



Rob Johannesma, *World-Wielding*, 2011. Ink-jet print, 32 x 20'. Installation view: Museo Marino Marini.

ARTFORUM

Critic's Picks

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Rob Johannesma

MUSEO MARINO MARINI

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Rob Johannesma's solo Italian museum debut is split between the Museo Marino Marini and AR-GE Kunst in Bolzano. (The latter show closed on March 17.) For the exhibitions, Johannesma's created a monumental ink-jet print, both titled *World-Wielding*, 2011. The point of departure for the piece is a news photograph of a skull and other human remains on a meadow, shot in 1995 near Srebrenica, a site of a massacre during the Bosnian War. Johannesma digitally rephotographed the original image (a small newspaper clipping) hundreds of times and then used small portions of his shots to re-create the original picture. The extraordinary result is an enormous mosaic, full of gaps and chromatic jumps. Its complexity alludes to the difficult task of deciphering that awaits anyone who sets out in search of historical truth. But the work is also a flagrant quotation of the *vanitas* genre of classical painting.

The parallel between the Western iconographic tradition and news images continues in an 2012 untitled work—a table on which the artist has arranged newsprint clippings, juxtaposing photographs of current events and reproductions of Leonardo, Tintoretto, Manet, and many others. As in Aby Warburg's celebrated *Mnemosyne Atlas* of 1928–29, the work indicates the survival of particular iconographic archetypes. While news photographs can be rapidly consumed, the artist seems to suggest this is because they obey schemes that have long been present in our collective memory.

The exhibition at the Museo Marino Marini includes three excellent videos created between 1998 and 2010. They are "landscape studies" in which, once again, the contemporary reveals the historical in a filigree pattern, as in the triptych *Cinque Terre*, 2004, based on photographs of rocky landscapes that recall the backdrop of Da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*. In an untitled work from 1998, Johannesma scans a photograph bit by bit with his camera's lens. Throughout all of the works, Johannesma's conceptual investigation of images is based on his scrutiny of their primary materials; indeed, through rephotographing, scanning, superimposing, and so on, he searches for meaning by zeroing in on structure and breaking it down.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.