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Patrizio Di Massimo (Jesi, Italy, 1983) lives and works in London. Di Massimo graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera, Milan, and received his MA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London. He participated in residencies at Stipendium Kunstzeitraum, Munich (2012), de Ateliers, Amsterdam (2009–2011), Sommerakademie at Centre Paul Klee, Bern (2010). Recent solo exhibitions include *The Lustful Turk*, Gaswork, London (2013), *I want to live like this*, T293, Rome (2013), *Il Turco Lussurioso*, Villa Medici, Rome (2012) and a performance at the Stedelijk Museum as part of the public program (2012). Last year his work has been featured among others in the group exhibitions *Souvenir*, at Galerie Emanuel Perrotin, Paris, *The 338 Hour Cineclub*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, *It may be that beauty has strengthened our resolve*, ParaSite, Hong Kong. In 2012 he was selected as a finalist in the *Premio Italia 2012*, held at MAXXI, Rome and participated in *La Storia che non ho vissuto (testimone indiretto)*, Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli, *Ritual without Myth*, Royal College of Art, London. Previous exhibitions include *One caption hides another*, Betonsalon, Paris (2011), *Prague Biennale 5*, Prague (2011), *Tous Cannibales*, Maison Rouge, Paris (2011), *See Reason*, Stedelijk Bureau Museum of Amsterdam (2011); *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2010), *Low Dèco*, Villa Necchi Campiglio, Milano (2010), *Tutta la memoria del mondo*, GAM, Turin (2010); *Patrizio Di Massimo*, Zilkha Auditorium, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2009). In 2010 he co-curated the exhibition, *More Pricks Than Kicks* with Vincent Honoré at the David Roberts Art Foundation, London.

# PATRIZIO DI MASSIMO

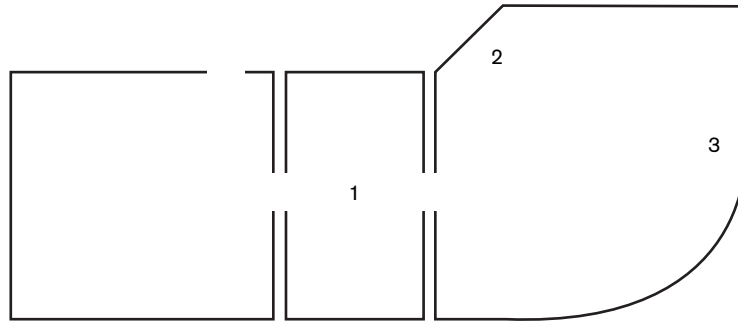
## ME, MUM, MISTER, MAD

### 15.02. – 12.04.2014

Avenida da Liberdade 211 - 1º esq  
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**M HKA**



1. *Mad*

bolster in green wool with piping, bolster in pink suede, bolster in brown velvet with rabbit fur, birdcage, canary, fake logs and stones, tassels  
variable dimensions

2. *Mister*

cushions in denim, cotton and raw canvas, piping, trimmings, tassel, live performance  
variable dimensions

3. *Mum*

200 cm tassel, cord, hosiery net, pelmet, velvet, ivy  
variable dimensions

Yes I would say so. I have made several self-portraits so far: *Untitled my father emulating me* (2007), *Patrizio per Massimo* (2010), *Portrait of the artist as an old man* (2012), *Monologue for two* (2013) and certainly with *Me, Mum, Mister, Mad* I continue that commitment.

This fixation has to do with the fact that my work has always been related to figuration, since the very beginning. I fell in love with painting when I was a teenager. I bought a book about Modern Art and I stared at paintings by Picasso, de Chirico and Dali for years. Portraiture is of course the main genre in figurative art and in a way it is the genre that keeps questioning human nature extensively, despite the times. I believe that what I found in the paintings of those artists is also what I look for in my own work, keeping in mind that society, technology and our concerns have changed.

If you consider all this when thinking about my work it becomes evident why I stress so much objects that aren't as used in our society as before (like tassels, curtains, etc) but that have defined, for many years, the relationship between human beings and their surrounding space, until they became claustrophobically traditionalist. They are a burden and if there is a touch of luxury fetishism in the use I make of them, they also conceal the possibility of self-expression, of being free, of being in the sun light... and therefore to be eventually portrayed.

All this has inevitably to do with the question about whether my national or cultural identity still defines me or not. I really think this is a long process and the works in this show are an important part of. They are breadcrumbs left after myself in order to one day trace back where I came from.

**Where do you come from?**

From the place I should go next!

**Biography plays a fundamental role in this exhibition. As you mentioned before, the show presents a portrait of your family, but by presenting a psychological depiction of each of your family members, through your memories of them, you seem to be tracing your own self-portrait. Would you say that your family defines you as a person and consequently, this show depicts you?**

I see this exhibition as a "neuro-furnishing" installation, in the sense that the space is induced by multiple synapses and their impulses are generated by a whole realm of abstracted memories. I don't really mean to portray my family members according to their visual or emotive features, but rather to get to a point where archetypes arise and everybody might feel a connection with those representations.

With the father (*Mad*), for example - I wanted to recreate the feeling when you are a kid and you see him naked for the first time; that sort of embarrassed disgust mixed with physical questions that remains unexpressed inside the mouth. I also introduced elements more closely related to my real father, like the birdcage with a canary, because I believe this has the power to be a symbol and therefore can speak to a wider audience.

The sister (*Mister*) is actually more similar to my childhood bedroom, in light blue denim and navy, than to her. This portrait plays with that slip of genders that occurs in many phases of growing up and is very defined by the relationship between brother and sister. There is an erotic tension in all the works and in this one especially such tension is underlined by the performance that happens within the pile of cushions, where a girl (or a boy) shows glimpses of her (his) body.

