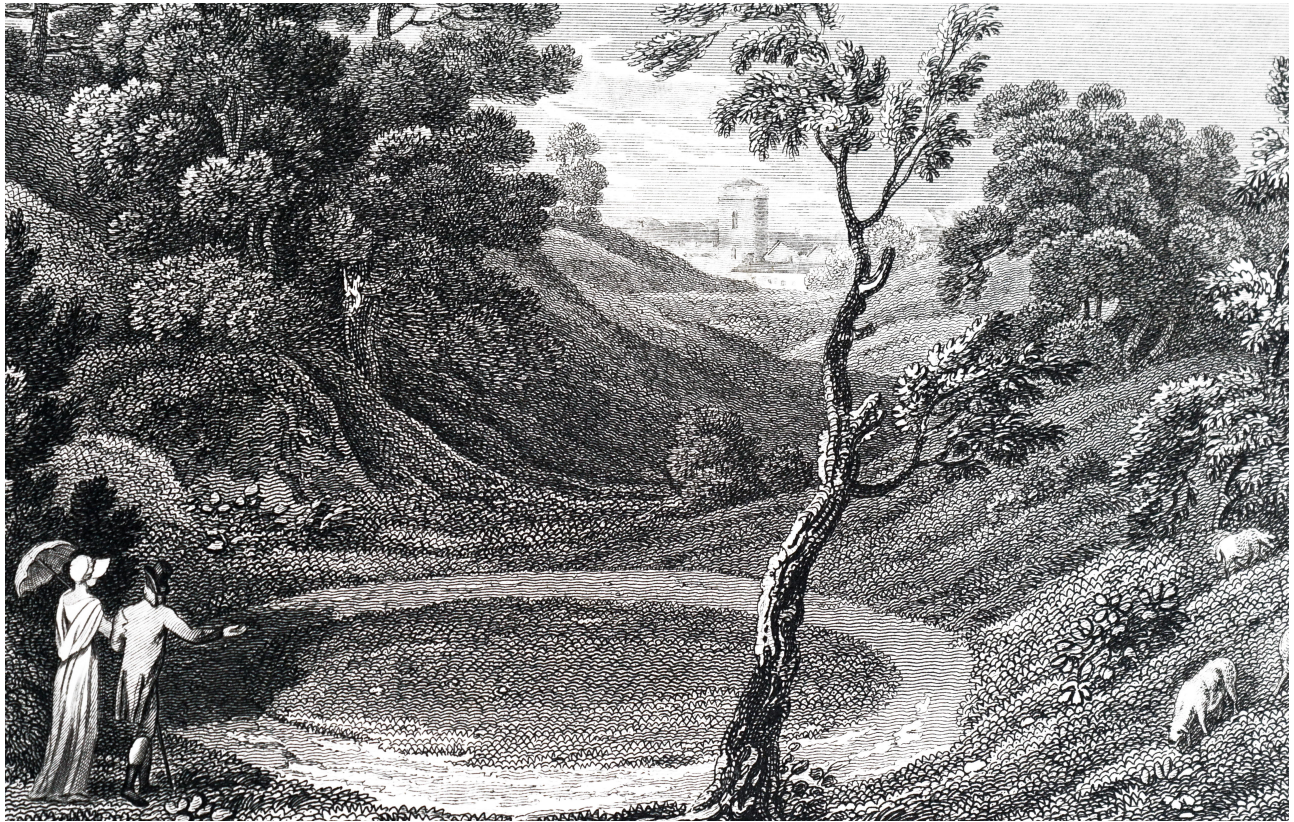


Et al.etc./Et al.



