

MARCO MAGGI *Unfolding* *Marco Maggi*

by Taney Roniger

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Artists, someone once astutely noted, are the great observers of society; their job, above all else, is to notice the world the rest of us inhabit but largely fail to perceive. By this criterion, Marco Maggi is the consummate artist, having made a career out of attending to the small and insignificant, the overlooked and ignored, the humble details of the phenomenal world that hover beneath the radar of ordinary perception. With a wonderfully quirky practice that involves etching, incising, or otherwise inscribing tiny marks into all manner of mundane surfaces, Maggi creates works of impossible intricacy whose appreciation requires a kind of sustained attention inimical to today's hyper-accelerated culture. The deep pleasure of Maggi's work, for those willing to slow down and lean in, lies in the perpetual rediscovery of what a thrill it is *to see*. The paradox of perception pervades this artist's work: Why is it that we are often blind to that which is right before our very eyes?

With the nine works in this show, an extension of the artist's current installation at the Venice Biennale, we have a glimpse into Maggi's protean practice and substantial range. On view are three large-scale wall installations, several smaller sculptural and/or site-specific pieces, and two framed drawings.

Throughout, deft allusions to the written word suggest that it is not just our collective hyperactivity that alienates us from the sensory world, but something perhaps more insidious: our increasingly compulsive need for knowledge and certainty in an age of instantaneous access.



Marco Maggi, *Two Pages* (detail), 2015. Self-adhesive paper on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Joséé Bienvenu Gallery.

Entering the gallery, any aspirations of certainty are quickly thwarted. Indeed, at first glance one cannot even be sure there is any art on offer. Slowly, however, as one's eyes adjust to the visual silence, the walls acquire a discernible texture that covers, in various arrangements, the entirety of the gallery's main space. Upon closer inspection, dense clusters of minuscule glyphs made of black and white paper emerge. Attached directly to the walls—and often protruding from them—circles, arcs, bows, and polygons intermingle with more eccentric shapes unidentifiable by name. All have been cut with surgical precision, but subtly wobbly edges betray their human facture. Throughout, minute folds and bends in the shapes' surfaces cast shadows that are often more visible than the structures themselves. While grid-like arrays of linear elements—some no wider than electrical wire—might suggest circuitry or architectural models, the glyphs remain resolutely non-representational. Instead, the recurrence of like shapes, together with their scale and vaguely topographical arrangement, suggests a kind of asemic alphabet or indecipherable code. Discursively shipwrecked, we find ourselves immersed in the wonders of edges, peaks, and shadows.

This simultaneous nod to and refusal of linguistic meaning is further underscored in many of the individual pieces. In *Two Pages* (2015), the largest work in the show, the glyphic protrusions spread across two adjoining walls, their shared corner becoming the spine of an open book. Here, the clusters of marks form unintelligible paragraphs punctuated by irregular patches of bare white wall, moments of silence between utterances devoid of meaning. The overall composition being too large to apprehend at close distance, it is the trees that matter more than the forest. Small discoveries feel like epiphanies: in one area of the spine-corner, a tiny linear strip extends, tentacle-like, from one wall to the other, casting an angular shadow wholly different from its source.

On another wall, *Gray Optimism* (2015) comprises a column of glyphs that extends from floor to ceiling and spills over onto one of the latter's beams. Gazing upward, it is unclear where the piece ends. Are those pocks in the concrete, or more paper glyphs? Which marks are significant and which not? Pondering the status of the barely visible specs, one recalls that the glyphs are themselves "insignificant;" they point to, but then adamantly refuse, signification. Here as elsewhere with Maggi, a tricksterish love of paradox comes to the fore; with its towering, columnar authority, *Gray Optimism* is a monument to insignificance in both senses.

While other works make less overt reference to language, all retain a strong evocation of information or data. In *Pocket* (2015), for example—another wall installation—the glyphs become smaller and more bit-like (some are no larger than an em-dash) and form a dense field of vibrating particles that suggests some kind of deep space—cosmic or cyber. In *Fanfold II* (2014), a delicate ladder of obsolete computer paper rises up the wall, its perforated edges framing nothing but absence and shadow. Here as elsewhere, gestures toward knowledge and its acquisition set us up for their ultimate subversion.

In a culture in which knowledge consumption has achieved the status of an addiction, we have surely never been more knowledgeable—or, it can be argued, more ignorant. With its insistence on discursive silence and its impassioned embrace of myopic vision, Maggi's work implores us to halt the excessive cogitation and return to the here-and-now, where life can become an adventure of perception. In this sense, Maggi's oeuvre is a grand ode to nescience. Without it, we lose sight of the world. With it, we might just know the place for the first time. It is a difference well worth noticing.