

LARA FAVARETTO

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Recently, when I was looking to buy a new car, the sound system was a real selling point. I cannot drive without listening to music, or so it seems. What I play while I am driving often comes from my phone and is connected wirelessly to the car's sound system. The information of each song is displayed on a screen just above my dashboard, though not always. The playlists vary. On occasion I have forgotten why I have downloaded an album or a particular track, and I find myself questioning my initial reasons for liking them. Opinions change.

There is one particular track that never fails to take me by surprise. It is the sound of banging, of construction, of the clarity of the outside world entering the environment of my car. It is noticeably louder than most of the other tracks, amplified further by the type of sounds it contains. Although its listing does not appear on the aforementioned screen, as it plays out I am soon reminded of what it is. Despite the absence of a title, I know that the track is called *Doing* and it is by Lara Favaretto, one of her earliest pieces from 1998. I am unsure how I obtained the file, and how it got into my phone in the first place – perhaps Favaretto sent it to me for a show and the track found its way into iTunes and has been subsequently synched, unexpectedly, to my phone. I probably should not have it, or rather I should probably have deleted it by now. It remains on my phone, however, buried somewhere deep in my playlist with its lack of metadata, playing from time to time.

Beyond the momentary confusion that it induces when it begins, the audio acts as a reminder of Favaretto and her work, and I start to recollect our first meeting and conversations. The track could be mistaken for the work of Aphex Twin, especially his album *Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments pt 2*, which also features in my phone, an incidental and kind reminder of one of our first meetings in which Favaretto introduced me to the animation series *Salad Fingers*, whose soundtrack is made up of much of the musician's work. The audio that occasionally rings out of my car stereo is a recording of a performance of the same title for which Favaretto asked three masons to work down marble into powder, essentially dust. The process took some three months and is condensed into a 50-minute audio recording – the material or rather immaterial trace of the performance, the indexing and residue of a stretched-out, laborious course of erosion. *Doing* might be classified as being different or alternative to the work that she produces now, but it carries with it all of her hallmarks and concerns to date – absence, futility, performativity and in equal measures action and inaction.

Opening this text with this anecdote felt necessary, as Favaretto and her work enter my world regularly. The unexpected infiltration in my car certainly conveys her work's ability to capture surprise and humour, as it sharply works through more serious matters such as loss, survival, commemoration and aspiration. Another parallel is drawn when we consider the temporary interventions the artist has staged throughout the years outside of the gallery space, unconventional means of presentation predicated on a desire to evoke aspects of subversion and disruption. The almost daily experience of the

beginnings of Favaretto's work makes me consider its lineage, what it has become, how it has changed and how it has not changed. Fittingly, *Collected Works*, the exhibition at Rennie Museum, is one of very few surveys of her oeuvre to date, or at least close to it. Indeed, the exhibition in Rennie's Wing Sang exhibition space is in line with previous exhibitions of its programme that display the collection's holdings of a particular artist – an increasingly rare sight for any private collection that displays a commitment to and keen following of an artist's career. Yet while this might suggest a mere presentation of acquired works without much input from the respected artist – albeit one made through a judicious selection process – Favaretto has in fact worked intensively alongside the Rennie Museum on the exhibition, continuing the attention that the artist pays so rigorously to display, presentation and context. What follows offers a guided tour of not only the exhibition but also the surrounding Favaretto context that the presented works belong to, offering both insight into the works on display and the larger picture from which they alight.

One of the opening works in the exhibition is *Village of the Damned* (2014). The work is part of a series that began in 2006 and for which Favaretto is perhaps best known. Each work in the series consists of one or more confetti cubes, almost always measuring 90 cm cubed, presented directly on the gallery floor in a resting position. Choosing a generic palette of colours, they are nearly all bright with colour, although *Village of the Damned* is one rare exception, looking as though it has been dipped in one of the artist's other works, *Momentary Monument – The Swamp* (2009), the swamp presented at the 53rd Venice Biennale, with its mix of varying shades of grey. The inspiration behind the colour came from the science-fiction film *Village of the Damned*, directed in 1960, in which the main protagonists, a group of children, are distinguished by the colour grey. The shade or shades of colour are determined by what is available at the time from a paper supplier that the artist uses, making the presentation of a work in the series never precisely the same twice and introducing tonal differences each time it is exhibited. The work, like many others in the series, is made using a wooden mould which is filled with thousands upon thousands of pieces of confetti. The wooden box, which bears resemblance to an art-shipping crate, is filled almost to the top, leaving just enough room for the artist to compress the confetti using her own weight. The form of each work and its ability to stand in place, at least initially, is given by compression, a process that sees the artist walk around the top for some several hours. One could think here of a whole variety of artists who have put their own bodily action into the forefront, especially a particular strand of performance art with the pioneering work of Chris Burden, Carolee Schneemann and Vito Acconci, leading back to Yves Klein's experimentations with models. The performance-based practices that are about leaving indexes and traces are perhaps more relevant to the construction of the confetti cubes, however. After their shaping, the wooden boxes are removed, leaving an almost completely formed shape, and resembling what might be associated with a process of mechanical production rather than the body and human action. The formation of the confetti cubes is perhaps a lesser known detail and not only its main purpose, though her own presence, her working through, is a facet important to her practice, brought out in other works more pointedly. Immediately after installation, at a distance their form recalls the sharp minimalism of Donald Judd

