

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 1991 Flash Art n° 160

A large still life, painted with a red dominant, and three small canvases, each slightly rounded like an art book open to the page of a color reproduction: these are the works in the first solo show in Rome by Gennaro Castellano. Precise and meticulous, the paintings are enlarged details of Neapolitan still lifes of the 1600s — in this case by Giuseppe Recco — and Castellano's intervention consists in changing the tonalities of the painting as if it had passed through a color photocopier programmed to emphasize a single dominant hue. Apart from this principle that we might call "anti-painterly", the operation of the artist focuses, above all, on the selection of the detail to be enlarged: there is no background, but a uniform surface packed with ripe fruit — grapes, figs, walnuts, leaves, pomegranates perhaps. Everything is so close to the surface that the painting seems laden, ready to overflow an image in which there are no pauses for the gaze, no security, communicating the corruption of what was once alive, and the inevitable distance between man and nature. There is also a distance between the artist of today and painting itself, a distance that can be bridged by meditation on a technical medium (photography) that corresponds to the mediation of a mental procedure (the subject of the work is not reality "live", but a painting from the past). But there is very little in common, here, with citations and anachronism, no display of a classical culture, none of the self—satisfaction of making a painting similar to those "of other times", which we might not be able to recognize anymore. The work takes place on the very narrow border between great respect and irony regarding "true" painting.