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postmasters 54 franklin street nyc 10013 212 727 3323

postmastersart.com

postmasters@thing.net

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Anton Perich

ANTON PERICH EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW AND STUDIO VISIT, NEW YORK

Postmasters Gallery in New York is presenting ANTON PERICH's large-scale exhibition *Electric Paintings 1978-2014* accompanied by a selection of his controversial television programs (originally shown on Manhattan's public access in 1973). Heralded for his invention of the pre-inkjet electric painting machine, the Croatian-born, New York-based artist is better known for his wealth of other interdisciplinary ventures like photographing LOU REED and ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE in the back room of Max's Kansas City for Interview magazine and video-taping CHARLES JAMES and CANDY DARLING for his underground cinema. Regardless, until now Perich has been shy to reveal his machine-wielded paintings and mostly withheld them. "My paintings, I kept to myself. I didn't show them much because initially I was heavily rejected for using a machine. But it's safe now. Now everyone uses machines to paint." Left to right, the apparatus, which he hand-built in '79, deposits thick lines of paint mimicking the vibrant Morse code of early television screens. "I love the way this mechanized thing can react to human skin. It has such a tender touch for it and reads it so well. Lips and eyes, everything is so beautiful. I love doing faces because they tell you so much. They're the most secret thing in the world. Combining the machine and the sensual: that's my aim." Physiognomic and in a higher resolution, his early work transcribes his snapshots of Warhol and friends onto massive canvases as if ejected from an immense inkjet of today. Growing

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weary of the wide use of high-pixel digital cameras, his work alternatively turned more primitive and abstract in later years. In some cases, he permits just enough information from the photographs to emerge that the surviving form exhibits an almost ghostly appearance. Other times he abandons human form completely and conveys pure abstraction. Electric Paintings 1978-2014 runs until November 22nd at Postmasters Gallery, 54 Franklin Street, New York.

PAIGE SILVERIA – What are you inspired by?

ANTON PERICH – As a child I spent lot of time in cathedrals gazing at the stained-glass windows. The enormous pools of the Adriatic light were so mysterious, secret and otherworldly. That is where I studied colors and spectrums of light. I learned that each piece of colored glass was outlined by black lead. I never forgot it. Many years later in New York I used that technique to paint. The color areas of my paintings are always underlined with dark paint, sharp lines and dots from the electric airbrush. It is like underlined text; you want to read it.

PAIGE SILVERIA – Who are your subjects?

ANTON PERICH – For the past few years I have been painting mostly ANDREA LANGDON, MISHA SEDGWICK and KRISTINA KORSHOLM. I know them so well that I could paint them blind. They are also my movie stars. I have a little underground Hollywood going on at Park Avenue South. I paint them because they are all so incredibly beautiful, intelligent and electromagnetic. I also paint NIKOLA TESLA. He was born in Croatia, and he electrified the world. In my humble way, my dream was to electrify painting. And I paint Warhol. He was my great inspiration, and I did photography for his magazine Interview in the early '70s. Another reason I like to paint Warhol is because his face was made of some compound of plaster of paris and wax, a perfect human drone, a face white like a geisha. I also paint mannequins. They are like human drones, detached from the world around them, oblivious to the messages they are delivering. The surveillance or devastation are not triggered by hand, it is done by messages in electric writings.

PAIGE SILVERIA – How has your work transformed over the years?

ANTON PERICH – My early digital works, between 1978 and 1979 were done using a very fine airbrush. They were painted with a resolution high enough to make them look like photographs. They looked as if they were printed with an Epson of today. I didn't like it. Soon after I performed lobotomy on my painting machine. I instructed it to reject and spill the extra information, so it drips straight down the canvas. It is sad that artists work hard to achieve better-than-life images with excesses of information.

PAIGE SILVERIA – Who needs it?

ANTON PERICH – Only an idiot needs millions of colors. I can count my colors on my fingers. I am going in the opposite direction: extremely low-res electro-primitive paintings. If you want to capture the essential, you have to get rid of the excess.

PAIGE SILVERIA – You have oscillated between so many different mediums, have they influenced one another?

ANTON PERICH – Working with video, I was really inspired by the electric image. That's when I had this idea to build a painting machine. Still being a Letterist, my painting machine is writing electrically line by line, coding something. Just like Morse code: short, long, short, short, long. From then on I realized that I had something really great to share with the world. It was a great leap because I really had to trust the machine to make my

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work. I had to sell my soul to the machine.

PAIGE SILVERIA – Most of these paintings have never been seen before. Why have you kept so much of this work a secret?

ANTON PERICH – No one else believed in it. I didn't have any shows. People would just say, "Oh, that's just machine art." Now everybody is painting with machines. Everybody has an inkjet printer now, but there was no inkjet printer then. I had to make one. This is the original one. I had to exchange and replace some pieces. But the only person who would give me a show at the time was TONY SHAFRAZI in New York. He became a really great art dealer. The moment I discovered the electric image, I realized that I'd make my electric paintings forever and explore it. Just like any other instrument, like an organ or piano, you can play a lifetime.

PAIGE SILVERIA – So it's true that you invented this style of painting?

ANTON PERICH – Recently somebody posted on Facebook that they like my work because I am an old-fashioned digital artist. I think it sums it up, that I am perhaps the last classical painter, and the first digital. Looking at my early work from the '70s, it is obvious that I started the new art movement, Digital Art. And now I am so pleased and happy that everybody paints like me.

PAIGE SILVERIA – Do you hope to achieve anything with this show?

ANTON PERICH – I'm the missing link between Warhol and everything digital. The show is about discovery and correcting the fictional history. The Whitney Museum said that Wade Guyton was the guy who invented the electric paintbrush. And in reality it's me. Guyton was six when I invented it. This is 1979. My work was telling the future of painting. It's going to be electric, not by hand. You know, in WARHOL'S diaries, he says that he's jealous of my work. In the 600 pages, that was the only thing that he was jealous of. And he saw the future. Very few people saw the future.

PAIGE SILVERIA – Parting words?

ANTON PERICH – I am so happy and in exalt to show my work in a colossal way in such a prestigious and radical venue, after a third of a century working in the absolute and splendid isolation of a monk.