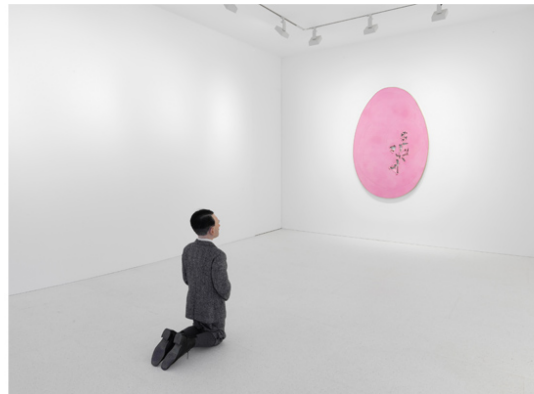


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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A Tale of Two Endings

Bonnie Friend



La fine di Dio: Maurizio Cattelan | Lucio Fontana © Maurizio Cattelan © Fondazione Lucio Fontana

Walk into a stark, white room at Gagosian gallery on Davies Street, and you will be greeted by a smartly dressed little boy kneeling in front of a Pepto-Bismol pink, two dimensional, giant egg, hung on the wall ahead. Surreal as this is, the scene is one of a certain sense of calm – the unimposing figure staring hypnotised at what appears to be a giant Easter egg.

Look a little closer however, and the whole scene takes on a considerably more chilling aspect, because this is no ordinary little boy. In fact, it's not a little boy at all. Kneeling on the floor in supplementation to Lucio Fontana's climactic painting of the early sixties, *La Fine di Dio*, is a small and eerily perfect model of Hitler.

The model, by Maurizio Cattelan, is simply titled HIM, with no further explanation needed thanks to the infamy of the subject matter. Meanwhile, *La Fine di Dio* was one of the late, polished works of an artist who was credited with being the founder of the Spazialismo/Spatialist movement, his work invariably characterised by the way in which he created negative space with slashes and cuts on the canvas.

This is curator, Francesco Bonami's, current exhibition, also titled *La Fine di Dio*, but what on earth are these two seemingly juxtaposing pieces doing in the same space, let alone brought together to create an entirely new conceptual installation?

Well, the devil is actually in the positioning itself, which is rather fitting given the history of Cattelan's model. Having been "designed to be the embodiment of hidden evil" according to the director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Fabio Cavallucci, in an interview in 2012, Cattelan's work has made its reputation for the places in which it has been installed and the

emotions it invokes as much as for the sculpture itself. In 2012 it appeared at the gates of a former Warsaw ghetto, the site where many Jews were sent to their deaths at the hands of Hitler's regime, to understandably mixed responses.

According to Bonami however, this idea came to him when he was in the storage area of the US Army Centre of Military History in Washington DC. The curator showed him a painting by Hubert Lanzinger, *The Standard Bearer* from 1935, depicting Hitler as Joan of Arc, but under one eye someone had placed a deep gash in the painting.

What transpired to be an act of anger on behalf of an American soldier enraged at the sight of the image but with no real individual to bear the brunt of his feelings, struck Bonami as not simply an act of vandalism but one of freedom. He saw parallels between the dictator and Fontana's work, both envisioning the end of God, but the former by way of destruction, and the latter by way of infinite space, "[he] found inspiration in the marvels of the universe, that infinite space where even god could disappear."

Thus it seems that through art, Bonami, Cattelan, and Fontana, make the image of Hitler bow down to a universe with more future and possibility than the one that he himself had set his sights on. The result is the contemplation of a story with two conclusions – one Fuhrer whose idea of an ending was one of destruction, and the other of an artist who didn't envisage an ending at all, only infinity.

La Fine di Dio runs until April 5, 2014 at the Gagosian Gallery, 17-19 Davies Street, London W1K 3DE from Monday – Saturday 10:00am – 6:00pm