

M A R T H E K E L L E R

# seeing through

CURATED BY ELISABETTA LONGARI

CASA ITALIANA

ZERILLI-MARIMÒ, NYU

ANTONIO SCACCABAROZZI



## Marthe Keller

(Top left) *Fogbow spans*, 2010, 14" x 13.75", acrylic on PVC

(Bottom left) *By way of Sagittarius II*, 2013, 12" x 12", acrylic on canvas

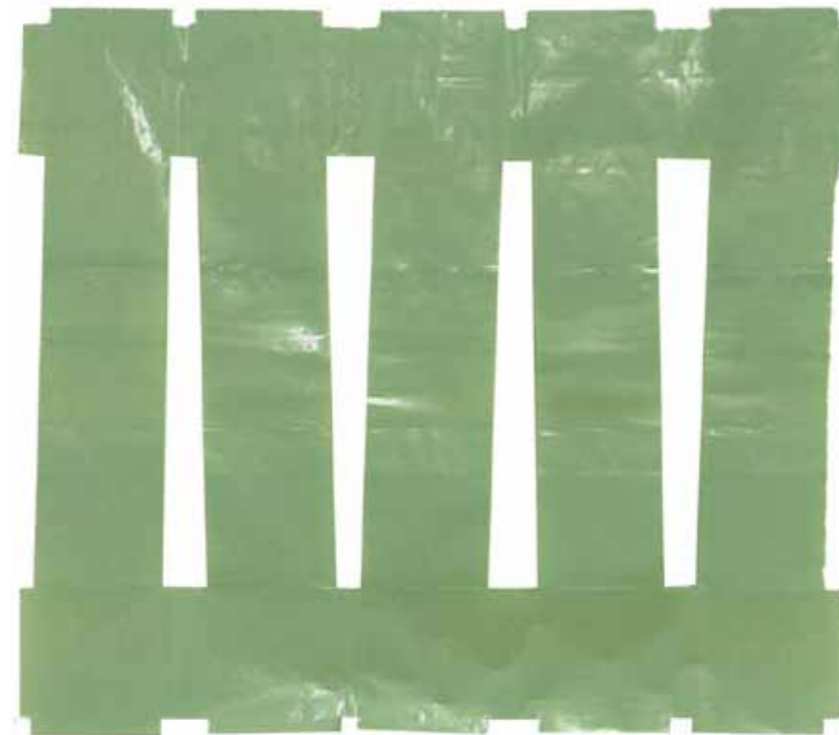
(Right) *Mottu propprior*, 2013, 53" x 48", acrylic, PVC, linen, acetate, stitching, grommets, brass rods

The history of western visual culture is first and foremost a history of seeing through, as found in philosophy and science, as well as in the visual arts.\* From the enduring legacy of Alberti's 'window' and its influence on some of the most audacious works of the modern era—including Duchamp's Large Glass and several of his *Étant Donnés*—this idea of 'seeing through' has influenced many artists up to the present day.

The function of 'seeing through' in the theoretical definition of the moving picture is extremely important. Film is based on the use of a system of lenses, and its evolution has led to some of the richest experiences of this form of seeing, as in Godard's use of overlay, or in Cameron's use of 3D technology.

The criterion for choosing the works in this two-person exhibit was based on two variations of the process of 'seeing through.' Before analyzing how each artist addresses or employs this principle, however, let's take a step back to consider each artist's profile.

What do Antonio Scaccabarozzi (Merate, 1936-2008) and Marthe Keller (New York, 1948) have in common? If we look at their respective biographies, they belong to different artistic generations, had different cultural upbringings, and experimented with different styles. If we compare their works closely, however, the two



## Antonio Scaccabarozzi

*Barre contrapposte*, 1999, 30" x 34" green shaped and folded polyethylene film

painters seem to explore similar visual problems and suggest answers that unexpectedly relate to each other. A most salient aspect here is that both artists base the visual dynamics of their works on the experience of 'seeing through', tethered to their shared interest in ideas pertaining to painting 'beyond the frame.' Each artist experiments with different approaches and materials, including the use of artificial shims roughly identifiable as plastic sheets, often so transparent as to become invisible. These elements, hanging in the balance between presence and absence, enhance the sensorial effect of the painted surface, making it more intimate and palpable, and allowing it to enter a kind of controlled dialectic between transparency and opacity. Enriched by many tactile nuances and visual cues, the surface is often deconstructed into overlapping layers, within which the inherent properties of color and painterly gestures create a theater of apparitions, aggregations and separations—a melange of possibilities in which a painted surface transforms into a dynamic, restless field.