or Carl Andre. Confetti is, of course, most commonly associated with celebratory occasions such as weddings or parties, and we tend to assimilate it with fleeting gestures – the throwing of confetti and its subsequent scattering after the event. *Village of the Damned*, as with others in the series, gives shape and form to confetti, jarring with that which we have become accustomed to, although like an event this is only a transitory position. The very structured state they take is temporary, as the cubes become undone in accordance with their surroundings. The movement of people, the conditions of the air and the occasional touch all come into play and work upon the cubes, and they deteriorate in form, revealing a clearer sight of the material they are made of. Seeing the cubes in various museums, institutions and gallery spaces over the years, with their differing volume of traffic, and visiting during different times of an exhibition, has indeed made me view and experience the series in new and different ways. They perform, in the best sense of the term, through failure, engendering issues of presentation, conservation and preservation.

The material of confetti is like an ode to Favaretto's practice in that it speaks so relevantly to what she is interested in and the principal aspects that she examines. It has also been readily used by Favaretto elsewhere. *Tutti giù per terra* (2004), on show in the exhibition at Rennie, is part of a number of other works that are presented in hermetic fabrications, rooms within rooms containing fans and mounds of confetti that progressively flush around the room. The rooms are always clad in plexiglass that act as viewing windows through which the viewer can peer in, resembling, almost, a musicians' recording booth, and like that making it possible to view the performance. The fans are fixed in a particular position and emit continuously, catapulting the plumes of confetti in the air, then drifting to rest before starting up again. Like the confetti cubes, the form of the material is uncertain and tentative, and the configurations are countless. While looking at the work we may reflect on festivities we have been part of, but the work also takes on the appearance of a site in which remnants of those occasions have been gathered and come to rest – a kind of commemoration site. Indeed, the feeling of celebration and jubilation inherent in Favaretto's work is never far away from a feeling of melancholy, of despair and exhaustion, and the downside, perhaps, of contemporary excess. Often, as with *Tutti giù per terra*, her work seems to sit in a threshold between two opposing states of feeling, never too happy and never too sad, and traversing comfort and discontent.

Favaretto's work has functioned as a device through which commemoration is both made and made possible. The swamp at the Venice Biennale, for example, paid homage to several inspirational figures whose circumstances around their disappearances are still shrouded in much mystery, including chess champion Bobby Fisher and artist Bas Jan Ader. As a continuation, *Good Luck*, her recent exhibition held at MAXXI in Rome, displayed several sculptures made of highly reflective materials, each containing boxes of elements belonging or dedicated to many of the figures referred to in the work in Venice and, in a similar way to that work, placed out of view.

The remembrance of the dead and the disappeared, and of loss through presence, is at work elsewhere in Favaretto's pieces. *Lost & Found* (1998), displayed in the exhibition at Rennie Museum, is part of a series of the same

name. The series consists of suitcases obtained by the artist from state-run companies that organise auctions of unclaimed property. Each suitcase in the series contains a number of objects collected by the artist over one year, some of the contents already being in the case when it was found and subsequently acquired. Once filled, Favaretto locks each suitcase and throws away the key and what has been placed in the case is never declared or revealed. A certain sadness is implied by their contents and the way in which the suitcases are installed, as they are positioned on the gallery floor as if left. Ideas of absence and loss in the work might come to remind us of previous possessions we have lost ourselves, or even be representative of our loss of loved ones. The installation of these pieces might also induce feelings of doubt on the part of the visitor. The suitcase could appear to belong to another visitor in the gallery or have been abandoned in the exhibition space by somebody who has already vacated the building, inducing thoughts of security and fear, especially post 9/11, which has seen security measures in public areas tightened. Additional meaning is generated by its hidden contents, turning the work into a paradox: the contents might become more valuable than the work itself in the future, and the notion of travel associated with the suitcases, as well as their temporary nature, is adjusted into a state of permanence – most of the cases were initially lost in public transport. The initial acquisition of the suitcases and the circumstances in which they were auctioned has additive meaning in this context, since the work has subsequently entered a collection, a place which ensures the prosperity of an object.

