

Zoe Stillpass, “Kerstin Brätsch and Eduardo Paolozzi,” *Artforum*, September 13, 2021

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS ROME

Kerstin Brätsch and Eduardo Paolozzi

Sant'Andrea de Scaphis | Via dei Vascellari 69

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By Zoe Stillpass



View of “Sun Swallow,” 2021.

An exhibition combining contemporary German painter Kerstin Brätsch and the late Scottish Pop pioneer Eduardo Paolozzi sounds odd. Offhand, I couldn’t think of any significant connection between the two. But, upon seeing “Sun Swallow,” I felt that the harmony between these artists’ dissonant approaches to material and production makes absolute sense.

To recapture spiritual forces and, perhaps, commune with ghosts in this deconsecrated ninth-century church, Brätsch resurrected two techniques associated with places of worship: stained-glass making and stucco marmo. For the glassworks, all created between 2012 and 2021, Brätsch melted down shards from her previous sculptures and recombined the results with leftover agates used by Sigmar Polke, an artist who haunts her oeuvre. These kaleidoscopic works radiate light as if coming to life.

Dedicated to her recently deceased mother, two series—"Brushstroke Fossils for Christa" and "Fossil Psychics for Christa," both 2019–21—present individualized "brushstrokes" that organize into figures and faces that stare back at the viewer. Her use of the technique of stucco marmo attests to the inherent morphogenetic potential—the aliveness—of all matter. In this process, the interaction of simple ingredients results in the emergence of a multicolored marblelike substance. Inhabiting the role of the "occult technician," as Alfred Gell called it, Brätsch likens her craft to alchemical rituals whereby base materials are transubstantiated into bewitching new forms.

While Brätsch's works revive archaic techniques, Paolozzi's three sculptures from the '60s mark a period when the artist relinquished bronze and began using aluminum, a modern industrial material. Two of his works evoke visionary architecture and one a robotic biomorphic alien. For these works, he collaborated with engineers to weld together parts as if assembling a machine. Nevertheless, these sculptures, which the artist has compared to idols, transcend functionalism by expressing an *élan vital*. In our current digital age, these shrines to machine technology look like sci-fi retro-futuristic ruins. And yet, through their techno-animistic spirit, they bond with Brätsch's works, interfacing with the metaphysical realm.