

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Piero Golia

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Angel food, kugelhupf, savarin, pound, fleur-de-lis, Bavarian bundt: a dozen ring-shaped cakes, each a unique sculptural form cast in white concrete elegantly gridded the gallery, set atop tall rectangular pedestals in three neat rows, four deep. Piero Golia received the elaborate bakeware set that molded this lot as a wedding gift some years ago. The pans sat cold in the cupboard until his divorce, when they came to mean something other than they had. For his show this past summer at Gagosian, Golia concretely figured the recently compounded emotional weight of the pans' readymade volumes as hard, opaque solids. Entombing their hollows, he transformed them, Medusa-like, into emphatically inedible blocks of tooth-shattering density, deadweights hardened around an absent core—one-to-one scale micromonuments to broken domesticity.

Beyond the pathos of their genesis, Golia's "Concrete Cakes," 2010–11, are extraordinarily graceful and shapely design objects that ingeniously combine geometric simplicity with striking, if understated, ornamental ridging and surface refinement faceted like cut jewels. Formal affinities recast the cakes as crowns, albeit impossibly heavy ones, and cement the faraway grandeur of sovereigns in punk affirmation that the artist reigns supreme. An epic sense of purpose and global stakes, as though borrowed from Shakespearean histories or *Lord of the Rings*, gradually pervades their otherwise deadpan and banal forms. Increasingly, one understands that deeply strategic moves are being played, from king to queen and cake to cake, across the orderly, chessboardlike layout.

If there is a formal strategy underlying "Concrete Cakes and Constellation Paintings," Golia's first (and long overdue) solo exhibition in the city he has called home since 2003, then it might be framed in terms of anti-entropic compression, densification, and the considerable weight of consolidation—simultaneously psychological and material. Isolating the simple act of pouring, everything is cast solid; each infill object communicates the gravity of a definitive gesture, something like closure. The swirling orbital rings of the Concrete Cakes, with their swollen masses and arching ribs plunging inexorably toward a central vortex like the force field around a black hole, are countered by the black holes of high-impact compression that are Golia's "Constellation Paintings" (2010–11): six massive panels of glossy black resin, hardened in slabs several inches thick and studded with colorful bits and pieces of shattered ceramic, metal, plastic, wood, and glass lodged in the solid depth like celestial bodies punctuating the night sky.



Piero Golia,
Untitled #1,
2010–11, concrete,
3½ x 9½ x 9½".

These impressively dimensional paintings (bordering on sculptures) are full of such ready-made protrusions as bent chair legs, knobs, handles, and the disembodied lollipop limbs of a broken Memphis coatrack: Golia offers tangible things to grasp onto, to hang your hat on, even as elsewhere, in works such as *Constellation Painting #8*, 2011, the viewer is pushed away by jagged slats of splintered wood that stick out sharply and demand a more distanced perspective. All the flotsam and jetsam fixed in the paintings' solidified plastic ooze are the salvaged remains of the artist's domestic possessions and art collection that were destroyed in a bizarre collision that occurred one August night in 2010, when a Beverly Hills cab driver incredibly crashed

his vehicle headfirst into Golia's house following an argument over a fare. The driver was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon.

If constellations are aesthetic rationalizations of haphazard stellar events, then Golia's paintings take stock and make sense of circumstance with a similarly mythic motive. Yet by consolidating and formalizing the archaeology of trauma, suspending its stuff in inky blackness, these paintings rhyme as closely with the muck of the La Brea tar pits as they do with imagined star fields glittering somewhere across the cosmos. Their undulating pitch surfaces—alternately caked and placid, wrinkled and smooth, roiling and oily—have pooled and puddled like vats of congealing primordial goo. We stand in front of a strange and dense abyss, our silhouettes reflecting merely as shadows breached by the twisted, fragmentary artifacts of the artist's increasingly legendary life.

—Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer