

EMERGING ARTISTS

ANDREA SALA



words by NOAH STOLZ



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ARTIST'S BIO

ANDREA SALA (b. 1976, Como) lives and works in Montreal and Milan. He has exhibited at Federica Schiavo Gallery (Rome), Optica Centre for Contemporary Art (Montreal), Galleria Monica De Cardenas (Milan), Viarini (Milan), Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca, Cultural Center La Rada (Locarno) and at the IX Biennale di Architettura (Venice), among others. He received an MA in Fine Art from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (Milan).

AUTHOR

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I always thought that Andrea Sala's work belonged to a rather curious universe. For example, at first I found it hard to understand why the artist felt compelled to turn forms drawn from the history of design and architecture into new objects, thereby perpetuating some sort of bourgeois, obsolete tradition of consumer goods. Why, I asked myself, was he unable to free himself of this Barthesian spirit, of this taste for decomposition and semiotic analysis? Then I gradually became aware of the way that reduction and synthesis transformed the object he was investigating into a proposition, one that no longer had its point of departure as its sole reference. Design, Adolf Loos claimed, should be subject to the principle that an object's form will not gain the upper hand over its function. Over the years, this concept has evolved in a logical and linear way, such that certain formal solutions can be traced back to the technical possibilities, needs or fancies of a particular period. Sala's forms take design objects out of their historical context, revealing their wilder nature. He appropriates the object of his inquiry, in some cases reducing it drastically in scale before changing its characteristics, and then alters its fate by transferring it into a world apart, into an immense and at the same time domestic imaginary archive, a garden of possible forms. A Pantone lamp ceases to be a lamp if its circular elements are opened up like orange peel to form an irregular surface and then stripped of their technical components. Yet the forms and materials remain part of the collective imagination. Sala's work is thus a sort of challenge to give rise to another temporality of the object—a dilated temporality which is no longer that of consumption but that of appropriation.

A place can leave a deep mark on the imagination of some artists, and this has undoubtedly been the case for Andrea Sala with Milan and the Brianza region, the manufacturing area that surrounds the city. Milan is a gray city. This grayness is also what most fascinates me. It must be the quality of silence, in contrast to the bustle of the morning, brought by the dense autumn fog. Nothing is more characteristic of the capital of Lombardy than its gloomy scenery and the austere mantle of the night that falls silently over the buildings facing onto the inner beltway or over the Castello Sforzesco. Under the thick and sooty gray patina left by cars are hidden discreet and remarkable treasures: the entrances of the apartment buildings, the tiled façades of Giò Ponti, graffiti by Saul Steinberg. In the nondescript warehouses that line the outer beltway and in the factories of Brianza, the construction of furniture, the heart of Italian design, continues on. Perhaps it is necessary to be familiar with Milan's grayness in order to fully understand what it is capable of concealing, to experience the intense sensation that comes from thinking that something is moving under this blanket of dust. It is the color of industry, something whose origins lie in the forms of a domestic modernity that has inhabited the antechamber of the imagination of entire generations of Italians. Recently, Andrea Sala, straying perhaps only in appearance from what has been his main obsession, has staged an exhibition that makes reference to a world parallel to this kind of broadly-consumed design. The press release describes this reference as "the visual system that has distinguished the first Italian television broadcasts (RAI), and some of those technological elements such as speakers and antennas, that allowed in effect the spreading of those broadcasts in homes. Of that world, rich in signs, graphics logos, posters and television props, very often produced by prominent architects and Italian creatives, through a process of rehabilitation and re-appropriation, the artist installs a real 'network' of objects." "Networks," held at the Galleria Federica Schiavo in Rome last March, tried to tune into frequencies that come to us from the recent past, the 1950s and 1960s—the best years of Italian television. Years in which even the test pattern that marked the absence of TV broadcasts was designed by artists and other creative types. This imagery has passed almost unnoticed, despite entering the apartments and lives of everyone, and had an impact on the unconscious that was certainly very different from that of the "intelligent" barrage of the age of digital TV.

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Rio Blanco and Rio Negro, 2009

Photo: Mario Di Paolo

Courtesy: Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome

Intervallo 0.3, 2009

Photo: Mario Di Paolo

Courtesy: Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome

Canada, installation view,

Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 2009

Photo: Annalisa Guidetti and Johnny Ricci

Courtesy: Galleria Monica De Cardenas,

Milan

Cicognini, 2009

Courtesy: Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome