

Well then

by Rossella Caruso

Who knows how our ancestors managed without ancestors
(E. Delacroix, 1854)

We need to give life to forms and rights to an individual existence
(K. Malevic, 1916)

There are works of art that conserve within the look of he who planned them; and works of art that absorb that very look, to then give back others, and others. There are works of art that activate processes, and others that ask to be contemplated, establishing a distance with he who observes them, which is not only perceptive. There are works of art that pacify the glance.

This happens independently of the *quantum* of abstraction or reference (terms that are refractory to absolute definitions these days); of satisfaction or urgency of expression; of spirituality or denouncing will; of absoluteness or occasionality. It's like saying, that when an artistic work arrives at a certain completeness, in order for it to be handed over for use, we are dealing with autonomous values of visibility, not necessarily pre established, but most likely germinated by specific creative aptitudes.

I'm not referring to the justified preoccupation, *ante litteram*, by Eugene Delacroix but rather to the fate of "an irreproachable painting in the studio", once it is entrusted to the exhibiting space and to the public. Neither am I referring to Marcel Duchamp's extraordinary synthesis - particularly reflected in the work *l'Etant donnès* - on the bodily dimension of visibility and on the limits of musealizzazione. Nor do I believe that this outline of considerations should touch what is contemporary, which is also accustoming us to further expressive modalities which seem to be drifting away from a certain statute of art to get closer to a sociological study, to the multi-sensory, to architectural living, to conviviality.

Instead, I believe that today, in our vision of a work of art we are inevitably conscious of its historic origin, memory retains an image of it, and that very image - which is not simply its formal aspect - in time imposes its own force and independence from everything, surrendering itself only to the occasionality of the look, and possibly the consequent chains of associations and connected images. And this is also valid for what has already been placed in history.

In Pietro Fortuna's work, this quality of exhibiting without concealment, objects and *figures*, "presences that take for themselves all the time", is carried out in a coherent way, even in its impassive excessiveness.

His work does not deal with something that makes a show of a flagrancy, nor, like Duchamp, produces a renaming of known objects; and yet one could be seduced by the recognition of different sampling practices (fragments of mechanisms, weapons photographs, *naturalia* etc.). Neither can one attribute a conceptual process to his work, which would preferably conclude in dematerialisation, concentrating on the substantiality of the ideas more than on the physical configuration of the works. What one seizes from Fortuna's work, which is frequently mounted (traditionally, I would say) on wall supports, or in the isolated and emerging exhibition of objects of architectural content - is what it

is, nothing more than what is revealed before our eyes; whether one recognises it as a non mimetic mark belonging to noted taxonomies (*Tails*, 1998; *Realismi*, 1998, *Without title*, 1999 (rifle and deer horn); *Ognifronte* (Everyfront) 2000, or whether one seizes it in its surprising originality (*Titone*, 1996; *Perché un popolo scelga* (So a population can choose), 1997; but even *Temanza*, 2001).

One could add, that the unquestionable belonging to a visual code, whose representative and declarative expedients have evidently already been studied, is an ulterior comfort to the assumption that these works do not want to refer to another semantic sphere. Instead they tend towards a temporal saturation and a sort of syncretism, to the point of being able to be recognised as *classics*: "maybe the secret to the classic lies in revealing the constant characteristics of an opening to the afterwards entrusted to an imperfect anachronism".

The ritual pattern of certain choices - in particular the recurrence, in the second half of the 90's, of the strongly suggestive "flaglike" mark that is repeated in *Polare* (1997), and of the *constructive* element that appears in *Kun* (1998), (the name of his assistant at the time) would confirm, moreover, a will, or maybe an urgency, to retrace visual places that are expressions of an ethical consciousness and that testify a personal humanism: an origin, silent, in the world, as "a distinct subject that occupies a place amongst others". We can also retrace this sentiment, in a pre-prospective figuration - rising from the principle need to communicate and revealed in a fresco on the walls of a church - which describes the perpendicular lines of the back view of a cross (Giotto, Presepe di Greccio, Assisi, Basilica Superiore), and in its oblique hanging on top of the described scene, "infinitely recites man's fatigue". Precisely through drawing, which in itself is an abstraction in projection, Fortuna traces the boundaries of this individual but shared experience: "the drawing participates in the constitution of a place", to define spaces, intended architecturally, of a self representative reality.

In a work of art like *Perché un popolo scelga* (So a population can choose) (1997), whose title already recites a choral intentionality, two distinct elements are arranged on different levels: the *icon*, similar to that present in *Kun* (1998) and a series of *taches* in various shades of fuchsia. Both occupy the central band of a neutral sheet of paper. Coloured plugs, of imperfect borders, are arranged in perspective in many rows ("like the seating of a theatre") to define in a narrative way a situation. The geometric rectangular element, of which the fractures are marked, in horizontal and in parallel, is turned over to the limits of the supports surface, perceptively determining an ineludibile wavering. And even if this alternation reveals a non representation, and does not find in words a possible translation, its completeness however enters it in the sphere of possible offerings to who, like Fortuna (comforted by the philosophic thought of Emmanuel Lévinas), identifies in the visual operativeness, a daily act of responsibility. Well then, it's exactly "here that one has experience of what is good, its here that every day in the most elementary sensorial act that good affirms itself".

Besides, we can see just how much the communitary experience of Opera Paese (1996 - 2004), a place and event founded by Fortuna with the collaboration of young philosophers, is tightly connected with this operative modality. There is a totally visual correspondence between the initial planning of the work and the subsequent articulation of events and situations within an industrial building found by Fortuna himself.

1. All the quotations in the text have been taken from recent conversations or writings by Pietro Fortuna.