Anthony Discenza

No. 3: Variations

Et al. etc. presents

Ghost Stories

Anthony Discenza

January 18th - February 29th, 2020

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 18th, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Keeping things simple doesn't come easily for Anthony Discenza. Over the past few years, the former Bay Area-based artist (now living in self-imposed exile in Western Massachusetts) has taken to weaving increasingly unreliable narratives around his practice. For "Ghost Stories," his third solo exhibition at Et al. etc., Discenza presents us with a suite of works allegedly made over the course of the past twenty-five years. The catch: none of these works have ever been shown. "Ghost Stories" consists of one-offs and outliers, idiosyncratic departures from the main roads of inquiry the artist's practice has followed. By bringing these works together, we're told, the exhibition is meant to function as a kind of alternate-history retrospective of Discenza's work—coordinate points of a path *not* taken.

Can one be one's own Doppelgänger? In Henry James's "The Jolly Corner," expatriate Spencer Brydon returns to New York City decades after departing for Europe. He has come back to claim his inheritance, the family mansion adjacent to Washington Square, now untenanted and empty. Over the course of the tale, Brydon—a thinly-disguised stand-in for James himself—becomes convinced the house is occupied by some mysterious presence and takes to obsessively stalking the place night after night in the hopes of confronting this phantom. Eventually Brydon gets his wish, finally coming face to face with the ghost, who turns out to be—spoiler alert!—himself. More precisely, the specter Brydon confronts is the image of *who he would have been*, had he remained on the path his family and upbringing had set him on—a strange case of haunting in the subjunctive. In typically Jamesian fashion, a sense of uncertainty hovers over the narrative: is the ghost objectively real, or merely a product of Brydon's mind? But the more unsettling question is, who is haunting who, exactly? Is there an "authentic" Spencer Brydon, and if so, which is the true one? Who, really, is the ghost?

A similar ontological blurriness permeates this exhibition. Are these works in fact what they purport to be, a set of old ideas finally being given a dust-off for a brief day in the sun? Or are they contrivances that somehow impersonate themselves—stand-ins deployed on behalf of an unreliable fiction? Yet unlike Brydon's ghost, the works are still *here*. They exist. Questions of their etiologies aside, they behave as exactly what they appear to be: a set of artworks in a gallery.

What, then, of these works? If this exhibition is in fact comprised of departures from Discenza's primary practice, they don't initially appear to be radical digressions. There remains an interest in appropriation and the use of found materials that can be readily located elsewhere in Discenza's work, as well as gestures towards ephemerality and disappearance. This feeling of incompleteness in the works—the sense of something left out—propels us on a restless circuit around some larger construction; a space intuited only along its edges.

It's here in this unseen space that something stranger and more unsettling begins to coalesce. Amidst the vectors traced between the components of the exhibition, we encounter hints of dystopian, even apocalyptic narratives that reveal a sensibility steeped in the tropes of fantastic and speculative fiction as much as those of contemporary art. Embedded—literally—within such seemingly dry formal gestures as *Boundary Anomaly* lurks a morbid contemplation of geologic time scales and mass extinction. Other clues are provided by titles: *The Heat Death of the Universe and Other Stories* nods to Pamela Zoline's 1967 story, in which the Second Law of Thermodynamics becomes an extended metaphor for the terrifying alienation of modernity. *Come, Now a Roundel and a Fairy Song*, with its evocation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, perversely underscores the motif of the magic circle—a conceptual boundary enclosing enchanted and/or demonic forces—that reappears in different guises throughout the exhibition.

Discenza, who in the past has voiced criticism of contemporary art's over-reliance on complicated academic or research-based backstories to validate its activities, is at the same time clearly an ardent subscriber to the power of fiction, and to the idea that ultimately, a story may be all we have. *All* stories are unreliable, the not-entirely trustworthy conceit of "Ghost Stories" seems to suggest, and yet we must rely on them, because they are our only means for navigating reality. Artworks, themselves a particularly extreme type of unreliable narrative, have for this reason always functioned as ideal tools for the production of the complicated forms of storytelling to which we give such names as *interpretation*, *meaning*, and *knowledge*. Herein lies the paradox that haunts not only this exhibition, but perhaps all lived experience: there must always be *a* story, but none can never be *the* story.

- Lindsay Selwyn

Works in exhibition. Price list available upon request

Boundary Anomaly, 2002

Iridium oxide, spackle

Dimensions variable.

