

Kurland's camera, a teen lies back to take in the scene. Her mien is impassive, but Kurland's composition is defiant—not every expression of female sexuality is safe for male consumption.

—Wendy Vogel

## Domenico Gnoli

LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN

“A commodity seems at first glance to be a self-evident, trivial thing,” Karl Marx famously wrote in *Das Kapital*. “The analysis of it yields the insight that it is a very vexatious thing, full of metaphysical subtlety and theological perversities.” “Detail of a Detail,” Luxembourg & Dayan's second exhibition devoted to the late Italian realist painter Domenico Gnoli, was riddled with superficially innocent, deeply vexing items: the prim knot of a red necktie, a tooled-leather brogue, a starched white collared shirt, a floral damask duvet.

Violently uprooted from their respective milieus and impacted against the picture's surface, these artifacts of postwar Italy's *embourgeoisement* are fully frontal and too close for comfort, ostensibly withdrawn from meaning yet disposed to fetishistic vitalization.

A high-heeled shoe, arguably the ur-fetish in popular culture, is the subject of two paintings from 1967. In *Scarpa di fronte* (Front of Shoe), its gleaming black leather body sails toward the picture's surface like the bow of a ship, terminating in a lean, mean point. Yet the view of the shoe's tapered heel in *Escarpin vu de dos* (Shoe Seen from the Back) discloses not the sexy stiletto one might expect, but a sturdy, sensible pump: a product of old-fashioned Italian craftsmanship

and stuffy good taste. The austere beauty of Gnoli's paintings derives less from the things depicted—*nota bene* the dowdy, dust-ruffled love seat in *Sofa*, 1968—than from the artist's cool, dandified gaze. “I am looking for a non-eloquent painting, immobile and of atmosphere,” he told an interviewer in 1965. “I never actively intervene against the object; I can feel the magic of its presence.” This kind of petrifying objecthood disciplines the human subject in *Capigliatura maschile* (Male Hair), 1966, a radically cropped close-up of a man's hairline. His meticulously groomed strands spring from an immaculate side part, each one striating the painting's glistening oil-black surface like a record groove. In *Curl*, 1969—the final work in a series from Gnoli's acclaimed New York debut at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1969 (only three months before his death from cancer at age thirty-six)—a lock of hair congeals into a sculptural helix isolated against a tessellated maroon ground. Here, notwithstanding the artist's claim that he never “wanted to distort,” style and hygiene become so extreme that they thrust his objects into abstraction.

Gnoli's canvases are encrusted with sand and marble debris mixed into acrylic paint, which leave behind cystic deposits that irritate and corrupt the works' slick illusionism. Suggestive of fresco, these grainy surfaces nod, with a creeping melancholia, to a historical moment pre-dating the commodity culture the paintings so dapperly depict. Gnoli

traced the “non-eloquent” tradition back to Italy in the fifteenth century, when the integration of painting and architecture seemed to secure art's social rootedness and ritual function. The structuring antinomies—between fetish and fresco, seductive illusion and repellent facade, desirable image and dumb matter—that give Gnoli's work its special anxiety were here clarified by the juxtaposition of two paintings with self-explanatory titles. In *Red Tie Knot*, 1969, the eponymous scarlet necktie's voluptuous form floods the canvas, a commodity engorging the eye with the marvelous perversity that so bedeviled Marx. *Brick Wall*, 1968, Gnoli's version of a “wall painting,” is very unlike Giotto's or Piero della Francesca's. Gridlocked by obdurate masonry coextensive with the picture's material support, the disenchanting gaze couldn't grasp anything at all, except perhaps the alienation that grants the work of art and other commodities their illusory autonomy.

—Chloe Wyma

## Peter Roehr

ORTUZAR PROJECTS

A fascinating—and, at least as far as the conventional canon goes, mostly missing—link between Pop art and Minimalism, Peter Roehr's work identified a vein of astringent poetry in the image world of an emergent global consumer culture. An exhibition at Ortuzar Projects provided a bracing overview of the five-year career of the German Conceptualist, who died of cancer in 1968, only weeks before his twenty-fourth birthday. Focused on his rigorously ordered photomontages, and featuring a revelatory suite of film montages, the show presented a practice very much in dialogue with the dominant conceptual streams of the time. But while Donald Judd and Andy Warhol would seem to be inevitable figures against which to measure Roehr's enterprise, the work's anti-iconic attitude toward its subject matter and its rich visual dynamism mark it as an epigone of neither.

Selections dating from 1963 to 1966—including a range of ephemera as well as several typewritten texts that suggest a species of Conceptualism—provided a useful context for the artist's life and work. Born in 1944 in the town of Lauenberg, Germany, Roehr attended art school in Wiesbaden and settled in Frankfurt, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was enormously prolific during the half decade he was active (he abandoned artmaking in the last year of his life and opened a head shop with his partner, Paul Maenz), producing some six hundred



Domenico Gnoli, *Curl*, 1969, acrylic and sand on canvas, 54 3/4 x 47 1/4".