Elisa Sighicelli Photographer

‘There is no narrative in my work... I am not interested in attaching a story’

By KAREN WRIGHT
Portrait by SEBASTIANO PELLION DI PERSANO

Photographer Elisa Sighicelli has been in this studio for the past three years. “I wanted a space that was full of light, which was also somewhere easy to get crates in and out of. This building has a big lift.” The space, a former factory, is unique to Turin, having been transformed into studios and workshops in the Eighties. She says that although there are several other artists there she does not have much to do with them other than saying hello as they pass.

The studio is indeed light and lofty; it is also, at the moment, a gallery, dramatically installed with her work. Her latest sumptuously coloured and expansive photographs are seemingly abstract in subject matter, but are subliminally attached to the subject matter of her native Italy.

Born in Turin in 1968, Sighicelli left the city after high school to study textiles in Florence, before continuing her studies in London. “My parents were not interested in contemporary art. My mother was a maths and physics teacher and my father worked for Fiat, as most of the people in this town did.” Sighicelli has recently been focusing on her photography and in particular investigating how the works are shown. “Usually photographs are mounted and there is no relationship with how they are displayed. In the Seventies there was a lot of work displaying painting and sculpture [that addressed] how the mediums existed in the world. This has not happened with photography.” She has increasingly turned to abstraction, saying she was frustrated by the way that her work was always discussed by subject matter. Here In Italy, surrounded by ancient examples of trompe-l’oeil, she sees her recent work as an inversion of this “trick of the eye” technique, “a two-dimensional work with something real to it”. In a recent series she took coloured strings and made a drawing in space. Photographing her string-sculpture, she then printed the photographs, carefully adding pins that have a dual purpose. They look like you could tighten the strings but they are holding the work to the wall.

Previously Sighicelli did a series based on historic Italian painters, and she admits that “when I look at old master paintings I look at how the drapery represents volume and how the light falls. There is no narrative in my work and you can create your own, but I am not interested in attaching a story to my works.” There may not be any storytelling, but the photographs instantly recall the rich draperies of Renaissance painting, here constrained by the tapes that contain them, a method of display that also expands their meaning.

Sighicelli has always had a talent for discovering materials. I tease her about finding a distressed slide in St Petersburg that she has incorporated into her work, asking “are you bored when you are on holiday?” She responds: “I have a fascination with materials and objects – I do need something to photograph.”

Elisa Sighicelli’s work can be seen at MOT International London, W1 (motinternational.com)