

ARTFORUM

Alessandro Roma

BRAND NEW GALLERY

The works of Alessandro Roma are complex visual machines, perfectly constructed to deceive the eye. The artist uses collage to compose landscapes that only at first glance seem to possess a possible uniformity. The deception is dual, for not only is each image the result of a stratification of fragments with multiple viewpoints, but the picture plane, which from a distance seems like painting, is revealed to be a surface made up of collaged elements. Oil paint, spray, enamel, and graphite all appear too, but the handmade becomes nearly indistinguishable from, say, pieces of fabric or bits of photographic imagery blown up from printed sources.

All these visual episodes slide into one another, forming connections through affinity or contrast. The damask weave of a textile is taken up again in a passage painted in oil, a photographic detail of a landscape becomes an element of decoration, and abstract details become figurative, mutating into trees and leaves. Continuous shifts and intersections between different materials, styles (figuration, abstraction, decoration), and modes of making (recycled images, handpainted ones) turn Roma's landscapes into puzzles to be deciphered. The works escape and hide within this play of stratifications and representational possibilities, in which each passage refers to some other fragment. However minimal, the relief effect brought

about by this mixing of materials gives his pictures a sense of depth that can also be interpreted as the consequence of an accumulation of memories. In constructing space, Roma seems to simulate a process of mnemonic sedimentation over time, with its thickenings, dilations, gaps, and removals. The eye is forced to continuously navigate forward and back in space and time, without, however, finding a focal point or settling down in a specific dimension.

Literary suggestions characterize Roma's titles, which favor the imperfect and simple past tense, starting with the show's title, that of one of the paintings, *Il sole mi costrinse ad abbandonare il giardino* (The Sun Forced Me to Abandon the Garden), 2011. Others, also from 2011, are titled, for example, *Accorsi di essere in uno strano luogo* (I Realized I Was in a Strange Place), *Avvertivo un movimento tra le foglie* (I Noticed a Movement Among the Leaves), *Mi avviai verso quel luogo appartato* (I Set Out Toward That Secluded Place), and *Cominciai a udire un rumore confuso* (I Began to Hear a Confused Noise). They evoke the idea of a garden of wonders, dense with mysteries, unexpected movements, mysterious presences. The fact that the titles suggest a plot, but one that is interrupted, and that they are conjugated in the past tense, once again shifts viewers' attention toward an elsewhere, pushing them to seek clues to an event within the rich fabric of visual elements. The fourteen collagelike paintings, created specifically for

Alessandro Roma,
*Il sole mi costrinse
ad abbandonare il
giardino* (The Sun
Forced Me to Abandon
the Garden), 2011,
oil, spray, graphite,
and collage on canvas,
82 5/8 x 70 1/8".



this exhibition, are constructed around the theme of the garden—here seen as an ideal, symbolic reconstruction of the world that exists only through fragments—and were accompanied by six terra-cotta sculptures, all from 2012, and six smaller collages conceived as preparatory sketches for them, also dated 2012. A mimesis of irregular natural forms, the sculptures were transformed into vases, some of which contained real plants—sage, rue, and ferns—reviving the dialectic between the natural and the artificial that underlies the other works in the show.

—*Alessandra Pioselli*

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.