

Exhibition Review**Maurizio Cattelan: Not Afraid of Love**

Monnaie de Paris, Paris, France

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Returning to the art scene five years after his self-imposed retirement, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (b.1960) is apparently *Not Afraid of Love*, as the title of his recent exhibition at la Monnaie de Paris proposed. Housed in the historic mint on the Left Bank of the Seine, which has produced French coinage since the eighteenth century, *Not Afraid of Love* was the first exhibition of Cattelan's work since his groundbreaking 2011 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (after which the artist cheekily announced his departure from the art world). For Cattelan, an artist who has always maintained tight control over exhibitions of his work, the choice to return to exhibition making, at an institution typically associated with money, not art (although the two are inextricably linked), demonstrates a new direction for the artist in his post-retirement career.¹ Organized by Chiara Parisi, the Director of Cultural Programs for la Monnaie, in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition presented Cattelan's irreverent, provocative sculptures within the institution's elaborate neoclassical architecture. This arrangement created a compelling intersection between an artist known for extending the legacy of institutional critique and an institution that is looking to expand its purview outside the realm of monetary production into exhibitions of contemporary art.² Although Cattelan produced no new works for the exhibition, la Monnaie's exhibition spaces provided an ornate, theatrical stage for new readings and associations to emerge around Cattelan's best-known sculptures, all created between 1997 and 2010.

The majority of the exhibition was installed on the building's main floor, with each room containing one or two works. Cattelan solicited wall texts for each piece from different authors who individually offered analyses, anecdotes and often critiques of Cattelan's work. Such a variety of perspectives on familiar pieces enriched the new associations that the environment at la Monnaie fostered. Situated in the grand salon of the exhibition, was the artist's most famous work, *La Nona Ora* (1999), a wax effigy of Pope John Paul II in full regalia struck down by a meteorite, leaving him crippled on his side. While critics and historians have traditionally read this work as a celestial condemnation of papal behaviors or the unfortunate collision of science and religion, under a painted ceiling depicting the allegorical theme of fortune, which rains money down on viewers (and Popes) below, John Paul II's disastrous demise here came at the hand of fortune's sinful counterpart, greed (fig. 1).

Following the Pope's salon is a network of more humble rooms, which created a scenography that fostered more intimate interactions with well-known works. Shown in a small back room with a low ceiling was Cattelan's work *All* (2007), a series of nine marble sculptures suggestively depicting bodies lying motionless under fabric. Typically displayed in a large hall to

¹ Many of the artist's endeavors since his "retirement" have been more commercially driven including his publication *Toilet Paper* and its online store, designing the window displays for Paris's Galleries Lafayette and modeling for the Italian shoe brand Santoni, among other projects.

² *Not Afraid of Love* was the eighth exhibition of contemporary art that the institution has hosted since it began the program in 2014. The exhibition following Cattelan's work is in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou on the occasion of the museum's 40th anniversary.

mirror the immense tragedy it evokes, this new setting created a discomfoting closeness to this death of multiple strangers, a poignant encounter considering recent acts of terror nearby (fig. 2). Such curatorial choices summoned a reality that is usually encountered through the media, in a work that is usually displayed at a distance, eerily close.

While critics and historians have frequently read Cattelan's work as a series of incendiary "one-liners," the fresh interpretations that emerged through this site-specific installation demonstrate the dynamism and longevity his works can have. Cattelan worked closely with Parisi on the design and installation of the exhibition, as well as on the production of a small catalogue, which includes an interview between the artist and curator illustrated with drawings depicting Cattelan's sculptures in various states of production and installation, further underscoring the importance that modes of presentation hold for the artist and this exhibition. Following the love this exhibition received, it can only be a matter of time before we can expect more old (and new) work from this artist who is not afraid to make himself comfortable in new situations and environments (fig. 3).

Images and captions:



Figure 1. Maurizio Cattelan, *La Nona Ora*, 1999. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2. Maurizio Cattelan, *All*, 2007. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 3. Installation view, Maurizio Cattelan "Not Afraid of Love," Monnaie de Paris. Photo courtesy of the author.