The mother (*Mum*) is simultaneously the most abstract and the most figurative of the pieces. I wanted to pay homage to her figure and depict it as an incumbent messenger, a blown trimming, a growing organism, a solid transparent object that results more virtual than real. The tassel here is humanized and eventually manages to create that feeling of familiarity that all of a sudden becomes alien.

I don't know if all this together depicts myself, as you suggest, but I know that after executing the three portraits I didn't feel the need to make a fourth one. The exhibition certainly plays a lot with the Lacanian definitions of Symbolic, Imaginary and Real so I could answer that my self is still that desire to please my parents and to be that fully satisfying love-object that lives in them, inside them.

**Besides exploring the subjective and intimate relation established with your own biography, and how that relation can be enacted (or performed) publicly, you seem to be addressing also one of art history's most established tropes, that of family portraiture. Portraits, self or otherwise, seem to be a recurring topic in your work, wouldn't you say?**

Kunsthalle Lissabon presents *Me, Mum, Mister, Mad*, the first solo exhibition in Portugal of London-based Italian artist Patrizio Di Massimo.

*Me, Mum, Mister, Mad* is an exhibition constructed as a family portrait. In the title the initial letter of the pronoun me replaces those of the other characters. The exhibition space is inhabited by three large contiguous installations portraying the Father, the Sister and the Mother.

*Me* is what actually becomes visible in the presence of these three representations, which substitute assemblages of upholstery and trimmings for the family members. Each of them evokes, in its own way, the relationship between the biographical and the domestic, the familiar and the alien, the material and the virtual, the static and the performative.

The Father is *Mad*. This is the first character we encounter when we visit the exhibition. He has a separate room and consists of three oversized bolster cushions made from different clothing fabrics, leaning on each other as in a game of mikado, as well as a birdcage holding a canary.

In the role of the Sister we see *Mister*, a pile of cushions against a closed door. Sometimes a girl's limbs can be glimpsed from under these cushions, and that is a live performance. The cushions are made from cotton jersey and cloth, adorned with cut fringes, trimmings or painted shapes.

The Mother, finally, is represented as *Mum* by a curtain fitted onto one of the windows in the venue. It is composed of a pelmet, an oversized tassel, transparent flesh-colored hosiery fabric and a climber plant.

According to Di Massimo, our relationship with domestic objects is thematized as both abstraction and figuration. If the price we pay for our western civilization and the domesticity that embodies it is the repression of some basic desires and fears, then the very same objects we use for this purpose can also take on the opposite function and bring back to the surface some of our submerged personal memories.

The family portrait, a classical trope of art history, also continues the artist's earlier engagement with themes such as the absence of orphanhood in western culture (*Without Orphanhood*, 2007). Self-portraiture is, in fact, a fundament of Di Massimo's practice, connecting his latest project to earlier works such as *Untitled (My Father Emulating Me)*, 2007, or *Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man*, 2012.

The new body of work now presented in Kunsthalle Lissabon is the continuation of the research into the use of furnishings as tools for allegorical representation that Di Massimo began for the *Lustful Turk* project (Villa Medici, Rome, 2012, and Gasworks, London, 2013), the exhibition *I Want to Live Like This* (T293, Rome, 2012) and the project *Monologue for Two*, 2013.

*Me, Mum, Mister, Mad* is a co-production with M HKA, the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, where it will travel as part of the group exhibition *Don't You Know Who I Am? Art after Identity Politics*, curated by Anders Kreuger and Nav Haq.

WORDS DON'T COME EASY  
CONVERSATION BETWEEN PATRIZIO DI MASSIMO, JOÃO MOURÃO AND LUÍS  
SILVA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION *ME, MUM, MISTER, MAD*, HELD  
IN FEBRUARY 2014 IN KUNSTHALLE LISSABON.

**In *Me, Mum, Mister, Mad*, the show you are now presenting at  
Kunsthalle Lissabon, you continue your research into the use of furnishings as  
tools for allegorical representation, but this time around your subject is that of  
the family portrait. What led you to this?**

I started using elements of decor in my work within the project of *The Lustful Turk*, a series of paintings, drawings and sculptural works inspired by the infamous erotica novel of the same title published anonymously in England in 1826. In this body of work cushions, tassels, tie backs, curtains and trimmings were treated as repositories of figurative evocations, allowing me to portray the body, and eventually some of the characters in that book, not through outsourcing it but rather using such elements as metonyms or synecdoches of my visual textuality.

The human figure has always been at the center of my work but for some unknown reason I like to pay tribute to a sort of apologetic way of dealing with its image. I think this is a bit concerned with a skepticism towards representation similar to the one of Islam, as I do share the belief that to see something reified in front of you prevents the possibility of seeing it inside you. I felt that the replacement that happens when domestic objects become substitutes for parts of our body was allowing me to be both figurative and abstract, and more apt to suggest rather than illustrate.

In between the presentation of *The Lustful Turk* project in Villa Medici (2012) and the one in Gasworks (2013) I made *Monologue for two* (2013), a work in which the elements of furnishing were already thematized as mental burrows. More recently the same happened with *Inside Me* (2013), a work in which cushions embodied a rather psychological state and the body became an imaginative presence where only its extremities were visible.

When you invited me to think of a project for Kunsthalle Lissabon I was at the right moment to shift everything towards the portraiture of those constitutional elements of my self as a being - my relatives, my family hub and the memories I have of them. I also must admit that the architecture of Kunsthalle Lissabon's space really inspired me in this sense. I felt that its domesticity would become part of my work if inhabited by such characters, since while occupying the space they would also render it. I started to think, or rather to throw out their physical presence, and arrived to define them as a combinatory system of elements in which the decorative meets the performative, the physical meets the virtual.