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**'BANDIERA NERA', BY JOHN DI STEFANO, SCA GALLERIES,
SYDNEY COLLEGE OF THE ARTS, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY,
23 JANUARY–21 FEBRUARY 2015**

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In John Di Stefano's exhibition 'Bandiera Nera', the film-maker and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini is the muse. Di Stefano's works address Pasolini's public persona, the socio-political history of post-WWII Italy that informed his art and activism,

his artistic process, and the ideas in both his films and writings. Pasolini gave to the world a mirror image of its own beauties and imperfections, reflecting on society, politics, capitalism, religion and sexuality. Di Stefano's works on Pasolini's life and art reinforce, expand and keep his vision alive.

Di Stefano's first contact and infatuation with Pasolini was through his public character. As a boy, he collected paparazzi pictures of Pasolini from tabloid magazines, images that were not from Pasolini's intellect, but of his male body, the man with controversial views, the celebrity. *Picturing Pasolini* is a selection of those images from Di Stefano's childhood scrapbook with a written analysis, which, along with the exhibition catalogue, support the artworks on show. The polaroids *Tenebre*, enlarged details of the same photographs, are reworked into dark, unclear, gentle monuments in memory of a man fearless of projecting his voice.

GRAM/SCI, *Ponte (orizzontale)* and *Silence, Please* refer to the philosophical and historical antecedents to Pasolini's writings, films and attitudes. *GRAM/SCI* is a work on paper imprinted in relief with the name of the Marxist philosopher and Communist Party leader Antonio Gramsci, from his tomb, and whose thoughts were very influential for Pasolini. *Ponte (orizzontale)*, uses the same technique and takes its inscriptions from the fascist milestones of the Foro Italico in Rome. One wonders if the crossing of this horizontal bridge from fascism (1943) to the Republic (1948) meant any form of social change for the Italian people. *Silence, Please* contrasts the social order required of the murmuring public by those in authority at the Pantheon, with its history as pagan temple and mausoleum for the unpopular last Italian king Umberto I.

Volgar Eloquio and *Senza Parole* engage with Pasolini's creative process, by positioning the viewer in his place. In *Volgar Eloquio* we follow the author in the birth of the poem 'Lines from the Testament' (1969), from his melancholic



Figure 1: Punto, 2013, digital video, one minute and 26 seconds, looped, dimensions variable.



Figure 2: *Theorem*, 2005, video, photography and mixed media, 98 minutes, looped, dimensions variable.

life experiences to the act of typing it in words. In *Senza Parole*, a short extract of the title scenes of Pasolini's film *La Ricotta* (1963) is projected onto a roll of paper in a typewriter. In the video, the authority of the author is questioned with humour by the freedom of a homoerotic dance/duel between two film extras, with the dot marks in the paper resembling Braille, perhaps as a subliminal message about the more mundane aspects of art-making.

Ponte (verticale), *Punto* and *Theorem* take on the fundamental theme of social decay in Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961) and *Teorema* (1968), scrutinizing its affects on his characters and himself. *Ponte (verticale)* shows the possible trajectory the Italian peasants took from top to bottom when circumstances changed and they were forced to move to the cities. The frame follows *Accattone* (Franco Citti) jumping from a bridge and diving into the river, with his chances of surviving the jump being very low. Together with *Punto*, both works are situated between the limits of still and moving image, each individual frame fading in and out just fast enough for the movement to be perceived. Filled with the physical presence of the young *Accattone*, *Punto* (Figure 1) surprises us by the slow change of his character from innocent beauty into his final aggressive act of spitting, an apt metaphor for the consequences of rural exodus. *Theorem* (Figure 2) consists of a transparent image of the dead Pasolini attached to a pane of glass, with the entire dialogue of the film *Teorema* projected through the glass. This piece has correspondences to Hélio Oiticica's *Bandeira-poema (seja marginal, seja herói)*/Flag-poem (be marginal, be a hero) (1968). The *marginal* in Oiticica's means outlaw, with the image of Cara de Cavalo, a criminal from Rio's favelas, involved in drug trafficking, prostitution and gambling, assassinated by an illegal faction of the police in revenge for killing a policeman. His illicit activities have nothing to do with the art of

Pasolini. However, for the Italian society that criminalized his homosexuality, political dissent, and criticism of society and the church, both are outlaws. This marginality is assimilated by both Pasolini and Oiticica in their outspoken views on the causes of the marginalization of the underclass.

Pasolini was silenced by murder, but in Di Stefano's exhibition the muse goes on living, revealing positive developments and tragic continuities of the same issues that concerned Pasolini, and that remain relevant to Italy and the rest of the world. This outsidership, the black flag of war that was the essence of his ideas, does not die with the artist. The 'Bandiera Nera' is passed along.

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