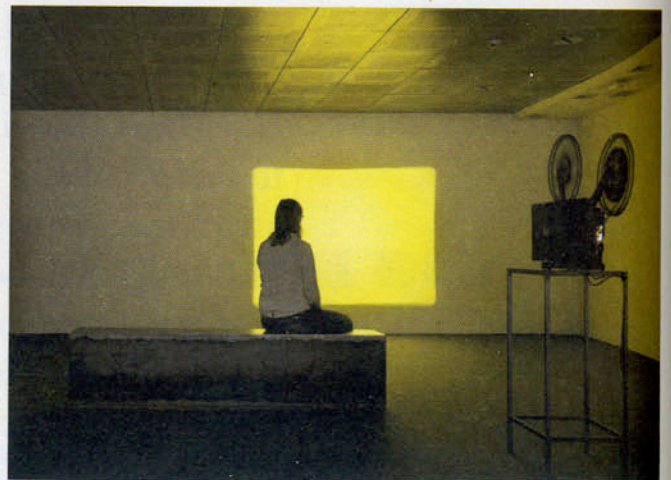


EMERGING ARTISTS

ROSSELLA BISCOTTI



words by MOOSJE GOOSEN



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ARTIST'S BIO

ROSSELLA BISCOTTI (b. 1978, Molfetta) lives and works in Rotterdam. She recently had solo exhibitions at Wilfried Lentz (Rotterdam), Fondazione Galleria Civica – Centro di Ricerca sulla Contemporaneità di Trento (Trento), Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Nomos Foundation (Rome) and Prometeo Gallery (Lucca). In 2009, her work was awarded with the prestigious price Prix de Rome (Amsterdam). She has also exhibited at Witte de With (Rotterdam), Arte Contempo (Lisbon), Museion (Bolzano/Bozen), TENT (Rotterdam) and at the 2nd Athens Biennale.

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

Rossella Biscotti is currently an artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten (Amsterdam). Her work is on view at GAM (Turin), Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin) and at the Adelaide Festival.

AUTHOR

MOOSJE GOOSEN is an art critic and writer of fiction and non-fiction, based in Rotterdam and New York. She is co-author of the book *Prix de Rome.NL 2009* and writes, amongst others, for *Metropolis M*.

The work of Rossella Biscotti brings me to 1895, a year of radical optical transformation, as film theorist Akira Lippit argues in his 2005 book *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*. 1895 was the year of the invention of x-ray and cinema, and of the foundation of psychoanalysis—all of which turned the interior inside out through their distinct modes of illumination. As Lippit writes, “X-ray, cinema, psychoanalysis provided a view of secret visibility, not an access or opening as such, but a mode of avisuality.”¹ Perhaps in “light” of this, we can reconsider our past and conclude that ultimately, there is no invisible history: at most, there are histories we have thus far failed to see. The past contains shadows and obscure regions (of censored or forgotten memories) that, to the unequipped eye, look like “nothing,” no more than a black hole. Biscotti’s work takes shape in these spaces. She points a flashlight and turns history inside out, excavating the traces we leave when we decide to remember or forget.

In *The Sun Shines in Kiev* (2006), a project that consists of a video, a slide projection and a poster, Biscotti shifts our attention to Vladimir Shevchenko, a Ukrainian filmmaker who decided to film the nuclear power plant accident in Chernobyl in 1986. Shevchenko is the one who points the light—his camera—on a history in the making: what we get in return, in Biscotti’s video, is a black screen. The black screen is not a void: it’s a historic black hole, just like the fragments of Shevchenko’s surviving footage with which the film concludes: Shevchenko’s material is overexposed by radiating light, as if it sought to blind the viewer from the history it contains. Biscotti reconstructs a biography of Shevchenko from contradictory information collected through interviews with Shevchenko’s wife and a surviving cameraman. Whereas the black video screen obscures individual memories of a historic event, the accompanying slide projection seems to offer the opposite: it illuminates, showing frames cut from a 35mm film shot in the days after the nuclear accident. The footage bears literal traces of radiation—white flashes of light that appear on the celluloid as a result of contact with atomic particles. One slide shows two officers, one of whom seems to be looking at a spot where the radiation has left a mark on the film: it is almost as if the officer suspects the presence of the traces this particular moment and place will leave on the future and hence, on history.

In another work, *The Undercover Man* (2008), Biscotti elaborates on cinema as both an existential and narrative code. For this video, she used the set of the *film noir* to stage an interrogation between herself and former FBI agent Joseph Pistone, better known as Donnie Brasco. Pistone’s first-person recollections, dramatic lightings, interjections of actual footage from FBI surveillance tapes and other techniques disrupt and sometimes obscure the narrative sequence, in which Pistone, interrogated by Biscotti, describes his infiltration of the mob—a testimony that once provided key evidence in a trial against the New York Mafia.

In *A short story about memory penthotal and dreams* (2009–10), Biscotti delves further into the black hole of supposedly erased memory, directing our gaze toward the depths of a traumatized subject. We listen to the recordings of a man trying to access images of his youth in a drug-induced state of sleep. Biscotti edited fragments of recorded sessions with Dutch psychiatrist Jan Bastiaans, a controversial figure for his use of LSD and Penthotal on patients experiencing post-traumatic stress from World War II. “A clear blue sky without sun, without clouds” is just one of the images that surface when Bastiaans’s patient attempts to remember his war-torn youth. It is an image that we cannot access, and that Biscotti does not attempt to replicate. Nonetheless, a supporting slide projection showing different gradations of yellow creates a visual realm that, for us viewers, becomes a mnemonic device of its own: of memories we can only dream to see. A black hole becomes a yellow, illuminated void. This is where Biscotti leaves her trace—in shadow optics.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 30.

Previous page, from top, clockwise:
Pharmaceutical dreams, 2010

The Sun Shines in Kiev, film still, 2006

168 sections of a human brain, installation view, Fondazione Galleria Civica di Trento, 2010 Photo: Hugo Munoz

Pharmaceutical dreams, 2010

Pharmaceutical dreams, 2010

All images courtesy: Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam, and prometeogallery by Ida Pisani, Milan