The new lease of life given to the suitcases and the mystery surrounding their previous life, role and ownership are also at play in the work 225 (2014) in the exhibition. The work consists of a painting that has been found by Favaretto either through the internet, a flea market or an antique dealer – the exact source for each work in this series is never declared. All, however, are given the same treatment. They are taken to an artisan who covers the painting's surface in one single thread of wool, wrapping the painting and essentially veiling its contents. Just like the suitcases, which are closed shut and remain as so, what the painting previously spoke to an owner or viewer is kept secret to a subsequent person or audience. Both the colour and type of wool used for each work are purchased from a wool supplier that has listed it as out of production, taking that act of salvaging with the painting one step further. We can never be sure what the painting revealed after its author finished it, but in a clever interruption by Favaretto, the technique used to conceal the work is deliberately provisional. The wool is wrapped so taut that it constantly faces the possibility of breakages – undoing, therefore, the primary purpose of its employment. If the thread breaks, it is to be kept in that way and not restored, further revealing the painting's pictorial contents and playing with issues of authorship and ownership, viewing and not viewing, and conservation and destruction. As with the confetti pieces, although in slower motion, what would become of the work, we might ask? How would the passage of time treat it? This collision of interest and almost misuse of materials that dances with time is also underlined in a constellation of works Favaretto produced for the 2013 Carnegie International, which brings together the harsh realities of steel road plates replete with silk fabric positioned underneath them – purity through deficiency.

Most of the works in the exhibition at Rennie discussed so far have used existing objects, especially those that have particular meaning in the world and resonance with us. That Favaretto's work deals with the readymade and all of the meaning it accrues is perhaps, however, an oversimplification. Although they do play with the readymade's complexity and context criticality through the gesture of the artist, touching on issues of an object's deployment and transferral, the purpose of using premade objects, they do not seek to exist in this terrain of art history elusively. *Twistle* (2003) is part of one of the artist's most celebrated and exhibited series. Each consists of one or more air-compressed tanks filled with nitrogen and accompanied by a pressure regulator, timer, electrovalve, party horn and plastic cables. The series started with one tank, the work *Twistle*, and includes the work *Plotone* (2005-ongoing), with tanks that increase in number each time it is shown. The cylinders are always hired for exhibition purposes and their history is shown in the varying degree of scratches on their surfaces, just like the suitcases before them. Each time the pressure of the tanks is applied, which is triggered by a timer, the blowout horn attached to the top of the cylinder extends and unfurls in what appears to be a jubilant manner, though there is no sound – aggressive, absurd, delicate, defeated and celebratory in equal measure.

The mood and tone set by the work is similar to *Coppie Semplici / Simple Couples* (2009), an installation made up of car wash brushes, which adorned the walls of an entire gallery space at Rennie. Again a series of work, each transfers an object, the brush, from its original context and uses its normal function in such a way as to point to new meaning. Perhaps even more, the brushes point to what has been on offer already in their natural context. The different-coloured brushes whirl round ceaselessly at varying speeds and hit the steel frames that seek to both frame the work and deteriorate the brushes as they spin.

The act of repetition is repeated throughout Favaretto's works. *È così se mi interessa* [That's how it is if it interests me], a work from 2006, consists of a collection of the artist's hair over a period of 12 years, translating the surrounding walls of the exhibition space into blank pieces of paper, recording the marks left by the hair's constant rotation and friction, as it behaves like a misguided lasso. A more recent work at the artist's solo exhibition at Galleria Franco Noero in 2015, *Citroen LNA*, was also the recording of a recurring action that left the walls of a gallery space as its index, and entailed a car and rope, in addition to the markings, as sources of evidence. Repetition can of course produce the same results but also make way for differences. Favaretto seems to embrace both sides of the coin, yet the dominant feeling is one of rebellion, of showing that doing the same thing over and over again says much about our quest for perfection and its futility. While *Twistle* and *Coppie Semplici / Simple Couples* speak in this way and say much about institutional power and the legacy of industry, as well as, equally, their exhaustion and their lack of renewal, their formal qualities also hold a human quality to them.

It is clear that Favaretto gives the many materials she uses a new lease on life. While they role-play what they are designed to, they also become new characters. Speaking about the work in this way is not as absurd as it might come across from the outset. The simple car wash brush couples could be read in their

