

PRESS RELEASE

Vittorio Santoro : *Rushing To Take Sides / Reflecting On The Right Side To Take*

@The Showroom by Xavier Fischer

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“*Chi puo metta, chi non puo prenda*” what can be translated into English as “Put in if you can. Take out if you can’t”, is a quote by the canonised doctor and philanthropist Giuseppe Moscati (1880-1927) that took on new meaning during the coronavirus crisis in southern Italy. Residents of several towns there wrote the quote on small pieces of paper and attached them to woven baskets filled with food. They then lowered them from their balconies into the streets of their neighbourhoods to help those in need. It was an act of solidarity and community in the spirit of Moscati’s work, who is still revered today for his selflessness and great commitment to the poor and sick.¹

In Vittorio Santoro’s work *Pulleys (Put In, Take Out/The Unanswered Question)* (2024), Moscati’s phrase is also found on a woven basket. This time, however, it is empty, and instead of hanging on a balcony, it is attached to a system of metal pulleys and cords that spans the entire exhibition space. If visitors follow the hemp cord, they will find three hanging instruments at the other end of the pulley. These three elements are the same as those that featured prominently in Charles Ives’ composition *The Unanswered Question* (1906-07). Composer Jan Swafford describes the piece as a three-layered musical collage in which the violins in the background embody *the silence of the Druids*. As the trumpet seems to keep asking the same basic question repetitively, the flutes try to suggest a solution. Still unsatisfied with the answers, the trumpet asks the question one last time at the end of the piece. But this time it remains unanswered, followed by a sequence of silence.²

Both the instruments and the basket hang at the same height and appear to be interdependent. The underlying system that connects the two extremities has numerous pulleys of different sizes, and the ropes that stretch across the entire space are tied together at multiple points and even contain knobs. What at first glance appears to be the physical logic of a pulley system has, on closer inspection, some functional inconsistencies. With objects of different weights floating at the same height, it almost seems as if the laws of gravity are cancelled out. The ropes seem more fragile than they are strong, and all orientation is lost in the confusion, creating the image of an almost impossible system on the edge of functionality.

“*Chi puo? Chi non puo? (Who can? Who can’t?)*” The large-scale installation *Pulleys (Put In, Take Out/The Unanswered Question)* reflects on ethical principles of coexistence, asking who has the power to act and who does not. It rejects binary or oppositional thinking. In contrast to the conflict in Charles Ives’ composition, here the trumpet and flute merge into a hybrid object, freed from their original function. Rather, Santoro searches for the origin of such differences and questions the universal validity of today’s flawed systems and their capacity for justice. At its very core, the installation reflects on the role of the individual in a larger social structure and the responsibility that comes with it.

Marius Quiblier (translated from German)

1. Giorgio Papasogli, *Giuseppe Moscati: Das Leben eines heiligen Arztes*, 1982.

2. Jan Swafford, *The Unanswered Question*, Boston Symphony Orchestra, 2024.

Vittorio Santoro

Vittorio Santoro (b. 1962, Zurich) lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland.

With his installations, text-drawings, films, sculptures, real-time activities, sculptural situations, films or sound pieces, Vittorio Santoro chooses specific ways to manipulate conventions to desired effects believing that creativity is an ongoing process of continual change and response. His practice conceals a tension between the referential potential of objects and the choreographic nature of their placement in context.

Since 2000, his works have been exhibited widely in group shows at major institutions, including Tate Modern (London), CAPC Musée d'art contemporain (Bordeaux), Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthaus Zurich, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Centre Pompidou (Paris), A Tale of a Tub (Rotterdam); as well as in solo exhibitions at notable venues such as Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard (Paris), Yvon Lambert (Paris, New York), Museum of Contemporary Art, Pavillon (Shanghai), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Kunstmuseum Luzern, Kestner Gesellschaft (Hannover). In 2017, he was nominated for the Prix Marcel Duchamp.

Public and Private Collections (selection)

Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern
Bundesamt für Kultur/Federal Office of Culture, Bern
Graphische Sammlung der Schweizerischen Nationalbibliothek (NB), Bern
Kunstsammlungen des Bundes, Bern
CAPC Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux
FRAC Collection-Aquitaine, Bordeaux
Musée National d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris
Museo de Arte Contemporânea Armando Martins, Lisbon
FNAC (Fonds national d'art contemporain), Paris
Artothèque, Ville de Pessac, Pessac
Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich
Kunstsammlung der Stadt Zürich, Zurich
Kunstsammlung Kanton Zürich, Zurich
Burger Collection, Hong Kong/New York
Collection Frédéric de Goldschmidt, Paris/Bruxelles
Collection Françoise Darmon, Paris
Kerenidis Pepe Collection, Paris
Sammlung Nobel, Zurich