

**EWA MONIKA
ZEBROWSKI,
AN UNENDING
CONVERSATION
WITH
CY TWOMBLY**

a solo exhibition
at Luisa Cevese
Riedizioni,
Milan, Italy,
March 22 – April 12,
2023

*Reviewed by
Dean Rader*

NO AMERICAN ARTIST was more beguiled by the marriage of text and image than Cy Twombly. Not only is much of his work made in response to literary texts, but many of his paintings and drawings actually contain lines of poetry by John Keats, Rainer Maria Rilke, Sappho, Homer, Federico Garcia Lorca and many others embedded in the visual field. Twombly also produced sculptures and photographs. His interests and inspirations were wide.

Which is why Ewa Monika Zebrowski's gorgeous exhibit—*An Unending Conversation with Cy Twombly*—at Luisa Cevese Riedizioni in Milan is so perfect. A blend of photographs, artist books, and poems, Zebrowski's artistic practice meets Twombly in all of his sweet spots.

Lovingly curated by Cevese, this elegant show features 17 prints, five artist books, printed poems. Unlike most of us who were drawn to Twombly through his iconic scribble paintings or his massive elegies to the ancient world, Zebrowski first discovered Twombly in 2012 by way of his Polaroids. That led her to Gatea, Italy, where Twombly lived and worked and to the Twombly Archives where she researched his Polaroids. Now, after a decade of responding to Twombly's Twomblyness in a myriad of ways, this fabulous show collects her Twombly-centered work in one setting.

The oldest piece in the collection is one of the most striking. *twombly italia* (2015), produced with the collaboration of the Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio, is two books in one—an accordion book of 21 photographs and a pamphlet of 10 poems. Zebrowski's photographs *feel* like Twombly's Polaroids. They are snapshots of water, flora and fauna, sculptures. Some are blurry, some are close-ups, others are landscapes. They celebrate the micro with an eye that loves detail. *fuori tempo* (*out of time*) is the most recent work. Three separate books are presented in a slipcase of 20 poems, 20 photos, and text, including an introduction by poet Michael Collier.

Perhaps the most fitting piece for this particular exhibit is *Bassano in Teverina*, a series of 25 photographs, five of which are on display here. Twombly had a home and studio in Bassano in Teverina that Zebrowski visited with Alessandro, Twombly's son. The images of the (now empty) spaces where Twombly lived and created are haunting. Time, history, memory, imagination—their presence and absence—echo like a silenced voice. These images pair well with *The White Sculptures*, a selection of 7 images shown in Milan, touching on Twombly's love of antiquity. These images are also the subject of a fabulous talk by Zebrowski given in conjunction with the *Cy Twombly: Making Past Present* exhibit at the Getty in Los Angeles.

The most ingeniously displayed work is *a bouquet for cy*. This small book, also in accordion style, presents 9 photographs of flowers and one short poem. Twombly loved flowers. He loved to photograph them, paint them, include lines of poetry about them. Zebrowski's images are cleverly cropped, indicating more petals, more stems, more beauty is outside the frame. One gets a similar sense with much of Twombly's work.

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In the exhibit, we encounter this book before we even enter the gallery. You can see it through the window as you stand outside on the sidewalk. It is rather magically framed by a famous line by Twombly—*In time the wind will come and destroy my lemons*—that has been painted on the window itself. Passersby, literally look through Twombly's words to Zebrowski's images, which are spread out inside a gorgeous vitrine.

This particular act of curation is a stroke of genius, but the entire show is the perfect blend of structure and lyricism—itself a poem. With Zebrowski images on the wall and her books on tables, the exhibit facilitates an interplay of word and window that Twombly explored throughout his career. I have written elsewhere that Twombly always needed more than one genre. Just image or just text would not suffice. The same goes for Zebrowski. As she writes in her artist statement, “Somehow my photographs were not enough to express my deep attachment to him. I needed words to express my emotion.” As someone who has also spent the last several years writing poems and essays about Twombly, I can relate in the most profound ways. Twombly is ever elusive. He and his work are always just out of reach. Anything we can do or make or draw or mark to get us a little closer to the spoor, the tracks, the always already disappearing traces of Twombly.

Images + words. Words + pictures. Pictures + poems.

Ultimately, Zebrowski enters into conversation with the great artist on her own terms in a setting he would adore.

DEAN RADER has authored or co-authored twelve books, including *Works & Days*, winner of the 2010 T. S. Eliot Prize, *Landscape Portrait Figure Form*, a *Barnes & Noble Review* Best Book, and *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry*, a finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award and the Northern California Book Award. His writing has been supported by fellowships from Princeton University, Harvard University, Headlands Center for the Arts, Art Omi, and the MacDowell Foundation. Rader is a professor at the University of San Francisco and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry. His newest book, *Before the Borderless: Dialogues with the Art of Cy Twombly*, published by Copper Canyon Press, pairs 50 of Rader's poems with drawings and paintings by Twombly. The book's publication date, April 25, 2023, is Twombly's 95th birthday.