Afterwards, 1998

Digital countdown clock, duration of exhibition

The Heat Death of the Universe and Other Stories, 2007

One gallon containers of various liquid products

Dimension variable.

Come, Now a Roundel and a Fairy Song, 2019

Ultrasonic plug-in pest control devices

Dimensions variable.

Study for an Activity, 2010

Simulaid® Trauma Moulage kit

Dimensions variable.

Composition in Red and Blue, 2016

Flat-panel television, Webdriver Torso YouTube channel

Economies, 1996

Stack of weekly coupon flyers from local grocery chain, replenished weekly

Dimensions variable.

Transitions, 2019

Signal Protect Silver RF/IR shielding film

Dimensions variable

Et al.etc./Et al.

Et al. etc. presents

Proxies

Anthony Discenza

January 18th - February 29th, 2020

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 18th, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

“The underlying problem, of course, is that quick-and-dirty shortcuts are simply insufficient to create the professional look which *audiences* have come to expect from contemporary *films*. In order to achieve sophisticated effects, *lighting* and *camera setup* must be done manually, which can be extremely time-consuming and tedious. Having the *actors* present during this process is therefore expensive and unnecessary.

Stand-ins allow the *director of photography* to *light the set* and the *camera department* to *light* and focus *scenes* while the *actors* are absent. The *director* will often ask *stand-ins* to provide the *lines* and to *walk through* the *scenes* to be *shot*. In this way, a good *stand-in* can help speed up production and is a necessary and valuable component of a *film*.

Stand-ins do not necessarily need to resemble the *actors*, but they must possess similar attributes so that the *lighting* in a *scene* will be set up correctly. For example, if a *scene* is set up using a *stand-in* that is taller or shorter than the *actor*, the positions of the *camera* and *lighting* may be incorrect, resulting in costly *reshoots*.”

Works in exhibition. Price list available upon request

20 Grams of Iridium Oxide Mixed into Spackle and Applied to a One Centimeter Channel Cut along the Circumference of the Exhibition Space, 2019

Iridium oxide, spackle
Dimensions variable.

The Time Remaining Until the End of this Exhibition, 2019

Digital countdown clock, duration of exhibition
Dimensions and duration variable.

A Series of One Gallon Containers of Various Products, 2019

One gallon containers of various liquid products
Dimensions variable.

Chamber Music, 2019

Ultrasonic plug-in pest control devices
Dimensions variable.

The Contents of a Kit Arranged in Preparation for Use, 2019

Simulaid® Trauma Moulage kit
Dimensions variable.

YouTube Play-Through #1: Webdriver Torso

Flat-panel television, Webdriver Torso YouTube channel

Takeaway, 2019

Stack of weekly coupon flyers from local grocery chain, replenished weekly
Dimensions variable.

Window Treatment, 2019

Signal Protect Silver RF/IR shielding film
Dimensions variable

Et al. etc. presents

Excerpts from the Red Notebooks

Anthony Disenza

January 18th - February 29th, 2020

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 18th, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

For his third solo show with Et al., “Excerpts from the Red Notebooks,” Anthony Disenza presents a suite of interpretive works inspired by the journals of the Italian speculative writer and sometime conceptual artist Vittorio Alderotti (1931-1998).

Alderotti, a recluse and autodidact who resided in Turin his entire life, is perhaps best known for *The Abhorred City*, a surrealistic novel that recounts the gradual transformation of the earth’s surface into semi-living, spongiform rock. The “red notebooks” comprise a series of journals kept by Alderotti between 1977 and 1983. Mostly filled with notes for stories and essays, as well as more personal entries recounting Alderotti’s struggles with depression, the notebooks also contain a number of proposals for artworks. These “propositions,” as Alderotti referred to them, may be read more as prompts or scores than understood as discrete artworks, as they rarely indicate the materials or even the appearance of the proposed work. There’s little evidence that Alderotti ever attempted to physically realize any of these works; instead, the propositions seem intended to operate in a speculative or poetic fashion, remaining open to interpretation and imagination. While similar in some ways to the textual scores of Fluxus, Alderotti’s propositions possess a darker, almost gothic sensibility—George Macunias as channeled by Thomas Ligotti.

