

REVIEWS PARIS

Anri Sala

Galerie Chantal Crousel

By Mara Hoberman



Anri Sala, *Legenda Aurea Inversa (VII, fragment 2)*, 2023, fresco and Cipollino marble on aluminum, 24 3/4 × 15 3/4 × 1 7/8". From the series "Legenda Aurea," 2023.

Fresco seems a radical departure for an artist known primarily for video and sound installations, but consider the blend of wet plaster and dry pigments

Anri Sala does: another time-based medium. Having studied fresco painting as a student at the National Academy of Arts in Tirana, Albania, in

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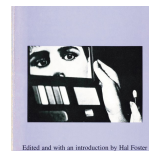
the 1990s, Sala recently spent several months in Naples refamiliarizing himself with the technique. Working with the traditional plaster-pigment mixture known as *intonaco*, which cannot be worked or reworked once dry, the artist needed to think and create in terms of a specific measure: *giornata*, the area of fresco that can be accomplished in a given day. The results of many stratified *giornate*, Sala's two series of fresco paintings made on individual aluminum supports drew attention to the medium's inherent temporal and material constraints while also expanding them.

The more figurative of the two series, "*Legenda Aurea*" (all works 2023), quotes *The Legend of the True Cross*, Piero della Francesca's fifteenth-century fresco cycle for the basilica of San Francesco d'Arezzo in Tuscany. The original illustrates a saga following the wood of the crucifix through stories from the Old and New Testaments, starting with the death of Adam. Sala, however, makes a point of excerpting nonnarrative details—for instance, a pair of outstretched hands (*Legenda Aurea Inversa [VII, fragment 3]*) or two disembodied heads under an archway (*Legenda Aurea Inversa [VII, fragment 2]*). In addition to cropping his source material, Sala has inverted the color. The digital process by which he creates color negatives gives the figures purplish-blue skin and ghostly-white facial features. The chromatic effect recalls X-rays as used by scientists and art historians to identify changes made to paintings before or after completion. This allusion to being able to see through matter and into another time period infuses Sala's frescoes with a sense of ephemerality that betrays their apparent physicality.

Sala plays further with the material and temporal aspects of fresco by adding inlaid marble and shell to works in both series. In the "*Legenda Aurea*" works, a thin slice of marble often replaces a section of the composition that appears as trompe l'oeil marble in Piero's original fresco. In the second series, "Surface to Air," which is based on color negatives of Sala's own photographs of clouds from an airplane window, the marble similarly echoes the imagery and color scheme of the surrounding fresco while introducing a new materiality. In *Surface to Air I (Tartaruga/Morning)*, inlaid pieces of peachy-gray tartaruga marble share the same hue as the frescoed clouds. Rough patches of crystals and craters endemic to the metamorphic rock suggest a more substantial connection: Both fresco and marble are hardened hybrids. Relating the geological process by which limestone and minerals fuse under extreme heat and pressure to form colorful bands and swirls to the artistic process of binding pigment to plaster to create strata, Sala extends the scope of fresco well beyond the concept of *giornata*.



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Edited and with an introduction by Hal Foster

In addition to providing links to the past and to the natural world, Sala's inlays connect his frescoes to the present. By jutting past the aluminum supports' edges, pieces of marble and shell usher the compositions beyond the picture plane and into the here and now (something traditional frescoes do inherently by virtue of being incorporated into an architectural framework). The show, however, included a notable exception—one fresco contained no inlays, and its colors were not inverted. In the early nineteenth century, Napoleon's troops occupied the San Francesco d'Arezzo basilica and, during this time, a bullet struck Piero's fresco. *Legenda Aurea (II, 1799/1800, fragment 1)* depicts a small, damaged section of the original fresco and provides a kind of coda to Sala's series: If creative forces expand space and time, destruction must remain caged and frozen.

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