

Art in America

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Paolo Canevari: *Continents*, 2005, video, approx. 17 minutes; at Studio Stefania Miscetti.

ROME

Paolo Canevari at Studio Stefania Miscetti

Paolo Canevari's exhibition "Continents" consisted of a 17-minute video (2005) and large drawings extrapolated from it. Almost immediately, the images emanating from the LCD screen are pretty hilarious. From a fixed perspective, slightly off to the side and above, the viewer sees five tires arranged on the ground in roughly the pattern of the Olympic rings. Each bears the name of a continent or country, informally written in white paint: one tire is dubbed America; others are named for Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. The America tire has a black dog chained to it, which seems unable to stop barking at the animals leashed to the other tires. The Asia tire is paired with a small mouse that wanders about testing the length of its tether, without getting too close to the dog. A rabbit tied to the Australia tire huddles in the same position from the start of the video until the end. The Europe tire is attached to a black cat that also spends most of its time as far as it can get from the agitated dog. The large pig chained to the Africa tire sits peacefully, ignoring the often frantic barking.

The political implications and slapstick humor of the video are direct—which is not to say they are not effective. In fact, its obviousness is wonderfully tonic. As often happens with

animals, the viewer projects behavior and motivations onto the quintet: the pig, we imagine, is probably trying to purposely piss the dog off, the mouse is up to something, the black cat is set for a getaway and so forth.

The big graphite drawings are faithfully realistic, if slightly baroque in some details. Occasionally, modifications are made—as when a dog is turned into Lupa, the mythical she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus and is the symbol of Rome—but for the most part the drawings simply monumentalize the video imagery.

Tires and tire treads have been recurring elements in Canevari's work from the outset, in the early '90s, although originally it seemed that he was more interested in rubber as a material than in the commercial product. Recent work shown at MACRO in Rome last summer included a pair of tire-tread "twin towers" and the projected image of burning towers between them. But the Italian-born artist, who now splits his time between Rome and New York, has recently gained most attention for a video included in the 2007 Venice Biennale of a teenager kicking a human skull through the bleak streets of a postwar Belgrade. Despite the humor of "Continents," the picture it presents of the world is, likewise, not very pretty.

—John O'Brien