re-using a great image that has been discarded or overlooked, almost as to give it a second chance.

CW: Do the simple geometric MDF structures that 'stage' the mise-en-scène of your installations have a relationship to minimalism, to Robert Morris for example? Do you intend a relationship to the physical presence of the viewer?

SP: No, I don't feel there really are specific references to any particular artist, or not in the fine art area anyhow. At some stage in my practice I felt like I needed more solid structures to enable me to play around with the elements of my installations like the prints on canvas or the sound loops, so I started devising these simple MDF constructions that are just that tiny bit askew so don't end up being too rigid. Because of my interest in theater design they

are arranged almost as to enact the viewers to perform within them, by marginally negotiating their physical interaction around them. But again, it's a combination of the rigid with the unrefined that interests me and that I hope will create an interesting tension in the work.

CW: How does the mise-en-scène of the gallery installation relate to the drawn tableaux from Victorian theater magazines with which you have been fascinated, such as *The Sketch*? Is there an interest in the fictional potential offered by the space of theater? How is that grafted with your political interests?

SP: I guess it's the potential in believing in ideas of 'fakeness' that I am fascinated by, a bit like theatrical or cinematic notions of 'suspension of disbelief.' As an artist, I try and put a lot of trust in the power of the image, which again is what a lot of political movements, especially those satellite ones, wanted to exploit. My installations retain a rough if minimal theatrical aspect that leaves them vulnerable and therefore open to tougher inspection. In a similar way, we can nowadays look at those aged images and interact with a contemporary knowledge that will challenge, in good and bad ways, the importance and validity of such images.

I like to think that fictional narrative can be a very powerful tool indeed, as it has the potential for real subversion; as viewers of anything visual we are put in a position to question reality, and that fragile moment when we doubt realness can be a very inspiring one indeed.

CW: There appears to be a 'gothic' aspect to the relationship between nature and culture, 'live' performance and sculptural 'deadness' and the uncanny quality of your biro drawings/spinning figures in performance?

SP: What interested me for instance in the Victorian images was the sense of passivity that they retained, which I felt I was trying to challenge by introducing those automatic-like drawing interventions. What I like is the idea that fiction can interfere with reality, the 'blur-

From top left: 16 Gennaio 1968, 2007. Inkjet print on PVC, tape, 180 x 130 cm. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London and Galleria Fonti, Naples; Decelerated Montage for the Good War, 2008. Mixed media. Courtesy China Art Objects, Los Angeles and Maureen Paley, London.

ring of art and life' if you like; psychologically there is something terrifying about the idea of the inanimate that then comes to life, which I guess is where a lot of theories about the gothic converge. I am attracted to the potential for a change in dynamic in anything that has a 'live' potential but that also poses itself as lifeless, however small and almost imperceptible that change may appear to be.

CW: Which artists historically have been important to you?

SP: Although I have artists who I admire I'm usually more likely to refer to creative people who act at the margin of the so-called fine art area. So I am more inspired by musicians like Coil or Current 93, or by all-round artistic figures like Alejandro Jodorowsky. I like how these people have a broad approach to the overall creation of a project, be it a record, or book, or film. It feels like the meaning behind their work can be transmitted via different levels, of which only one happens to be visual; I guess it's again a bit like what those political movements we discussed earlier felt they were doing. ■

Catherine Wood is curator at Tate Modern, London.

Seb Patane was born in Catania, Italy, in 1970. He lives and works in London.

Selected solo shows: 2009: Maureen Paley, London. 2008: China Art Objects Galleries, Los Angeles. 2007: Tate Britain, London; REC, Berlin; Fonti, Naples. 2006: Bureau, Manchester; 2004: Lawrence O'Hana, London.

Selected group shows: 2008: "Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities," MoMA, New York; "Archeology of Mind," Malmö Art Museum; "Yours Mine Ours," University of Essex, Colchester, UK; 2007: "Salon Nouveau," Engholm Engelhorn, Vienna; 2006: "While Interwoven Echoes Drip Into A Hybrid Body," Migros Museum, Zurich. 2005: Prague Biennial 2. 2004: "The Black Album," Maureen Paley, London.

