

Where should we begin in our presentation of *La Recherche de l'Œuvre Absolue (The Quest of the Absolute Artwork)*, CANEMORTO's first exhibition at the Villa Arson?

Probably by the story it tells. That of the businessman, banker, commander, and more especially famous occultist who bequeathed his name to the Villa: Pierre-Joseph Arson. Before he became first Consul of Nice under the Sardinian restoration, "commander Arson" became known through a strange occurrence: for several years he had paid a substantial annual allowance to the Polish mathematician and philosopher Josef Hoëné-Wroński Polish mathematician and philosopher Josef Hoëné-Wroński, who had promised to reveal to him the secrets of the Absolute. This is the better known part of the story. It is said to have inspired Honoré de Balzac when he wrote *La Recherche de l'Absolu (The Quest of the Absolute)*, whose hero, Balthazar Claës, was supposedly Pierre-Joseph Arson's literary alter ego.

There is another lesser known, or even hidden story, the details of which CANEMORTO will reveal to us without asking for anything in exchange, apart from an act of faith. CANEMORTO is here to unveil the secret of the Absolute Artwork, a work capable of pleasing audiences from the entire world and from every era – a secret that, according to them, only Pierre-Joseph Arson possessed. In order to seize it, the artists explored the most obscure corners of the Villa, desecrated graves, and practiced alchemy to its very limits.

Haters will say this part of the story is false. At best, an amusing fan fiction. But CANEMORTO has never attached much importance to recognizing the limits between truth and fiction. The only thing that matters to them is the will of Txakurra, a dog shaped divinity whose followers they are, the inspiration for all their artistic actions: whether in the street or in the studio, on a wall or on canvas, CANEMORTO's "trine paintings" are a divine gesture, both ironic and weird, spontaneous and brutal, demanding the greatest devotion and the deepest contemplation.

To narrate *La Recherche de l'Œuvre Absolue,* CANEMORTO has created an artistic and initiatory journey in two parts: a short film and a cycle of paintings – or better still, a cycle of silkscreen monotypes that can function as paintings – which will shed light on every detail concerning the Villa Arson, a venue abounding in stories and secrets, both luminous and obscure.

CANEMORTO, a trio of anonymous Italian artists, has been active since 2007. They wear masks, speak an unknown language and honor a canine divinity called Txakurra, while circulating their mysterious cult through works of art "six hands" using the most diverse media.

www.canemorto.org

Vittorio Parisi CANEMORTO, more than 170 years after Pierre-Joseph Arson's death (1778–1851) you've come from Bologna to Nice on his tracks to penetrate the secrets of the Absolute. A quest to which Arson – banker, mathematician, philosopher, occultist – dedicated the greater part of his life and of his fortune in vain. Bound by a contract to the Polish mathematician Josef Hoëné-Wronski, who claimed to be in possession of the Absolute, Arson accused him of fraud in 1818 and embarked on long legal proceedings which created a scandal at the time. How do you intend to proceed?

CANEMORTO On the homepage 4chan /darksideofart/ one learns that Arson, disillusioned by his failure in the search for the Absolute, dedicated the last years of his life to social sciences. As one of the numerous treatises he published tells us, he claimed to have discovered, by applying the principles of the Absolute to the visual arts, the formula for creating the Absolute Artwork: a work of art that audiences from the entire world would love. Over the years many artists have traveled to Nice in search of this treatise (Matisse, Léger, Picasso, Chagall...) but it was never found. We believe we know where this text is, but of course we can say nothing more.

VP The archives in Nice tell us that in 1862 the bones of Pierre-Joseph Arson were transferred by his son Gonzague from the Saint-Barthélemy cemetery to the chapel at the Villa Arson, where the educational secretaries' office is today. However, during the construction work transforming the Villa into an art school, they were never found. Were they stolen? Or has Arson resuscitated? After all, he believed in metempsychosis, the family emblem is a phoenix reborn from flames, and the Villa Arson was supposed to be his "resurrectional tomb"...

C These are interesting theories. Although they come from reliable sources, we will refrain from commenting them because they are very much outside the frame of our research, which concentrates exclusively on the content of the homepage /darksideofart/, in our opinion the only truly dependable source of information on the subject. However we can state that when staying at the Villa, one can perceive obscure energies and tensions that can hardly be explained through the language of reason.

VP CANEMORTO has always dealt with superior entities from another world. You claim to venerate a canine divinity called Txakurra. Can you explain the origin of this cult and of this figure? And tell us a little more about CANEMORTO: who are its three members, what do they do when they are not painting or making videos, are not rapping or engaging in alchemical research?

C Txakurra showed itself to us for the first time in 2007, through a common dream. It is a spirit in the form of a dog which links the world of the living to the world of the dead. It is present in numerous religions from central Africa under the name of Kozo, and the famous Cerberus in Greek mythology is probably derived from it. It is following

villa arson

Agenda

February 29 2024
• 6pm
Opening

• Every day of the exhibition
3 pm
Meeting around the exhibitions

Students on a mediation course at Villa Arson will create guided tours of the exhibitions, sometimes with performances, evoking their personal interests in relation to the artistic issues of the program.
Free admission.
No reservation needed.

Practical Information

Exhibitions opened every day (except on Tuesdays) from 2 to 6 pm and from 2 to 7pm in July and August
Closed May 1.

Villa Arson is a public institution of the ministry of Culture and a legal member of Université Côte d'Azur. It is supported by the City of Nice, the Alpes-Maritimes Department, the Region Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Villa Arson is a network member of École(s) du Sud. BOTOX(S), Plein Sud, d.c.a, ANdEA and ELIA Art Schools.