The red notebooks, which came to light only after Alderotti’s death in 1998, reveal a pervasive fascination with geologic and cosmologic time scales, sometimes juxtaposed in unexpected ways with the more transient and ephemeral aspects of contemporary capitalist experience. (In one hallucinatory entry, Alderotti describes vast clouds of discarded plastic bags transforming into a new kind of weather system as they drift over an ancient seabed.). There is also a preoccupation, bordering on mysticism, with what Alderotti perceived as the uncanny aspects of physical matter; he writes of an inherent agency lurking in even the most seemingly lifeless materials—one utterly indifferent, if not actively hostile, to human concerns. In particular, he was drawn to the dizzying array of synthetic materials and compounds generated in the wake of the industrial revolution, speculating that the production and use of these constituted a new kind of occult practice. In Alderotti’s writing, pollution and toxic waste are frequently equated with a kind of dark alchemy both produced by, and giving rise to, the unconscious forces of modernity.

In some ways these obsessions link Alderotti to the work and writing of artists such as Robert Smithson—but if Smithson’s writing tends to evoke the science-fictional, Alderotti’s sensibilities are more aligned with the literary subgenre known as “cosmic horror,” a category into which much of his own writing would probably fit. References to a wide range of fantastic and occult literature continually crop up in the journals, alongside a tendency towards a psychoanalytic reading of the systems of global production. “All matter is a ghost,” Alderotti declares at once point, “a persistent and persisting traumatic residue resulting from a vast network of forces—cosmic, geologic, biologic, economic, social—interacting in incomprehensibly complex ways. Who knows what strange forms of agency might not arise *from and within* these interactions, agencies whose operations would be utterly incomprehensible—and therefore imperceptible—to humanity?”

For the current exhibition, Disenza has produced a collection of works intended as responses to several of the propositions contained in Alderotti’s journals. Disenza sees these not as attempts to “realize” the propositions, but rather as products of his own engagement with the open architecture of Alderotti’s interests and ideas, as well as with his own affinities for the intersections of fantastic literature, deep time, and late capitalism. Each of the works in the exhibition is titled with the text of one of Alderotti’s original propositions, alongside its English translation.

Works in exhibition. Price list available upon request

Un'opera che invoca una scala temporale geologica in modo da produrre un senso di sgomento (A work that invokes a geologic time scale in such a manner as to produce a sense of dread)

Iridium powder, spackle
Dimensions variable.

Un'opera prodotta al di fuori del tempo evanescente (A work that is made out of [vanishing] time), 2019

Digital countdown clock, duration of exhibition
Dimensions and duration variable.

Un'opera intrisa dei luridi colori dell'arcobaleno di un mondo inquinato (A work imbued with the lurid rainbow colors of a polluted world), 2019

One gallon containers of various liquid products
Dimensions variable.

Un'opera che non può essere percepita ma che è intollerabile (A work that cannot be perceived but which is intolerable), 2019

Ultrasonic plug-in pest control devices
Dimensions variable.

Un insieme di oggetti disposti in preparazione all'indicibile (A set of objects arranged in preparation for the unspeakable), 2019

Simulaid® Trauma Moulage kit
Dimensions variable.

Un'opera prodotta da una macchina, per l'utilizzo di altre macchine (A work produced by a machine, for the use of other machines), 2019

Flat-panel television, Webdriver Torso YouTube channel

Un'opera fatta per tutti, per tutti/ Un'opera della quale chiunque può fare buon uso (A work made for anyone, for everyone/ A work that anyone can put to good use), 2019

Stack of weekly coupon flyers from local grocery chain, replenished weekly
Dimensions variable.

Un'opera che funge da protezione contro le forze dell'invisibile (A Work that Serves as Protection Against the Forces of the Unseen), 2019

Signal Protect Silver RF/IR shielding film
Dimensions variable