The use of plastic in both artists' work might be considered a new manner of glazing, a traditional technique in oil painting that intensifies the fluidity of colors and pigments. The connection between the two terms of the equation (glaze, plastic sheet) is readily evident in the visual parallels between the



**Antonio Scaccabarozzi**

(Top to bottom, left to right)

*Essenziale con Ombre Pittoriche*, 1991, 16" x 30", acrylic and glue

*Ekleipsis 11*, 2002, 39" x 27", green, white, and grey sheets of polyethylene

*Velatura*, 2005, 22" x 20", oil on canvas

works in Scaccabarozzi's series *Velature* (*Glazes*, 2005), consisting of canvases painted in overlapping layers of color, as attested by the title, and in the sort of chromatic 'ready-mades' included in the series *Ekleipsis* (2002) and *Banchise* (*Icepacks*, 2009), with their vibrant surfaces made of overlapping sheets of polythene.\*\*

Keller's investigations are the same in many ways, even if her materials of choice differ radically. If we compare *Dressy* (2010) and *Ufer and ufer (Schwester)* (2013), in which the artist's chromatic marks become enlivened with sensitivity, we notice how the addition of 'plastic' layers represents a way of addressing the temporal element of perception—spurring on thoughts of change and chance, and reminding us of Duchamp's definition of his own *Large Glass* as a "delay on glass." Plastic enriches the surface with dynamic cross-references, reflections, and glares. The object of perception becomes the sum of an array of accidents, chance encounters, events and interferences, all taking place at different depths to then emerge through the paint itself.

Keller and Scaccabarozzi also have a shared interest in the potential for instability as it relates to perception. They seek out liminal spaces and intervals, subtle nuances that oscillate between visible and invisible. Painting becomes a threshold event, its tangible surface



**Marthe Keller**

*Dressy*, 2010, 63" x 39", acrylic, vinyl, tape, stitching, grommets, netting, brass rods

a sensitive skin—delicate and metamorphic on the one hand, but also capable of reacting to the environment, connecting it to life's inherent imperfections.

A final note on titles is worth considering. While Scaccabarozzi's are quite directly connected to the complexity of perception, Keller's are more ironic, with literary references that evidence her fondness for Joyce. It would be possible to re-list the titles in any order; the outcome would be a story as fascinating as that told by the paintings themselves. Titles can provide our gaze as viewers with variable routes begging our patience and attention, and they can lead us on to a vast range of personal experiences.

For both Keller and Scaccabarozzi, these experiences take place somewhere between the visible and the invisible. Their paintings are at once announcements and affirmations of the medium of paint itself. They are presences and predictions in the making.

*Text translated from Italian by Kevin Mc Manus*

\* On this matter, see Serge Bramly, *La transparence et le reflet*, JC Lattès, Paris, 2015.

\*\* The radical choice to adopt polythene found in garbage bags of different colors, either overlapping or isolated, and treat it as pure paint is explained by Scaccabarozzi as a chromatic interpretation of his observations of how clouds filter light.



**Antonio Scaccabarozzi**

*Quantità di blu con bianco*, 1989, 79" x 79" ink on polyethylene

**Antonio Scaccabarozzi** produced and exhibited for over four decades, beginning in 1965 until his unexpected death in a motorcycle accident in 2008. An affirmed 'outsider,' not anchored to any specific movement, Scaccabarozzi is consistently shown and considered alongside prominent artists such as Castellani, Colombo, Dadamaino, Dorazio, Girke, Griffa, Glattfelder, Morellet, Tornquist and Uecker. Antonio's notable exhibitions continue to take place all over Europe. Recent shows have been at Galerie Hoffmann, Freidberg, Germany; Foundation Antonio Calderara, Italy; Nuova Galleria Morone, Milan; P420, Bologna; and Scaramouche, NY. [www.archivioantonioscaccabarozzi.it](http://www.archivioantonioscaccabarozzi.it)

**Marthe Keller** is based in New York City. She lived in Rome in the 1960's and returns to Italy annually to work. She studied painting with Sal Scarpitta at the Maryland Institute and worked making wall drawings for Sol Lewitt. Keller's first significant shows were in New York and Palermo, Sicily in 1982, and she has had over 22 solo shows since. *Corso Ricorso* toured Italy, Germany and the US from 2008 to 2011. Keller's artworks are in collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, Whitney Museum and the British Museum. She has won grants from institutions such as the NEA, NYFA and MacDowell Colony. Marthe co-founded the *BAU Institute* arts residency. She is an Adjunct Professor at Hunter College in NYC. [www.marthekeller.com](http://www.marthekeller.com)

**Elisabetta Longari** is an art historian and curator based in Milan. She teaches Contemporary Art History at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, Milan, and Phenomenology of Styles at Catholic University, Brescia. She is a prolific writer of essays, books and catalogs, such as *Sironi e la V Triennale di Milano*, published by Ilisso Edizioni. She has curated numerous one-person and group exhibitions in museums and galleries internationally, including *José Barrias* at Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 1996; and *Pelanda dei Suini* at Testaccio, Rome, 2016.