

## SENTIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Text by Mattia Ruffolo

Davide and I broke up two years ago after living together for five. He is a special person to me. We are close friends, and we share a lot among us, including the majority of our friendships, the dog we got together and the library we created together; book after book, catalogue after catalogue.

Davide is an artist, and I recently came across an article of his, in which he talks about his latest work, *Light Switch*, exhibited in the Gregor Steiger Gallery in Switzerland. When I read what he said, I froze: “D: I ripped these images while flipping through the books, magazines and catalogues of my library. Actually, it’s not 100% mine, since I have to somewhat agree with my ex-partner on how to use the library together, or how we will divide it. It’s weird how this idea manifested, it was just a joke I made while me and some friends were at a bar talking about revenge on our ex-boyfriends.” I had no idea, the only thing I could think was: “What a bitch!!!”.

I had another look at the photos from his installation, and I realised he’d probably ripped off some of the pages from the catalogue of the COMME DES GARÇONS’ exhibition at the MET. Some from Silvia Calderoni’s catalogue about Motus. Others from Ethan James Green’s book that we got from Strand in New York on our last trip together. The exhibition is very touching; the artworks very enigmatic and intimate, as most of his work is. When I saw images from the opening, I hadn’t realised just how personal it all was. Only now, after reading that interview excerpt, I understood that I’d been looking at the visual requiem of our relationship. I realised that the artworks were spread across the room in the same way our furniture was laid out in our home. The light switches were positioned in the same exact way as they were found on those walls we had shared for years. He hadn’t said anything, as if it had been his silent, cryptic, piercing revenge. Whether I’d been aware of it or not, it wouldn’t have really mattered.

Finding out the truth made me think about the spaces I have lived in throughout my life. I grew up in a very small council house in the south of Italy. There were six of us living there: my mother, my two brothers, my two sisters and myself. As a child, I spent most of my time looking at myself in a mirror my mother had hung up on the wall to make the corridor look bigger than it was. Looking through old photographs, I noticed that those same rooms used to be emptier and tidier before. By the time I arrived, the house was already filled with memories.

My mother furnished it “with what we could”. She took great care of the furniture, and we also had to do the same, because it couldn’t be replaced. When I got angry at her, to annoy her, I would slam the doors. In that house, there wasn’t enough space for everyone’s stuff. We each had to own a small amount of objects. Each one of us had a drawer where we could put our things in. Sometimes we even hid stuff underneath the bed; it was the only way we could keep such a crowded house tidy.

I was the youngest, and when my siblings started leaving home, each one of them would take their stuff with them, and the drawers started emptying. By the end, I’d managed to have a bedroom all to myself. For some years, it was just my mother and me. Until the day I also left.

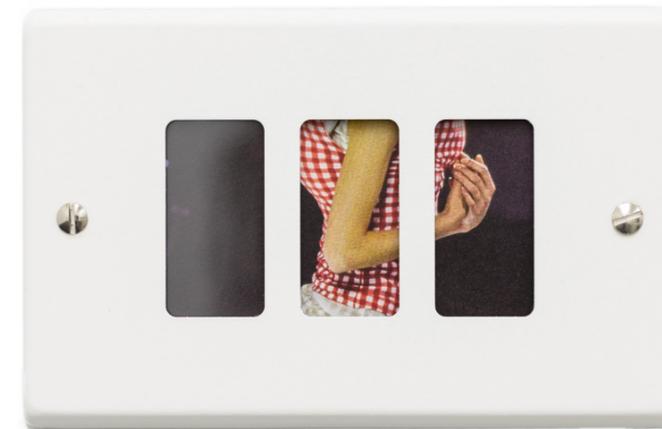
The belongings from my adolescence are still there. My mum keeps them safe as if they were heirlooms; they’ve now become hers. Nothing changes in that place, because that immobility is reassuring to my mum. I also left my clothes there and only brought the essentials with me.

When I left, I had two suitcases full of photographs and fashion magazines with me. That’s actually the reason why I’d left in the first place. All those pages that had opened a window onto the world throughout the years had finally become my physical and emotional anchor. I didn’t have a lot of money, and that knowledge was the only thing I had on offer and, although it was hard, it was a sacrifice I had to make.

