

image: *black dot* (detail), 2011
polyester, polypropylene, nylon
diameter 140 x 45cm depth



gag

GREENAWAY ART GALLERY
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DANI MARTI

And that's it

16 November - 11 December 2011



inside front and back cover:
screaming out to the heavens above (detail), 2011
red road reflectors & glass beads, steel frame
330 x 175 x 20cm



sure, perhaps, maybe I will, 2011
stainless steel, 120 x 90 x 6cm

ARACHNE/ ATHENA/ MERCURY/ JOHN

Ovid tells us that Arachne was a woman from humble origins. her distinction lay in her skill as a weaver: nymphs were drawn from throughout the island of Lydia to see her work; even Athena, the goddess of crafts, was moved. Admirers sometimes suggested that Athena had been her teacher, but Arachne denied it, claiming she could prove her supremacy if only the goddess would compete. And so the two came head to head. Athena wove scenes showing the fates of mortals who had challenged the gods: transfigured into mountains, birds. Arachne answered with scenes denouncing the sex crimes committed by the gods when they took on the forms of bulls, swans, satyrs. When Athena saw the splendour of her rival's work, she shredded it, beat her with a spindle, and turned her into a spider. and so Arachne's descendants weave on to this day.

Artists, traditionally melancholics, are sometimes said to be born under the sign of Saturn, but it is easier to appreciate Dani Marti under the patronage of Arachne. For if he is to have a patron, it must be one that comprehends what seems to be the very stark division between his work as a painter/weaver, and a film-maker whose subjects probe the sexual lives of others. This book treats those practices separately, though the puzzle of their connection remains. Colin Perry resolves it by identifying what we could call a complementarity of pain and desire: "The videos are cathartic" he says, "the paintings are sublimatory." The fact that the paintings sublimate feeling should remind us how indebted they are to Modernist abstraction and Minimalist sculpture – though they offer an eccentric and expressive version of that tradition. They are tributes and fetishes whose reek of bodily yearning puts them at a far distance from the kinds of Modernist objects we usually contemplate with aesthetic disinterest. *The Pleasure Chest* (2007) tangles necklaces and Rosary beads into a design with the all-over infinitude of a Jackson Pollock and the rich materiality of a Piero Manzoni. Meanwhile, as a filmmaker, Marti delivers catharsis by drawing us into his subjects' lives of desire: *Time is the fire in which we burn* (2009), for example, telegraphs the confessions of John, a male prostitute.

But if Marti follows Arachne in one respect, he follows Athena in another: he refuses to judge. For the Greeks, morals were a human concern: the gods, immortal, were free of such taboos; they were thought to live as humans might if they only dared do as they pleased. In that sense – if in no other – John is a god, and some part of the compelling power of tales such as his is the narrator's apparent indifference to conventional morality. Certainly, Marti isn't going to deliver any judgment himself.

Or might Marti be neither Arachne nor Athena? Might he instead be Mercury, who traffics messages between the gods and the mortals? After all, his films often take a transactional form. Money might not change hands, but a deal is still done – Marti supplying the listening ear and the sympathy, his confessors providing the revelation. In that exchange – as in so many involving money – moral judgment is suspended. Marti never seeks to deny the appeal of his narrator's tales, nor to insist that they are the honest and truthful product of documentary enquiry. His narrators, as they describe their experiences, are complicit in his probing; we, his audience, are accomplices, too.

If desire is the common *force* that binds the strands of Marti's practice, on a more typological level the strands are also united by his ambition to portray. Of course, these are not conventional portraits, pictures that mistake a visual likeness for a spiritual essence: he does not present faces as windows-on-the-soul. Marti's painting-objects are metaphorical, his films are allegorical: both use one thing to describe another. Beads describe their wearer; tales of sex describe a life with or without love. Marti doesn't pretend to offer up the whole, essential individual to our gaze. Indeed, his work insists on the fact that identity is not a stable essence that can be recognised and captured again and again; instead it is something performed, and it changes each time in the performance. The damaged narrators in Marti's films may well feel themselves to be "mining their souls" when they speak of their experiences, but what they surely come to realise is that that soul is worn on their sleeve – it can be changed at will. A tale told one way offers one version of a truth; told another way it offers another version; neither offers a more honest reflection of feelings than the other.

Finally, though, if it is true, as Marti suggests, that subjectivity is no more than skin deep, then it is surely a folly to go looking for any common strands in his work at all. He makes objects, he makes films; one urge finds its outlet in one form, another finds its outlet in another. The result can be the basis of a rich public discussion, not merely soulful contemplation.

Morgan Falconer

(Foreword from upcoming publication 'Dani Marti', Hatje Cantz, 2012)



looking for pablo (detail), 2006 - 2011
stainless steel braided hose, polyester, polypropylene,
leather, industrial rubber, glass & magnetic beads
250 x 140 x 70cm



and that's it, 2011
video, 31'34"

david st vincent, 2011
two channel video, 18'45"

oh william oh william (detail), 2011
steel, automotive paint, polyester, & polypropylene, 125 x 250 x 5cm



jim solo, 2011
steel, automotive paint, leather, steel wire
175 x 120cm diameter (approx)





my sad captain (take 2), 2011
polyester, glass beads, 210 x 10cm diameter

