

Valerio Nicolai
PROSPECT OF A MATRYOSHKA

Curated by **Marcello Smarrelli**

Opening: **Tuesday May 30th 2017 | At 6.30 pm**
May 31st – September 29th 2017

smART - polo per l'arte
Piazza Crati 6/7, Roma

Rome, April 2017 – **smART** presents *Prospect of a matryoshka (Prospettiva di una matrioska)*, a solo exhibition by **Valerio Nicolai** (1988), curated by **Marcello Smarrelli**.

One of the most promising and significant artists to emerge in Italy in recent years, Valerio Nicolai uses painting as a starting point for creating complex installations that are full of meanings. In his exhibitions the works and the spaces around them blend together seamlessly. His pictorial interventions thus seem to expand to include the environment that surrounds them and they extensively explore the realm of sculpture, creating unusual and incongruous situations that enfold and interrogate the viewer.

For Nicolai painting becomes an instrument of investigation that can gradually embrace and incorporate reality itself, redefining and overcoming it, with the aim of creating genuine "worlds" in which the artist's fervent imagination becomes tangible in the form of environmental installations consisting of a host of objects that are connected to each other by surreal and syncopated narratives. His work proceeds by means of unpredictable associations, which examine and explore the issue of the exhibition space, questioning the role of viewers or observers and their ability to recognize the nature and the quality of the materials used, as well as to make a distinction between works of art and mere objects.

The complexity of this approach is exacerbated by the unsettling and hermetic titles of Nicolai's works, which are almost always ironic, thereby also allowing language to become an integral part of his poetic approach. His artistic "strategy" aims to produce an initial effect of disorientation on the beholder, who is stimulated to construct new levels of meaning as regards the context of the exhibition. This approach is certainly clearly evident in *Prospect of a matryoshka*. In fact a *matryoshka* or "Russian doll" is a set of wooden dolls of decreasing size, each one nesting inside the other, and it can be used as a symbol to denote any recursive procedure or structure consisting of a series of similar elements that are placed within each other, as a process that is potentially endless.

The image of the *matryoshka* perfectly embodies this principle of recursion, which is a common feature of language. In the context of art and literature also the expression *mise en abyme* refers to an element that is repeated, such as "the figure within the figure" or "a story within the story". By using similar techniques and procedures Nicolai guides us into a stratified world, offering us levels of interpretation that include the fantastic, the grotesque and the irreverent, always with a dimension of intimate participation.

Prospect of a matryoshka presents a new series of works conceived entirely for *smART - polo per l'arte* during a period of residence, in the course of which the artist worked in close contact with the exhibition space and all its distinctive qualities.

With thanks to the Monitor gallery of Rome for the support it has provided towards realizing the exhibition.

Valerio Nicolai (b. Gorizia, 1988) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 2013 and he now lives and works in Turin.

Starting from 2009 he has participated in several collective exhibitions including the prestigious *95th Young Artists Collective*, at the BLM in Venice, where he won the study *grant*, which was followed by the Atelier BLM at the *SS. Cosma e Damiano* Complex on the Giudecca Island in Venice together with Thomas Braida. Worth remembering are his exhibitions *Non totalmente immemori né completamente nudi* (*Not totally oblivious or completely naked*) at the Municipal Gallery of Contemporary Art of Monfalcone in 2010 and *Difetto come indizio del desiderio* (*Defect as a sign of desire*) in 2011 at *neon>campobase* in Bologna, both curated by Andrea Bruciati. In 2013 he participated in the Crepaccio Pavilion at *yoox.com* curated by Caroline Corbetta at the *Ca' Soranzo* apartment in Venice, and also showed his work in the exhibition *Walking with Art* curated by Marco Tagliaferro, at *Spazio Monotono* in Vicenza, as well as in the exhibition *Falansterio* curated by Guido Molinari, at *Spazio Morris* in Milan. In 2014 Valerio Nicolai participated in the collective *Shit and die* curated by Maurizio Cattelan, Marta Papini and Myriam Ben Salah at the *Palazzo Cavour* in Turin. In 2016 he held a solo exhibition in Turin curated by Matteo Mottin, *Trasformazione permanente di un mago in formica* (*Permanent transformation of a wizard into an ant*), presented by Treti-Glaxie. His solo exhibitions also include *Processo a porcospino* (*Porcupine process*), at the Clima Gallery of Milan. He is the Vice President of the Fondazione Malutta, with which he recently curated the exhibition *Black Market* and participated in an international group show promoted by the Foundation at the Monitor Gallery of Rome. Valerio Nicolai was a finalist of the Moroso Award in 2017.

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