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The mutant abstractions of Quayola

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**Aesthete of connection between figurative art and digital abstraction, the Italian artist Davide Quayola turns classical Western tradition of pictures and landscape to new audiovisual dimensions, in direct contact with technological disruptions of our time.**

Since last 1st April, the domain of Chaumont-Sur-Loire in The Loire Valley welcomes among all the invited artists of its cultural program 2016 the very intriguing Italian (but settled in London) Davide Quayola for a presentation of its piece Pleasant Places. Pleasant Places is a digital and contemplative painting offering to the spectator the occasion to observe the progressive transformation of the pictorial textures of its bucolic landscape into a living and evolving photographic image, swarming with blurred and anthropomorphic details. This piece that has been principally using mapping technology is particularly representative of hybrid experiments led by Quayola, merging 3D animated images, immersive audiovisual installations and inspirations guided by ancient art and its very formal representations.

## **Mesmerizing hybridisations**

Quayola's work has indeed always induced a rather quirky and mesmerizing link between a certain artistic tradition (transmitted by painting, sculpture and iconic art), and a truly technological

modernism. A link he enjoys to blend into digital frames, into kinds of new hybrid paintings including a modification at the surface of the images with abstract and animated geometric forms (like in his Strata series and more specifically in his piece Topologies in which he appropriates original paintings from Diego Velasquez and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo to operate his formal transfigurations), but as well into robotic sculptures (the mechanical processes of his project Captives, where car assembling industrial robots are reprogrammed to become digital “Michelangelo”, carving polystyrene blocks until obtaining new “classic-contemporary” figures), and more recently again into exploration of new intricate craft of algorithmic engravings and prints that has taken place in his project Iconographies that relies once again on classic, even biblical, figures such as the Caravaggio’s Judith and Holofernes painting. A whole range of combining artistic approaches that refer to the permanent work of research and synthesis that Quayola drives between representation and abstraction.



*“I’ve always been fascinated by the space between abstraction and representation, real and artificial, and I feel this is explored deeply in Pleasant Places as well as in other series like Iconographies or Captives”, Quayola says. “I bring forward many different series and each with its own theme and subject. However the relationship between different modalities of vision is a key principle behind all my works. In this sense, Pleasant Places pays homage to the modern tradition of Western art that takes landscape as a point of departure towards abstraction.”*

## **Shock of cultures**

Throughout this singular process, Quayola offers a rare opportunity: the one to bring back to either two aesthetics, even two audiences that oppose often themselves - the followers of figurative and the total fans of abstraction – in a practice that literally transcends the relationships between classicism and new digital technologies. A connection that Quayola has been honing at every new piece and that takes its origin in the own artist’s roots.

*“My mother is a painter and always been very passionate about art, so I somehow grew up immersed in this pictorial thing”, he admits. “But it was actually when I moved to London that I started thinking about these images in a different way. So, on one side there is certainly something very personal about my engagement with art history. But on the other hand however, I think there is a wider context for this, more related to how technology is drastically changing the way people look and experience the world. As new tools expand our senses, unexplored opportunities arise to discover new points of view. I reckon that for me, looking at something like these ancient images which are so old and that shaped so much our visual culture, it’s like my way of engaging in such wider conversation about how technology shapes people and culture.”*

## **Live AV and sound related projects**

In this idea of broadening the artistic object, Quayola is far from being an autarkic artist, withdrawing on his simple and exclusive vision. He takes a lot of interest in live and collaborative audiovisual projects like the one with electronica/Warp label artist Mira Calix that has given in 2009 a musically-augmented version of Strata (Strata#2) presented in the very specific and architectural frame of the Église Saint-Eustache in Paris. More recently, in last January for the first edition of the Biennale des Arts Numériques in Paris, he created within the program Turbulences Numériques of the Philharmonie an audiovisual partition based on composer Györgi Ligeti’s Sonate For Alto.

*“Sound has always been a great inspiration for me, and in many of my works, it’s an essential part of the piece that cannot be separated from the visual part”, he says. “The Ligeti concert is part of a series of projects where sound is actually the main subject. In a similar way on how I might analyse and re-interpret a painting, sculpture or landscape, a piece of music becomes a point of departure where to build upon.”* And as it happens, the technological dimension found also a logical place into the principle of mutation of the score and the whole creation. *“The audiovisual partition was developed in collaboration with two other visual artists, Pedro Mari and Natan Sinigaglia. We developed together a specific software to analyze the audio in real time and control related real time visualisations”.* A new expansion of work that should continue to feed Quayola’s creative abstraction towards new enlarged spheres of alternative modes of vision and synthesis.