relations as duets of people, and the height of the canisters is similar to the height of a person, which brings a palpable emotional quality to both, even though, essentially, they are machines. Her work has much concern with that very concept of restitution while paying homage to and leaking out an object's history. The body of work that Favaretto produced for the 2013 Carnegie exhibition mentioned earlier compounds her interest in formal aspects of materials and how, when facing one another, they can conjure up opposing states that lead to tension and rupture. The work *Psych-Out* (2014) in the exhibition at Rennie is a testament to that process, comprising several scaffolding tubes, 120 in fact, that are laid out on the gallery floor, the placement orientated in dialogue with the surroundings. The tubes' original function, to support, is here rendered useless, and their overall form can instead be seen as an art *deja-vu*, of the stylistic tropes of Minimalism or Arte Povera. The work might appear fixed, robust and solid, although elements of danger and risk arise when knowing that if the tubes were stepped on the arrangement would become greatly unsettled. The title of the work, *Psych-Out*, takes its inspiration, as with many other pieces by the artist, from a film of the same name whose main protagonist, a deaf girl called Jenny, seeks out her brother in San Francisco before losing her way in the psychedelic scene of the city. The film is characterized by a sense of miscarriage that is so often apparent in the artist's work, of the failing of what one sets out to achieve, underlining the state instability that surrounds the piece.

Scaffold tubes have also found a place in other pieces by the artist. In a number of works produced for her 2010 solo exhibition at Galleria Franco Noero, the scaffold's use as a means of support is stated, and their different compositions circulated the exhibition space in a way that seemed to track and demarcate the space, with attention given to certain sections of the scaffold by means of wrapped wool. *Grid after Piet Mondrian, Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1921* (2012) presented at the artist's exhibition at MoMA PS1, is a work that corresponds with that site and place, with the wool yarn replicating the geometric composition of the work by the artist indicated in the title. These works are not only about service, or conservation or preservation, it feels as though they are more about protection – that the chosen scaffolds are the lucky few and no longer have to serve outside in the world.

Objects and materials from the construction industry and engineered world are used through Favaretto's work, speaking perhaps of Italy's legacy in these fields. *Boring* (2010) and *Fisting* (2012), two pieces that were on show at the Rennie Museum, take the process of construction, of their making, as their main subject. The two works make part of a series in which the artist records a course of action that she takes to concrete after it has been poured. A wooden frame is made, into which the concrete liquid is poured, with the top left bare for the artist to intervene. She plunges her body into the liquid in its drying stage, and the title of each work captures the individual state of mind or gesture that is performed. Some other works, for example, have incorporated a kick, a dig and a snatch, while some have captured moments of resting, waiting and leaning. And there are others for which she has used tools such as pieces of plywood, a jackhammer and a shovel. The actions are never fully apparent from looking at the pieces alone and are best appreciated through looking at the titles. Rather

than working with the material, the process is more about working against it. That the concrete sets is inevitable. Favaretto, in many ways, is trying to slow the process down rather than prevent it, after which her actions are given a sense of volume and significance – a kind of sculpture in reverse that is as much about its undoing as the other way around.

The work *Fisting* (2012) was installed at one end of a corridor in the Rennie exhibition with the work *Defense d'Entrer* (2012) at its opposite, which is one of few works where Favaretto has used language in its literal sense. Another is *Your Money Here* (2008), which uses both the content and style synonymous with charity boxes to instil a moment of unusual disruption in, say, the context of an art fair, a museum or even a private house where it is displayed. *Defense d'Entrer* also uses language for the purpose of interruption. Consisting of a sign adorned with the words in the title of the work, it is exhibited on a gallery floor, requesting that the viewer not enter and not step any further. One might choose to abide by the request and not enter, or elect to ignore it and step around it, much in the same way that we might dismiss public signage. Yet, all in all its physical presence and placement has already constructed an obstacle in the viewer's path, even if he or she is a passive spectator. The installation of the work at Rennie Museum generated further meaning and follows the consideration spoken of earlier where Favaretto allows her work a relationship with place, site and history, and the ability these have to arrange further implication. The restriction of access is made more predominant, with the artist choosing to position it at the foot of the narrow corridor. The corridor was, in fact, a previous alleyway that ran between two buildings that have since been made into one, the exhibition space. Rennie Collection's building, the Wing Sang Building, is located in the Chinatown district of Vancouver and is its oldest. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Chinese community suffered hardship and a curfew was imposed, after outrage had been sparked against its people, who saw several buildings in the area being vandalized. Alleyways behind buildings were common and were put in place so people could commute from place to place out of the wider public's eye. Within the exhibition space, the original alleyway and coupling of two ex buildings has been preserved. Favaretto's work, then, could be seen to point to previous tension in the area, and the demarcation of space, as well as the fear of the other that was felt especially at the time, which is, of course, often the lead into anger and injustice.

If one had reached the end of the show and traveled back through it, the confetti pieces might have changed detectably, and the actions of the machines would be pressing on in their endless fashion, or about to. The wool of the painting is unlikely to have broken, but there is a chance. The hidden contents of the suitcase will still be hidden and kept secret, even if it has been picked up and moved by accident. No matter the change, Favaretto's work in many ways gives the impression of a certain autonomy, an additional lifeline, but only ends up wrestling with the inevitable, showing failure at its best and most poignant, and with that, unfortunately, also our own.