

Cesare Pietroiusti has long undertaken a reflection on the theme of value: economic value, artistic value, the functional value of thought, actions and objects. This reflection also includes a series of critical studies and experiments specifically to do with the world of money and the value of art.

“I’m interested in the attempt to create situations in which some kind of paradox or inversion of terms forces the visitor/participant (of an exhibition or a performance) to look at something which is considered normal and taken for granted (money) in a different way. Economic laws, in this sense, provide a very interesting potential field of research. The fetishisation of money, the existence of taboos linked to it, the co-presence within this “entity” of an almost divine nature and its extreme, trivial ordinariness, opens up a broad field of experimentation and investigation which we might describe as...rich.”

Among the projects implemented, there is *Mangiare denaro - un'asta*, which, furthermore, the artist was invited to present, in Viafarini in June 2005. Pietroiusti’s intervention also involved the English artist Paul Griffiths. The performance started out with an auction in which the auctioneer – the antiques expert Marco Arosio – invited the numerous members of the public present to offer any sum of money, as long as it was a sum that could be offered in Euro banknotes.

The two banknotes that together make up the highest sum were destined to be swallowed by the artists in front of the spectators. In this case, the highest offer amounted to 700 Euros, divided into two banknotes of 200 and 500 Euros. It should be noted that the banknotes are somewhat leathery and are in fact extremely resistant to being swallowed and digested. In the following stage, the two banknotes, expelled and carefully cleaned, still recognisable by their form although not their colour, were signed and returned to their owners along with a certificate. Thus treated and irreversibly altered through this “organic” and “visceral” process, consisting of the passage through the body of the artist, the banknotes’ economic value was thus transformed into an artistic one.

The performance constitutes an ironic and grotesque homage to money in all its concreteness: one which is heading towards extinction, if we consider that today, the value of electronic transactions is greater than the volume of direct economic transfers and that financial processes are ever more bound up in forms of abstraction. The issue of authorship and the work’s relationship with the artist himself, the broader issues relating to the mechanisms of the art market, the metamorphosis of money invested in a work, the economic phenomena bound up in the world of art are all paradoxically synthesised in this intervention.

The *Mangiare denaro – un'asta* (2005) performance was also held on other occasions; such as at Neon in Bologna in 2005, as well as at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham in May 2007.

Gabi Scardi