

Alfredo Aceto

Builders Supply
20.01. – 11.03.2023

« We have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained.
That is a new story. » – Ursula K. Le Guin, « The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction » (1986)

When sci-fi feminist writer Ursula K. Le Guin uses the metaphor of the carrier bag to suggest alternative forms of storytelling, she proposes a reversal of standpoints to underline what universal narratives have left out. Instead of heroic exploits, she tells the stories of humans, less spectacular yet just as valuable, favouring the harvesting over the hunting, or the carrier bag over the spear. This symbolic shift of perspective is a good starting point for apprehending the work of artist Alfredo Aceto. Aceto's exhibition *Builders Supply* features a space for multiple potentialities, like an unconventional toolbox or a wardrobe where the works reveal themselves as carriers of subversive and distorted messages.

The exhibition *Builders Supply* originates in DIY construction shops. Since 2015, the artist developed a fascination with related environments while renovating artist Paola Pivi's house in Alaska. A display of stereotypical masculinity and a supply site for artists, artisans, and tinkerers, these *builders' supply shops* become sources of reflection and contemplation for Aceto.

Viewing the tools necessary for construction and destruction as aesthetic and signifying objects, Aceto suggests an interplay of ideas that leads the viewer to reconsider their supposed heteronormative undertones. And this is his preferred technique: subverting the object, detaching it from its *primary* function to expose a broader spectrum of meanings and symbologies. The metonymic tendency to transpose one word or image for another underpins much of the artist's work. Hence, the exhibition becomes a sort of voluntary and intimate *exposure* like opening the door to one's wardrobe revealing one's favourite items but also the armours and the secrets.

The artwork *Campanula* confronts the body through its verticality. Made of fiberglass, the sculpture has the potential to disturb wandering in space by the possible activation of its small inlaid bells. With *Tongue Twister*, Aceto diverts the sphere of construction towards that of the body. Photographed on the hood of his white Subaru, these images conjure an erotic and traditionally masculine universe. The artist assembles objects with slimy and hard textures like still life paintings, and pours greasy motor oil on top, a liquid that he fetishises for its sophisticated and libidinal appeal. He also loves tongues, organs of taste and language, and the gateway between the inside and outside, which he layers in the pictures.

Mouths appear frequently in Aceto's work, suggesting both sexual connotations and oral expression. In particular, *Bocca con pennello*, refers to speech therapy exercises. The brush in the mouth is hence at the service of intelligible communication rather than pictorial creativity. Fascinated by these tools, Aceto makes them into sculptures of bronze, painted with oil—an optical illusion and reference to canonical art history and *high art*, of which traditional forms of painting and sculpture are emblems.

The ambivalence between container and content is also expressed in *Svuotatasche*, which refers to the bowls placed at the entrance of homes to empty one's pockets. Moulded in reverse, these sculptures reveal the social attributes that are worn outside and taken out inside. This inside-outside relationship is omnipresent in Aceto's work, notably through the image of the closet as a place dedicated to personal belongings and secrecy, a non-social space linked to preservation and isolation. The closed thus becomes a metaphor for a territory where questions of sexuality and gender—and by extension identities—are negotiated. In her text "Epistemology of the Closet" (1990), queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick demonstrates how society conditions and conceals homosexual desires through the image of the closet, eminently symbolic in the construction of modern Western cultures.

Therefore, the closet can be seen on the one hand as the container of intimate emancipation and on the other hand as the repository of oppressed desires. By opening it, one exposes themselves to the outside world. By keeping it closed, one maintains fantasies and a world of their own. In the exhibition, the duality between inside-outside/container-content is also illustrated by the figure of the moth.

With *Hummel*, Aceto pays tribute to these small insects, known for their mastication of supporting structures. Whether it is the termite for wood or the moth for clothing, they have the ability to disrupt the foundations that host them. This re-evaluation of hierarchies is at the core of the garment piece, in which the moth takes possession. Eventually, the content becomes the container. The moth becomes the jacket.

The loop is completed (just like the endless cycle of *Copy-quick*). *Builder Supply* reflects a distinct fascination with the emancipated object from its utilitarian function. In the DIY shop, in the toolbox, or in the closet, objects are available according to one's desires and needs: sabotaging conventions, getting rid of social assignments, putting on one's best clothes, and taking them off. *Builder Supply* is about entering the artist's closet, the multiple versions of himself, and his anecdotes. "It is the story that makes the difference," writes Ursula K. Le Guin. Through a series of trivial objects, Aceto speaks about aesthetics but also about anti-normativity, anti-heroism, and all those banal and complex stories that inhabit and define us.

Camille Regli,
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Born in 1991 in Turin, Italy, **Alfredo Aceto** lives and works between Geneva and Turin. He studied Fine Arts at École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL) and at The Mountain School of Arts (MSA[^]), in Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited in many international surveys, including DOC!, Paris, Museo Pietro Canonica, Rome, Museo del 900, Milan, Centre d'Art Contemporain de Genève, Geneva, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, St. Gallen or Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus. Aceto is currently teaching at ECAL. In 2019 he is the recipient of the Leenaards Culture Grant from the Fondation Leenaards.

Camille Regli is an independent curator based in Zurich and Biel/Bienne. She is the co-founder and director of the contemporary art centre KRONE COURONNE and is part of the curatorial trio *Collectif Détente*. Her interests lie in revisited narratives that sustain an alternative and feminist reading of contemporary societies. She regularly writes for artists and on contemporary art, including for the OnCurating Journal, Nero magazine or Mousse. She is a graduate of King's College London and ZHdK, and was curator in residence in 2020 at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin.