

Press release

Not Vital and Alberto Sorbelli
8 lessons on emptiness with a happy end

Exhibition from 16th March to 13th May 2006
Opening on 16th March from 6pm

Guy Bärtschi gallery is pleased to present Not Vital and Alberto Sorbelli solo show from March 16 to May 13, 2006. Not Vital, born in 1948 in Sent, Engadine, is a tireless nomad. Full of compassion and love for all living beings, the Romansh artist travels the world without ever detaching himself from his Swiss origins. After France, the USA, Italy and Nepal, his path has taken him to Agadez in Niger, where he is currently working.

It is in his roots that the artist finds his main source of inspiration, roots that are both inextricably linked to his place of origin and in constant absorption of his new experiences of life, of places. Neither illusionist nor abstract, often with a touch of humor, his work is halfway between funerary sculpture and a silent celebration of life. Thus a large white marble sled, standing vertically, becomes a totem pole of intimidating beauty; ceramic spheres reveal themselves to contain the ashes of a dead camel; a block of silver turns out to be a self-portrait of the artist, a compendium of his entire life since birth.

Indeed, the Portrait presented here, made by Tuareg craftsmen from Agadez, conceals in its dimensions the date of birth of the artist: on a base measuring 19 x 19 x 48 cm is installed a rectangle measuring 15 x 15 x 2 cm, thus making the date of 15 February 1948 tangible. This opaque and mysterious stele, imprinted with Not Vital's date of birth, is it waiting to be complete until the date of his death is also inscribed on it. The materialization of this life, in such a silent and pure form, seems to send us back to the question of death.

Born in Rome in 1964, Alberto Sorbelli now lives and works in Paris. A former dancer with the Rome Opera, he is well acquainted with the performing arts, which considerably influence his work where theatricality and corporality play a primordial role.

From the outset, Alberto Sorbelli's art is part of a tradition of provocative, even irreverent performances. Disguised as a prostitute, he goes to the openings of Parisian museums and galleries, giving out his telephone number and promising complete satisfaction to whoever calls him. Although other artists have also tried their hand at this role, André-Louis Paré points out that "he is probably the only one who plays it without cheating on the confusion by letting people believe that he is really what he does". Mimicking the possibility of being both an art object and a sexual object, he highlights the ambiguous and triangular relationships that govern the art world, where the artist must literally "whore around" to satisfy merchants and institutions. This performance gave rise to a series of photographs entitled "Attempt at a relationship with a masterpiece" (1994) and "Au Louvre" (1997).

After 1999, the theme of physical aggression replaced that of prostitution. With the help of accomplices, he staged real physical assaults on his person in places such as the Guggenheim Museum (1998) or at the Venice Biennale (1999). Once again, it is the artist's body that serves as the raw material for the work of art, and which must provoke in the viewer a questioning of individual and institutional systems of violence, a questioning of fields of authority.

In addition to some thirty photographs and two films documenting the various facets of Alberto Sorbelli's work, this exhibition will also show a new series of 18 drawings forming a single work, as well as two diptychs composed of drawings produced in an ambidextrous manner.