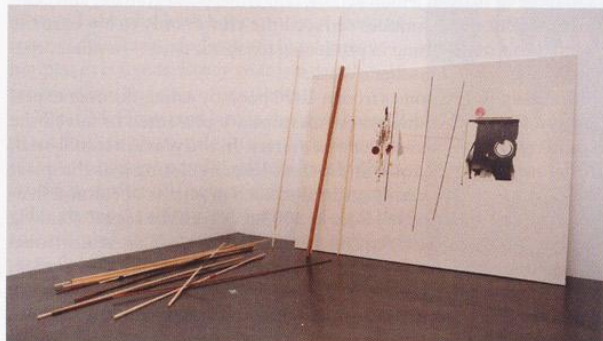
LOS ANGELES

Seb Patane

CHINA ART OBJECTS

At the heart of Seb Patane's tight, studied exhibition is its namesake, a hypnotic video titled *Year of the Corn*, 2011. The time-based composition has a trancelike, vaguely tribal sound component and sets into action the many static expressions visible in the artist's drawings, paintings, collages, prints, and sculptures elsewhere in the room. Over the course of six minutes, the piece shifts through five distinct movements: a dark silhouette (a head? a landscape?) floating static against a pixelated red sky; two planes of latticework spinning laterally; a strangely ritualistic performance shot in black and white played forward and back; two masked bodies superimposed against a bamboo forest; and a point-of-view tracking shot retreating from a deserted shack. In this final section, a muffled voice can faintly be heard reading a poem written by the artist; a text pasted to a wall adjacent to the projection echoing the voice-over, "We were faithful to the line; faithful, to the straight line. . . ."

The structure of this video is peculiar in that while it is both nonnarrative and looped, it is also clearly linear, its successive patterning moving steadily from scene A, to B, to C, and so on, before ultimately returning to A and starting again while lyrically unfolding indeterminately outward. Such opposition between a line and a loop proves to be an unpretentious formal device, which Patane extended to the other works in this show. For example, in *Eleventh to the North*, 2011, similar formal dualisms are sculpturally and pictorially addressed. Leaning a ten-foot-long unprimed canvas against the wall, Patane then dropped before it a pile of thin wooden poles marked with bands of colored tape; four more poles lean against the canvas, reiterating and buttressing the dominant works rendered in acrylic on the flat surface. In between these two- and three-dimensional lines, the work is further embellished with an explosion of tiny geometries, organic patterns of ballpoint pen, and symbols and fragmented text drawn in colored pencil.



Seb Patane, *Eleventh to the North*, 2011, acrylic, ballpoint pen, and colored pencil on canvas, wood, and tape, 90 x 120".

Patane easily shifts between painting and sculpture, conflating pictorial space with physical presence and addressing an object as he might regard a painting. In *Helmethretic Telepathical*, 2011, a large free-standing wooden structure installed in the gallery's main space, Patane seems to question where the "face" of both a sculpture and painting might be. Oriented toward a back wall, the sculpture revealed a small artwork secured by its open-frame structure: an abstract painting collaged with printed paper and leather and set behind glass. The orientation of this flat work was frontal in relation to its sculptural superstructure, but the sculpture seemed backward, with the reverse of the painting's frame facing the entryway. Thus, the viewer was forced to perambulate the sculpture to view the front of both pieces.

In what might be taken as a parallel gesture, when Patane turns toward the figurative—whether in collages that incorporate found photos or in prints that purport to be self-portraits—he nearly always obscures the face of his subject. Even the short clip used in his video—lifted from Peter Sykes's 1968 cult film *The Committee*—depicts a man wearing an elaborate headdress that covers much of his face. These instances of the artist literally defacing a body, while reading as easy attempts at the erasure of identity, are yet another move in the gamelike systems that the artist contrives. And how the viewer figures into these riddles may actually be where we locate the face value of Patane's not-so-faithfully "straight" meanings.

—Catherine Taft

Cross Platform

Sound in other media

Italian multi-artist

Seb Patane

stays faithful to the
straight lines that connect
and divide people and
places, politics and
culture, sound and music.

By Rob Young



Seb Patane *Absolute Körperkontrolle* (2006)

As a young man, Mexican film maker Alejandro Jodorowsky devised a plan to plot a straight line through a local village and walk along it. If this entailed barging through people's homes, over roofs or tramping through their gardens, so be it. Faithfulness to the line, persistence, was all. It's an art action admired by Italian multi-artist Seb Patane. "My interest is in the will to conquest," he says, "to achieve an aim no matter what, and in the passion for the act of what gets called 'performance'. This image [of Jodorowsky] always struck a chord with me; I like it not only as a very visual, surreal image, with an interesting crossover between performance and architecture, but also as a metaphor with ambiguous meanings, or even with political connotations that can be seen as provocative. In the 80s there was also an Italian proto-Soviet punk band called CCCP Fedeli Alla Linea (Faithful To The Line)..."

