

Adrian Paci

*The Guardians*

opening November 7, 2015

535 West 22nd Street, New York

kaufmann repetto New York is happy to announce Adrian Paci's exhibition, *The Guardians*. Three different videos will coexist in the exhibition space: Paci's latest video titled *The Guardians*; *The Encounter*, shot in occasion of a performance held by the artist in Sicily, and *Albanian Stories*, Adrian Paci's very first video, dated 1997.

The three works are elaborations of the artist's personal experience: born and raised in Albania, Paci experienced the limits of a totalitarian regime, and the consequent abandon of his native land. At the same time, the works open to a level of universal experience: the specific episodes lose their historical connotations, and become the occasion to reflect on wider topics like life and death, the vital power of storytelling, the potentiality of the gesture.

*The Guardians* takes place in the Catholic cemetery in the artist's hometown, Shkodra, in Albania. Following a ban of religious symbols imposed by the Communist regime, the cemetery was abandoned for decades, and became a place where couples secretly met. After the fall of the regime in 1991, the cemetery was reopened and new construction of unauthorized tombs started to proliferate, recreating the chaotic architecture typical of post-communist Albania. Within the cemetery's renaissance, groups of children were paid to clean and take care of the graves.

Starting from these memories, Paci creates an ambiguous dialogue between the graves and the children's presence. This image summarizes a central topic in Paci's oeuvre: the tension between the liberating power of individual creativity and humor, against imposed constraints.

*Albanian Stories*, shot in 1997, uses a similar strategy: in the video Paci's three-year-old daughter recounts a series of improvised fairy-tales, in which imaginary characters, such as a cow, a cat and a rooster, commingle with unexpected references to soldiers and "international forces". The child's creativity recounts through storytelling the horrors of civil war, in order to cope with the cruel logics of history.

*The Encounter* is the result of a performance that happened in Scicli, a small town in Sicily. Here, Paci gathered several hundreds people from all over the world, and greeted each of them with a simple hand shake. This humble and symbolical gesture is repeated in a rhythmic fashion, becoming a solemn and hieratic ritual.

Freed by any subordination to other human activities (like celebrations, condolences, agreements) the gesture of hand shaking is made the subject of the celebration, and expresses all its potential through a sense of openness, that is one of the main feature of Adrian Paci's work.

Adrian Paci (b. 1969 in Shkoder, Albania) studied painting at the Academy of Art in Tirana. In 1997 he moved to Milan where he lives and works. Throughout his career he held numerous solo shows in various international institutions such as Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway (2014); Röda Sten Konsthall, Goteborg (2014); MAC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (2014); Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea – PAC, Milan (2014); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2013); National Gallery of Kosovo, Prishtina (2012); Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich (2010); Bloomberg Space, London (2010); The Center for Contemporary Art – CCA, Tel Aviv (2009); Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund (2007); MoMA PS1, New York (2006) and Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2005). Amongst the various group shows, Adrian Paci's work has also been featured in the 14th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2014); in the 4th Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2013); in the Biennale de Lyon (2009); in the 48th and the 51st edition of the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (respectively in 1999 and 2005); in the 15th Quadriennale di Roma, where he won the first prize (2008); and in the 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006).