Image Canemorto, 2024
Text Vittorio Parisi
Design In the shade of a tree
Printing Perfectmix-Photoffset

nice

this apparition that we founded CANEMORTO, with the aim of spreading the cult of Txakurra by all possible means, the most efficient involving visual representation. For us it is a global vocation which leaves no room for other activities.

VP In his 1817 essay – which bears the short and not in the least resentful title *Document For the History of the Great Crooks on Earth or Memoirs of Arson (From l'Isle de Vaucluse) Against Hoëné Wronski, Author of Several Works on Mathematics* – Pierre-Joseph Arson defined the Absolute as "that *which occurs on its own*", in other words something which exists, happens, exclusively in relation to itself and to nothing else. You, however, define the Absolute Artwork as a work of art "*that audiences from the entire world would love*". But how can a work of art really please the entire world?

C The Absolute Artwork is an incarnation of every artist's deepest desire: a work which is capable of pleasing art critics and audiences totally unanimously, without exception nor diverging opinion. A work of art which unites and does not divide, capable of summarizing the preferences of every historical era, of every people, every community, every individual. A work beyond time, transcending the concepts of figurative and abstract... Only Pierre-Joseph Arson knew the secret for the concentration of such universality in a single work of art, and our aim is to discover it.

VP Do you think Txakurra will support you while you create the Absolute Artwork? What do you intend to do once you have made it?

C Txakurra will undoubtedly support us during the representation of the Absolute Artwork, precisely because our intention is to use it as a vehicle for propagating her cult at the highest level. With this goal in mind, the only thing that matters for us is that the work be seen by the greatest possible number of people, and we hope it will end up at the Louvre, the most visited museum in the world.

VP Do you intend to sell it?

C We are not interested in the logic of the market.

VP In 2023, you dedicated a distinguished treatise to outdoor painting, a reference for all the art academies in the world, including of course the Villa Arson. In it you state that the secret of a successful painting is in the preservation of a certain degree of "tension", in other words something mysterious which makes it possible to avoid both the "decipherable jargon of illustration" and the "vain refuge of abstractism". Indeed, your paintings seem situated in a space defined by opposite forces: on one hand that of irony and banter, on the other hand that of the strange and the weird. In order to do this, you rely on what you call "trine painting". Can you tell us more about this principle? Is it simply a work method or is it an actual philosophy of painting?

C The activity of painting, conducted for years on end, inevitably leads to a loss of vitality, because one becomes content or satisfied by the repetition of forms and known elements, which are reassuring, "comfortable" in a way, to the detriment of a fundamental tension intrinsic to any good painting. This negative occurrence spares no one, it is visible even in the pictorial production of great masters from the past. "Trine painting" is the only solution to this problem. It consists in joining forces with other painters of equal value to create a trio, for it must not be confused with the forced juxtaposition of different styles which is typical of collective painting today. With perseverance and commitment, the three allied painters must be able to transcend their personal ego to develop a unified and shared pictorial language, which will constantly renew itself thanks to its triple nature. "Trine painting" embodies the only true way to overcome the stagnating crisis of contemporary painting and to start a revolution which will go down in history.

VP The number 3 comes back cyclically. In an article from the Sunday insert of *L'Éclaireur de Nice* on March 31 1929, it is written that "convinced that his astral spirit would come back on Earth to guide his return to his dear villa", Pierre-Joseph Arson had drawn "isosceles triangles on some of the walls", which are now lost. According to your experience and your life in communion with Txakurra, what is the meaning of this number?

C First of all, 3 is the only number which guarantees perfect balance, by avoiding the viscous dynamics of pairs and preventing the risk of dissolution typical of bigger groups. Stahl, Becher, Paracelse, Agrippa, the watchword of all the great occult scientists was the Trismegistus, in other words the great Triad, before which humanity has knelt for so long. Indeed, the number THREE has always represented God, in other words Matter, Force, Effect. It is composed of the Pythagorean cult of number ONE, from which all other numbers are generated and which represents the unique matter, added to number TWO, the first aggregation and the prototype for all the following.

VP Honoré de Balzac was supposedly inspired by Pierre-Joseph Arson for the character Balthazar Claës, the hero of his 1834 novel *The Quest of the Absolute.* Only three years before (again this number...) he wrote one of his most famous tales, in which he precisely develops a reflection on painting. Of course, I'm alluding to the short story *The Unknown Masterpiece* published in 1831. In this story the fictitious painter Frenhofer tells Flemish master Frans Pourbus and young Nicolas Poussin that it took him 10 years to create a painting so perfect that his subject – a courtesan – seemed alive, made of flesh and bones. In this the character of Frenhofer is not so different from that of Claës-Arson: the obsession for the search of something essential, capable of giving meaning to everything, and through which everything can take shape, is almost the same. An obsession which, in both cases, bears no fruit: at the end, when Frenhofer unveils the work to his two illustrious guests, all they can see are "... colors accumulated as if on a palette [...] scrambled, muddled tints...". In his introduction to the English translation of the short story, philosopher Arthur Danto suggested that Balzac had unknowingly described what would happen a century later with the advent of modernist painting. As in the case of Frenhofer's work, should we expect that CANEMORTO's Absolute Artwork will also come from the future?

C Actually, the Absolute Artwork comes from the past, in the sense that it is made possible by stratifying very ancient alchemical studies, but undoubtedly it is projected in the future; we can state that it is a work "from all eras", capable of encompassing the past, the present and the future. Indeed, it is impossible to ignore the huge impact it will have on the course of art history: the appearance of a work of art which everyone loves will completely influence future artistic production.

VP How does CANEMORTO imagine art in the future?

C In all likelihood, art in the future will only be a pale imitation of our art.



01.03–
25.08.24

Passage
des fougères
En

canemorto

The Quest of
the Absolute Artwork

Curator
Vittorio Parisi