Patane, a Sicilian living and working in London since 1992, recites the phrase "faithful to the line" down a telephone in *Year Of The Corn* (2011), a short film made for his current exhibition in Mulhouse, France. He works across a variety of media, including installations involving sculptural and sound elements (such as the 'living sculpture' *Absolute Körperkontrolle*); film and electronic music. Acknowledging the influence of Coil, Current 93 and contemporary electronica, he produces his own music as part of the duo Frontier, Frontier! with Giancarlo Trimarchi, although they haven't done much of late. "Frontier, Frontier! is an ongoing project which still exists," insists Patane, "although because of work commitments Giancarlo and I haven't been able to work together in the last two years or so. I am now mostly concentrating on composing tracks on my own, or with Marco Pianges, who collaborated on the sound for *Year Of The Corn*." Pianges and Patane's newest effort, *A Series Of Graceful Juggling Tricks (Part IV)*, will be presented at London's ICA next month.

In *Year Of The Corn*, over a black screen, sounds accrete: birdsong and the rural outdoors; a creaky watermill; a glimmering windchime, and the ringing of a vintage bell telephone. Spinning cobwebs of ruled lines and diagrams appear, as an electronic rhythm kicks off. This is succeeded by a short sample of black

and white footage of countercultural shaman Arthur Brown, a supercharged alien presence cavorting around a private party wearing a flaming headpiece. The soundtrack subliminally morphs back to birdsong, digitally enhanced, and the scene changes to a field of reeds glinting in sunlight, superimposed with engravings of huntsmen from the 18th or 19th century. Finally, as Patane's hand-held camera retreats from one corner of a field, it reveals a rough track parallel to a line of trees. The film meditates upon a series of thresholds, crossings and retreats; persistence and resistance in a constant dialogue.

"*Year Of The Corn* is influenced by ideas of disrupted narrative, rhythm and the difficulty of collapsing dreams, reality, memory, past and present together," Patane says. "The clip with Arthur Brown is from *The Committee* by Peter Sykes, from 1968. I was fascinated by how Brown interrupts a seemingly polite event, by disrupting the order with his dramatic entrance, the fire also representing an organic, out-of-control element. The film is a surreal exercise in some sort of utopian philosophy, that scene being the only dynamic one in an otherwise pretty slow movie."

Such interventions are a core element of Patane's visual work, which consists of altering and defacing found images. These intrusions are about problematizing and muddying the waters rather than clarification, which extends into his other musical work. Anyone listening to his sound pieces *Violenzia D'Avanguardia* and *So This Song Kills Fascists* (both 2007) might expect, from their titles, a music of disruptive, convulsive urgency. They are Panasonic-like assemblages of electronic beats and drum samples, but instead of the frantic bpm's of club music, they are arranged in patterns suggestive of stuttering, indecision, even stasis. The point of a protest song is not to luxuriate in aural textures, but to abandon listening and tackle the problem. But Patane's 'protest' pieces resound in reverbed space, which amplifies the sense of an empty chamber where no one is listening. The tracks are protests with their eyes masked out, like one of Patane's altered postcards.

Patane is interested in what happens to extreme political ideas when direct action is substituted by

songs or artworks. "I'm interested in the potential or failure of such mediations," he says, "and it intrigues me that strong ideas could be presented through the 'embellishment' of an artistic medium."

Patane has spoken of the "failure of dissent" – that direct action is, on the whole, spectacular but ultimately impotent. In the example and activities of Lotta Continua, the 1970s hard left Italian political cell, he sees a different order of revolutionary proposal: change that unfolds through the slow drip of actions, propaganda, protest, publishing, demonstration, private debate, in an underground, unofficial knowledge economy. Political collectives such as these operated in a way which directly mirrors Patane's own comments about sound: that it is "volatile", "anarchic" and exerts a "time-based infiltration of consciousness".

400 Sonnets In Reverse, Together, the piece of music that names Patane's Mulhouse exhibition, takes its title from a line in Broadcast's "The Be Colony". The album where the track is located, *Broadcast & The Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults Of The Radio Age* (2009) can be seen as an epitaph for singer Trish Keenan, who died in early 2011. It shares a certain sonic density with the later Broadcast work, laden with destabilising dub and echo effects. "I've done it using a super-lo-fi, quasi-analogue recording process, literally layering samples and home recordings done on my Mac," he explains. "It has a murky quality and chaotic 'structure' compared to the other stuff. Broadcast have always inspired me for their vision of transformative psychedelia, and that album was for me crucial in making me think about the idea of sonic interferences and interventions on the environment. Buried beneath layers, somewhere in the piece is my voice, heavily treated, singing that line over and over."

"The death of Trish Keenan, although I didn't know her personally, has affected me profoundly, as I have been a fan of the band since the very first days. I consider it to be almost some sort of personal, quiet tribute to them and Trish in particular." □ *400 Sonnets In Reverse, Together* runs to 28 August at La Kunsthalle, Mulhouse, France. An artist monograph edited by Bettina Steinbrügge is published by Distanz