

MILAN

Francesco Gennari

GALLERIA ZERO

Contemporary artists tend to reject the view that an artist is some exalted, exceptional personality who, out of nothing, creates something highly significant to the rest of the world; today this concept is considered too aristocratic or belatedly Romantic. But among some young Italian artists, including Francesco Gennari, the idea seems to be making a comeback. Clearly, this position implies a bit of egocentrism—an attitude confirmed by the rather cryptic press release for Gennari's recent exhibition, in which the artist went so far as to use the word *demiurge* to describe himself.

The show's title, "*7 enigmi per il mio loden*" (7 Riddles for My Loden Overcoat), refers to six elegant, gold-plated coat hangers affixed to the wall, each of a different shape, and titled *Enigma 1*, *Enigma 2*, and so on (all works 2006). On one of these, the artist hung his overcoat. That action, which took place at the opening, was not intended as a performance but as an act of establishment, which therefore cannot be repeated once it has been carried out. (The artist



refused to repeat the gesture with a different coat hanger when I suggested it.) According to the press release, hanging the coat is the equivalent of "applying a concept, projecting thought to the matter, to give it meaning, function, shape, in synthesis, determination." Thus, there is really nothing superhuman after all about the action of this demiurge—the form assumes a function after the material has assumed a form: The sculpture becomes a clothes stand. The universe that the demiurge creates is a small universe of microevents, a shaping of form through a new organization of material. In other words, Gennari's project is about the genesis of a work of art, understood in a rather traditional manner.

The show included two additional pieces, called self-portraits. *Autoritratto tra un quadrato e un triangolo* (Self-Portrait between a Square and a Triangle), a small-scale sculpture in black marble, placed on the floor, has an

elongated shape that begins as a parallelepiped and ends as a pyramid. This solidification of the "space" between a square and a triangle represents "the place where the demiurge desired to spend part of his time in the guise of gin"; indeed, this alcohol has been poured over the sculpture. In fact, gin is one of the substances with which this demiurge is identified or symbolized (gin is a "spirit," as they say in both Italian and English). In the second self-portrait, *Autoritratto con* (Self-Portrait with), the two manifestations come together in a photograph of a man, seen from behind, wearing a loden coat and holding a bottle of gin in his hand.

Plato wrote that the demiurge gives form to preexisting eternal ideas and thus projects a universe that is just and beautiful and tends toward the common good. It will be interesting to see whether Gennari, the self-proclaimed artist-demiurge, will be able to move on from the hermetic premise of his work and do good within a cynical art system.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.