

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

LA WEEKLY

Piero Golia at Gagosian Gallery

By Andrew Berardini *Thursday, Jul 21 2011*



Piero Golia's paintings and cake sculptures at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills
PHOTO BY DOUGLAS M. PARKER STUDIO, COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY & PIERO GOLIA

On March 4, Piero Golia announced the date and title of his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles on Facebook after 10 years of living here and scores of exhibitions almost everywhere but L.A. "Concrete Cakes and Constellation Paintings, Los Angeles, June 23, 2011," he wrote. The first commenter noted "location, to be determined?" I'm not sure if Golia was taking bids or simply negotiating, but the location was within a month or so determined, and it happened to be Gagosian, one of the most influential galleries in the world.

Normally such declarations might emerge as audacious, but not for Golia, who regularly manages to make his incredible visions credible. Originally from Naples, Italy, he's done only two other projects in Los Angeles. During an edition of an art fair in Santa Monica, not getting the booth size he expected, he took a full-sized passenger bus and crushed it to fit the size of the booth he received. His dealers were forced to perch on chairs in the promenade.

In West Hollywood, Golia installed a public project atop the Standard Hotel, a large white globe light that is on when he's in town and off when he's not. Simple, graceful, almost secret. Now you know the secret, but how many Sunset Strippers cruise by the globe in their daily commutes and wonder why the light is on when it's on and off when it's off? Perhaps they don't notice it all. Upon first hearing about the project, one might think it a grandiose monument to the self, but it becomes in practice a quiet beacon for a single citizen and those who care when he's around.

At first, each of these projects has the clarity of a good joke and the grace of a single contained gesture, a ballerina's plié or just one crack of the blacksmith's hammer. But buried within them are layers of difficulty in negotiating an aesthetic vision against reality, not only how reality shapes vision but how the fiction manufactured by the artist can then shape reality. It took Piero almost right up to the deadline, after sleepless months of preparation and planning, to figure out how to crush the bus, which he realized with the help of three bulldozers (one to pin it, two to crush it) and only after, of course, taking out all the necessary infrastructure built into a bus to keep it resolutely safe from being crushed. The light on the Standard was an idea that took at least seven years to realize and, even after he'd found a sponsor and a location, years more of fabrication, red tape and bureaucracy to make it a reality. Planned as part of the California Biennial in 2008, it did not actually appear until 2010.

His last commercial gallery show in the U.S. was in New York during the trough of the global financial crisis and not long after the artist split from his wife. The exhibition had the same simplicity and grace of all of Golia's projects — a 35mm camera was thrown from an airplane, recording its fall to the ground. The piece documented what it meant to

capture freefall, the ground and sky a flickering, chaotic vertigo, until the inevitable crash landing. Though its meaning exists independently from its time, it also felt like a beautiful acknowledgment of all the trouble we'd gotten ourselves into.

His current exhibition at Gagosian seems almost like the bookend of a bad time, not only for Golia but a whole era.



Piero Golia PHOTO BY GILDA LOUISE ALOISI

Writing about Golia typically requires a preamble, as the legend of the piece and its creator becomes almost as important as the piece itself. In the gallery at Gagosian, two somewhat disastrous incidents come together. As an accidental wedding present, Golia received a set of unusual cake molds for which he artist had no use. Secondly, in August 2010, after two of Golia's friends disputed a cab fare, the taxi driver drove straight into Golia's house, destroying many of the artist's possessions, including furniture and art. It made the evening news, the tattooed artist holding his injured arm in the background as the cabbie was led away in handcuffs. For Golia, having just moved to the house in the wake of his divorce, the tragedy seemed doubled.

The set of a dozen cake molds he filled with white concrete. The exhibition's alliterative title is deliciously poetic, and the concrete cakes look like something sweet, though a single bite might cost you your teeth. They almost look like what my mother would recognize as art in their classical presentation and representation but with the variations on a theme, the grid of the sculptures themselves resting on plywood pedestals, the subtle tease of pop in the familiar shape and the legend of the artist infecting it all, the cakes become as much a conceptual gesture as any of the artist's other works — the idea becomes the machine that makes the art.

Lining the walls around the cakes are a series of paintings composed of poured resin and the shattered remnants of what the taxicab destroyed in its swan dive through the front of the artist's house. Strange knobs (from a coat rack, maybe) poke out of the shiny black swirling miasma along with a host of other detritus that once were precious possessions. The constellations are all of the lost materials in the blackness of the tableau.

Cast in resin and encased in concrete, these two disasters are ensconced in art and set behind. All the things of value we thought we were collecting this last decade might just now be shattered junk, and it's best to seal them in resin like prehistoric bugs caught in amber. All those sweet things we thought we were tasting have perhaps turned into concrete in our mouths. In both are stories of a decade of gain, loss, struggle and, perhaps here at the end of the road in L.A., redemption.

PIERO GOLIA: CONCRETE CAKES AND CONSTELLATION PAINTINGS | Gagosian Gallery | 456 N. Camden Drive, Beverly Hills | Through Aug. 5