

Open Studios - Artists in Residence

marta ferro



**villa
arson**

March 6, 2025

Temporary gallery

nice

Marta Ferro is an Italian artist based in Milan, whose research explores the relationship between the human figure and pictorial abstraction. Examining the link between the materiality of the body and abstract thought, her work deconstructs the body into pre verbal and gestural signs to analyze the mental processes that contribute to creating an image.

The artist often resorts to automatic practices related to movement and rhythmic improvisation, using signs and lines as a form of personal choreography.

Marta Ferro is the laureate of the Nouveau Grand Tour, a residency program for artists under thirty coordinated by the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris.

Gil Lekh: Marta, could you tell us about your artistic journey, from your beginnings in Sicily to your installation in Milan?

Marta Ferro: I was born in Palermo and then raised in a small town in the Sicilian inland. During my first year of training, I studied calcography and etching in Palermo and then moved to Milan to focus on new technologies, where I mainly engaged with digital installation, photography and programming. The reason of this shift was related to a research I was doing around the theme of the body and the virtual. In those years I also practiced dance and performance.

G. L. : Your work centers on the human figure from a structural, psychological and anatomical perspective. What draws you to this exploration?

M. F. : I think my interest in the human body started because I was somehow searching for a definition for myself. I like its ability to be an inexhaustible source of forms and meanings while still maintaining a strong basis of physicality. I was attracted by this sense of circulation because it gave me the chance to draw the same thing multiple times in different places at the same moment, questioning the notion of presence.

This pattern led me to deconstruct the figure in such a way that the body could move in the form of a mark, allowing me to develop it more freely by following the natural needs of both my intuition and the line itself. In this sense, we could say that the "analytical" use of drawing coincides with personal trajectories that are deeply psychological or poetic. It is precisely this tension that fascinates me.

G. L. : Marta, your work is deeply influenced by repetition and automatism. How have these practices emerged in your career and what role do they play today?

M. F. : For me, repetition has always been to me a tool for exploration and understanding. As a child, I learned to draw by copying images from magazines—frozen and stylized figures that appealed to me for some reason. Later, I realized that this act of reproduction was actually a process of identification: by copying these forms, I was seeking to appropriate them, to give them a more intimate place in my perception.

But this repetition is not just a means of possession; it is also a technique for research. By copying a figure repeatedly, I memorize it and eventually reinterpret it

differently. I developed automatisms, such as drawing blindly or using external sources to create rhythm in movement. Sometimes I also use creative writing or other times I cancel and reconstruct the same image over and over until new shapes emerge in unexpected ways.

G. L. : You've mentioned a need for identification through these forms. How does this dimension connect with your research on the body and space?

M. F. : There's a paradox in this research. On the one hand, I am fascinated by the way bodies are codified, whether in the media, classical painting, or the frozen postures of ancient sculpture. On the other hand, I feel a distance from these representations, as if they are imposed upon me. Drawing thus becomes a tool for both emancipation and mimesis: as I said, I choose at first to copy them because I want somehow to feel like them. The need to deconstruct then emerges as a formal necessity, stemming from a movement that seeks to break free and stop imitating. The forms recall each other repetitively in the same way until a line or a shape itself invites me to do something different, as if it suddenly evoked something entirely different. I then decide to follow it and from that moment, the phase of deconstruction and transformation begins. This is a way of creating a personal alphabet in which bodies "escape" their first imposed definition. In this sense, the blank page becomes a terrain of trial and repetition. This is also where my work connects with something almost choreographic. I experience this practice as a ritual of warming up and cooling down, a way of letting the hand find its own rhythm. I've been thinking a lot about physical training methods and dance, especially about how a dancer warms up their body to reach a state of full availability to gesture.

G. L. : You've also worked on the relationship between the body and architecture. How did this inquiry evolve at Villa Arson?

M. F. : I've been researching how architecture influences our movements and perceptions through display and material. I was particularly interested in labyrinths and concrete, especially in the latter's ability to shape itself so easily for any use and style. I thought that this morphic quality could have something in common with the labyrinth, the way we move through space and the capacity to create forms through the processuality of movement. I was interested in hearing what the students had to say about this, in relation to their experience of the place and potential narratives that could be used to structure new drawings inspired by creative writing and the original architectural plans of Villa Arson. I am currently developing a workshop based on this research.

G. L. : After this residency, what directions do you wish to take your work in?

M. F. : I'm thinking about setups where the viewer would need to move to fully engage with the work, in a logic of spatialization of drawing. In this way, the external space could, in some way, "be contained" by these lines, and the

empty space could interact in a complementary way with the works. I am also thinking about a performance project.

This interview was conducted and translated by Gil Lekh.

Thursday, March 6, 2025

• 6 - 8 pm
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