

ÉDOUARD MONTASSUT

Riccardo Paratore

Diphthong

October 12 - November 10, 2018

Language is a kind of material vulnerable to sculpture, too: eroding across time, malleable in meaning, context-dependent, replete with dead cultural artifacts, yet nevertheless shaping “our” reality—or anyway, a certain sense of it.

Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom . . . Le langage n'est pas fait pour être cru mais pour être obéi . . . He is a fine man and great intellect . . .

While morphology accounts for the formal structure of words, parts of words, and their interrelationships, phonology concerns the drifting shapes of speech sounds. And phonetics those physically performed actions—turning on the position of the lips, jaw, palate, tongue—that discharge language out loud. Here, the diphthong describes a sequence of two or more vowels of different qualities contained within a single syllable; its pronunciation requires a smoothly coordinated movement of the speech organs, unbroken by any consonant sound. Found in several languages besides French, the diphthong recurs variously in *aesthetic theory*, *ihre Träume*, *quanto sei divorato dall'invidia* . . .

Paratore's presumably “primed canvases”—allegorical phonemes—collate a number of now-useless mechanical devices drawn from the everyday: the wiry skeleton of an umbrella, a two-slice electric toaster, child's reading lamp, and toy car radio. Slipping from found readymade to sculpture-and-pedestal to wall-mounted high-relief with a concentrated gestural shift (and a matte coating of RAL 9002), his panels coolly assimilate the heterogeneously trashed material signifiers of small domestic comfort (shelter, interiority) in the West. Huddling between the art fair booth and the gallery's off-site storage, the pathos of these works lies in their awkward deviation—that is, actual extrusion—from the operational surface of pure communication. Although stripped of color, the “fun” or functional forms of Paratore's peculiar objects remain articulated, even as the ubiquitous skeuomorphic digital graphic interface cannibalizes all of twentieth-century design, as cartoonish icon. Dissolved in a “system of nuclear matrices” controlled (and surveilled) via palm-sized screen, today the human-scale is virtually obsolete.

Thus the anti-monumentality in the slyly recovered expendable commodities here—gliding from spent to speculative surplus value—which also seem desperately to say, in unheroic consonance with the current era, so hostile to ordinary life: *ouch*.

Kari Rittenbach