I didn’t understand why my mum was so pathologically attached to those things. After reading Marx in high school, I distanced myself even more from my mother’s urge to archive everything. I saw it as a feeble need that had its roots in capitalism.

When I left, I started from scratch. I didn’t want to get attached to anything physical. Growing up with my mother had made me understand how difficult it was to communicate with objects. I had to clear myself from all those things.

In Milan, I had an empty room with just one bed, some clothes, and many books in it. I used a coloured neon light to give the whole room the same hue. All of my bedrooms have always been blue. I only went back home at night-time to sleep. My life was outside, and I often flew to London and Paris to check out art exhibitions.



Davide Stucchi  
*Light switch (Sitting Room)*, 2019  
Aluminium, paint, acrylic glass, photograph removed from publication, backing, screws  
11.5 x 7 x 0.5 cm



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I met Davide in 2013 through a photo. It was a photo of him facing backwards while he installed his artworks in the case of Medardo Rosso's sculptures. We moved in together a year later. We got a flat on the third floor of an East-facing building. I had never lived in such a house that was so high up before; I would've been able to witness all of Milan's sunsets. It was all so exciting for me.

The walls were painted in very different and strong tones. We painted everything white and started from scratch. We both wanted a neutral space to live in. I'd read somewhere that it was pointless getting expensive furniture because relationships could last less time than them. I was 21-years-old, and IKEA furniture was perfect: economic, mass-produced and impersonal. And we also found ourselves furnishing it "with what we could".

In that house we didn't want decorations, it looked like a bourgeois house. We focused all our irony on little simpering camp objects that we would place on shelves scattered around our home. In that way, we were indifferent to giving that space a style or taste. For us, the simple use of things was a sign of freedom, as we thought it had to resemble as much as possible the projects by architects Locaton & Vassaly (poverty stimulates the imagination).

In that flat, there were many wires, and extension cables and the fact that it was so empty made them stick out even more. It was Davide who dealt with those things that I defined "masculine". With time I understood that he enjoyed them. It looked strange to me, but I let him be.

We shared everything we owned, even clothes. I've always had a small amount; I would wear his. And before wearing his, I used to wear my brothers'. The bedroom was chaotic, full of luxury brand boxes and bags that we'd collected throughout the years. Davide used to strut down the corridor as if it was a catwalk wearing anything he could put together. The majority of times he was inspired by Galliano's Dior or COMME DES GARÇONS. Depending on the songs that I would pick, I would tell him how to strut: Versace, Prada, Chanel or Vetements style.

When it came to books, I would guard them with jealousy; at first, I tried keeping them separately. My library would be the visual representation of my mental order; kind of like a scale-model that gives physicality to my rooms of knowledge. Throughout

the years that order had been lost. When we learned to know and trust one another, we felt ready to merge our knowledge together physically. He knew my books, and I knew his. One night we decided to sort them following the way art critic Germano Celant would with his. We'd both been his office assistants, and we knew his archiving method. When I got angry with him, I would empty all the bookshelves to spite him. They would be completely empty. It was then a question of putting everything back following the same method; that was almost our cathartic way of finding our balance and getting closer again.

Although I would find so many defects in that house, it became more and more familiar. I would live there with the freedom to leave, explore and get to know the world. I never felt bound to it, and I never felt abandoned. That place was my free port. Whenever I would come back from a trip, I would hang on the bedroom door handle access passes that I'd worn around my neck and that would define me as an editor, writer, guest, artist. In every corner of the bathroom and on top of every light switch there would be photographs of Nan Golden and Wolfgang Tillmans that we'd bought in museums.

We would wash ourselves with Marseille soap, and we would empty our pockets and place seashells around the bathtub. The stories, images and music that had marked two separate existences, then merged together, were etched on the walls, bookshelves and light switches of our flat.

We would unknowingly scatter around memories; like Georges Perec had done in *Je me souviens. Les choses communes* [1978]. Small gestures that would give me small satisfactions every day.

Without me noticing, that home had become similar to my mother's. When I moved to another place, Davide switched on the blue neon and shone a light on my left traces. If something was about to disappear, it had to be exalted.

Today that flat is still his and sometimes I go back to have a coffee with him. It's very different now; everything breathes him. He might even be renovating it soon, although I don't see any defects any more. It's already beautiful as it is, full of plants and scented flowers.



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