

ALBERTO ROCCA

I Laugh Therefore I Am

Versatility is the key to Alberto Rocca's art, so is a heavy dose of irony. But what a sweet burden!

Somewhere between mixed media works on wood and comical line drawings lies a heart of an artist deeply engaged in life. His works on paper easily fall into the category of caricature, echoing the art of such established cartoonists as André Pijet and Yayo, to name just a few. His preoccupations are numerous, from issues of health and nutrition, to the environment and human idiosyncrasies. Society's many foibles do not escape his keen eye, and his equally honed sense of irony. Aided by delightfully unencumbered hand at drawing, Alberto Rocca tickles our funny bone while gently laughing in our face. His *Zoo Donne* is simply hilarious, three large-lipped (fillers?) women, heads only, staring plaintively from behind bars of cage. Men are not spared, as we witness in a trio of male heads under the title of *Uomini*, cross-eyed, oddly discombobulated, suspended in space, and sanity. And just in case one doesn't grasp the irony, another drawing appears under the heading *Siamo Uno Zoo*, we are, indeed, a zoo.

Rocca's humour extends to his three-dimensional pieces, like the whimsical *oink pio pio oink*, a mixed media round sculpture crowned with a pig's head in shocking pink, wide-eyed, on the verge of tumbling.

His works on wood employ a different visual lexicon, but remain firmly rooted in the artist's conceptual vocabulary. A small sculpture, *orango tan*, presents the viewer with a crudely carved ape's head, the wood barely altered, its texture and edges filling in the composition. Enormous ears ground the piece; tiny beady eyes the only material addition. Simplicity and humour hand-in-hand, once again.

Eyes are an integral component of the Italian artist's production, regardless of medium, and the orang-utan head is no exception. It is staring at the viewer with innocent impunity, eliciting an instant smile.

Looking/seeing is also at the heart of two works with the same title: *ci guardano, only eyes*, mixed media works on wood attesting to Rocca's creative versatility. Like an abstracted, cubist sculpture, these are quasi portraits; faces with ceramic eyes on stalks made from metal pipes, the mouths formed from openings in rusted metallic scraps. The first piece almost monochromatic, the second with a wonderful dash of red against a peeling bluish background, and together an inseparable duo.

It is not easy to place Rocca within a particular frame, and that is a good thing, for this is an artist clearly impossible to rein in, a free spirit on a creative adventure, one the viewer is eager to embark on in tandem with. His art is accessible and filled with humour that traverses cultures, a storyboard of sorts, and one is left with a craving for 'pages' to turn.

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