

GRAND HÔTEL

Michèle Provost is a Canadian artist who faithfully migrates to Alghero on a regular basis, to acquire some distance from her regular life, and bathe in the beautiful off-season solitude of the Sardinian coasts. For this artist, as for many, every displacement engenders new artistic considerations, new projects, and new parameters for reflection. Thusly cut off from the daily grind, and deprived of familiar, namely linguistic, settings, the artist thrives on this atemporal zone of isolated and uninterrupted creative energy.

The works on display in this exhibition are part of Provost's ongoing investigation of our relationship with contemporary culture. This time, the artist has set her gaze on a graphic and editorial phenomenon of the post-war era, a true staple of Italian culture which went on to conquer the world, and enjoyed remarkable popularity well into the 70's; we speak here of the "fotoromanzo", or illustrated romance serial, the ultimate in populist escapist "literature", aimed at the masses but secretly consumed as a guilty pleasure by ladies of the upper crust. Through her research of the source material, Provost in fact collected countless testimonials of women (and men) who confessed their own experience of, and fascination with, this low-brow form of popular entertainment from a not-so-distant past.

Initially struck by the intense, if faded, beauty of the original covers, works of art in their own right which beckon our attention for motives of nostalgia as well as historical interest, Michèle Provost went on to explore the concept of cultural consumption through mass production and distribution of original and unique original content. Following a rigorous path of research and analysis, the artist created a stunning body of work, which combines historical perspective with a heartfelt homage to the original illustrators of Grand Hôtel, artists who have put their undeniable talent in the service of romance, albeit overblown and formulaic, but nonetheless glorified, human and comforting.

Yet, all the while paying tribute to this vanished era, Provost endeavours to denounce our own relationship with disposable culture, by recreating, reinstating, and breathing new life into a discarded, forgotten, and almost disgraced trend, which suffered from its modest means of publication, and a short sell-by date. Here, as is often the case, the contemporary

artist takes on the mandate of an archeologist of the relative present. In fact, in this case, the very medium selected for the task is itself an endangered form, for Provost has elected to re-create these forgotten gems using the quaint technique of embroidery on cloth. The very choice of embroidery exemplifies the artist's determined commitment to the subject at hand. In a deliberately exaggerated, furious, almost sculptural fashion, Provost inscribes, with every stitch, the presence of her mundane source of inspiration in the greater continuum of culture. Turning the pictorial realism of the original Grand Hôtel covers into a frenzy of expressionist creation, a manic web of lines and colours, the artist truly owns the contents of her exhibition, presenting it in gloriously material form; textile objects as recipients of meaning. The laborious process thus becomes a repeated, insistent prayer, an atemporal ritual which connects the past to the present. It bears to mention that no aspect of this endeavour is overlooked. In fact, the very intricacy of these works requires the artist's complete and utter involvement in a reflective process which conveys the gestures of countless generations of feminine work.

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curator