

Video Art - Federico Solmi's American Revenge

Vincenzo Ruocco (June 22, 2009)



The Bolognese artist is awarded with the most prestigious prize for contemporary art. It helps him forget the scandals in which he got involved in Italy...

What happens to an artist when his creativity is threatened to be silenced? How should one feel, what is left to think, where does inspiration escape to? This is what I asked myself as I met with Federico Solmi, the internationally-renowned Italian artist accused of blasphemy because of a wooden crucifix and an imaginary pope caught with an erection.

And yet America has rewarded him.

Federico was honored with the prestigious 2009 [Guggenheim award](#) [2] in the category of video and



audio art. Many previous recipients have gone on to win Nobel prizes in literature, economics, and science.

Established in 1925 by Senator Simon Guggenheim in memory of his son John Simon who died on April 26, 1922, the award seeks to promote cultural growth in a broad sense by financially assisting scholars and artists with their work and research without making any distinctions of race, color, or religious creed.

“It’s exciting to win such a prize and to be associated with the most important names in culture, medicine, and science. For me, it means becoming a part of the American establishment.”

Federico is a self-taught artist and his accomplishment gives us a reason to pause. It’s not necessarily because of a college degree or some other diploma that demonstrates his artistic ability but it’s because America gives everyone the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

It’s not when you hear it repeated over and over, but rather when it happens to you that you begin to understand that it is possible.

“To participate in the contest last year, I sent the same collection of work related to the video ‘The Evil Empire,’ which was confiscated in Bologna.

The months following that incident, January to March of this year, were very difficult but ultimately what occurred was what I consider to be a miracle. The most important artists and critics recognized and rewarded me.”

But what exactly does Federico Solmi do? His art is comprised primarily of 2D pencil drawings on paper that are then transformed into video animation; the resulting work is irreverent, surrealistic, offbeat, and ironic.

Using pop culture as a vehicle to represent the artifacts of the entertainment industry, the world of video games, and the Internet, his work offers a glorified vision of the present, a present based on ephemeral values and one that is in constant danger of disintegration.

The contradictions of our society are the inspirations that gave birth to this creative project in which the protagonists appear to be small puppets catapulted into worlds that have already defeated them from the start. They are victorious heroes that, despite their place in the hierarchy and dictatorial positions, reappear strangled and mutilated – perhaps by their own power.

In the work “The Evil Empire,” the 35 year-old Bolognese artist who is a New Yorker by adoption after spending the last ten years in the Big Apple, takes aim at the generic, abstract figure of a pontiff and at the entire history of the Catholic church.

The work stems from the desire to explicitly portray the degeneration of our society by firing at the evil and vices that afflict modern man. The futuristic video set in 2046 is nothing more than a parody of contradictory historical context with the major players swallowed up by earthly temptations and ephemeral values and where morality no longer exists but is replaced by current leaders who are consumed with hunger for power and Hollywood narcissism.

The artist, who is known for his paradoxical video animation that provides a personal and ironic vision of the degeneration of contemporary society, agreed to sit down with i-Italy and answer a few questions.

“It seems appropriate to satirize the millennial power of the church,” he explains, “and I’d like to say that there is no reference to the current pope because I have no interest in doing so. The wooden crucifix with the naked figure with the papal headdress,” asserts the artist, “is a self-portrait, an absolutely fictionalized pope that I use to talk about power and the people who use it to destroy the lives of others. I included it among other evil people who, by contrast, I specifically identified: Stalin, Hitler, and Napoleon.”

Controversy, however, has accompanied this young artist on his global journey, and Italy – his Italy,



our Italy – is blind to this artist who is capable of putting himself into play with the force, power, and liability of his own ideas.

Provocation is not an end in itself, although it may be a common practice among many of his

colleagues. It is, instead, a demonstration of dissent, a critical sensibility that has now become a creative force as well as a work of art, communication, and perhaps even counter-information.

The award from the [Guggenheim Foundation](#) [3] that amounts to 38,000 Euro will enable him to finance his next project, the video “Chinese Democracy and the Last Day on Earth,” which is a satire about the history of “human stupidity, from prehistory to the present day,” with an epic finale – a “space war between the two super powers, America and China.”

“New York remains the most important city in the world for art. Despite the great economic crisis, it is still the barometer of the global art market and the place with the largest number of galleries and museums in the world.”

→ **"The Evil Empire"** - trailer 2009

His next solo show in New York will take place in January 2010 at the Gallery [LMAK Projects](#) [4], in the new neighborhood filled with art galleries, the Lower East Side.

His work will also be shown in Santa Fe, New Mexico on January 19 and 20, 2010 at [SITE Santa Fe](#) [5], the nonprofit contemporary art organization committed to the growth and enrichment of cultural life in Santa Fe and beyond.

For more information about Federico Solmi, please visit www.federicosolmi.com/ [6]

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