

ON WINDOW

Federico Ferrari

“Here alone, leaving aside other things, I will tell what I do when I paint. First of all about where I draw. I inscribe a quadrangle of right angles, as large as I wish, which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint”.¹

When, in 1435, Leon Battista Alberti published this treatise on painting, dedicating it to Filippo Brunelleschi, geometric linear perspective’s first great creator, he delineated the problem of pictorial gesture in a clear manner. Over the next six centuries the question will not change in its basic outlines. The way to look from the “window”, whose perimeter hosts the pictorial gesture, will certainly change; landscapes will also change as well as figures, plans, masses of color, views but the window will remain intact until it will become almost invisible, as if it were the “unseen” of the vision – unseen is to vision as unconscious is to consciousness. The window of the vision is an open window on the visible: painting is the creation of this opening. Only inside this frame a pictorial view can be possible, here the world is shown not as a duplication of reality but as a framed, defined, circumscribed and mapped reality that was apparently denied by the abstract art revolution of the early twentieth century.

The entire history of painting can be seen as the experience of this glance on the world from a window. The problem of Flavio de Marco, who for over fifteen years has been wondering about the meaning of painting today, it’s still unsolved. Within which window can the artist look at the world today? What can be seen within this window? What images can appear? What landscape can be drawn within the window of contemporary world?

In my opinion in order to understand the path de Marco took in recent years is necessary to dwell on two key-works that, in my view, contain the alpha and the omega of his entire journey along painting tradition, his tormented and moved attempt of extending this path, reaching that immense openness that Alberti described so well at the beginning of the Renaissance, at the dawn of Western painting.

Looking at Spazio pubblico privato pittorico (Paesaggio) [Public Private Painting Space (Landscape)] of 1999, we are faced with the starting point. De Marco deals with an impossibility. The window of contemporary age is a screen, an operating system (Windows) within which our gaze moves. Our daily routines consist of a restless wandering through a proliferation of windows that open onto each other. The points of view multiply; the gaze becomes more and more panoptical; each place can be reached; landscape’s boundaries can be crossed, from a perspective that no longer has its own point of view, but rather places itself in the non-place of a depersonalized gaze opened to the world, on a set of postcards that, ultimately, does not allow to see. The excess of images corresponds to the absence of vision. The window turns black. The viewer can not see anything anymore. Some times, it is possible to recognize what has already been seen, but no real vision is possible. Only the window remains, a window opened on the night vision. Abstraction had led to the black square of Malevich but the technical hubris of the millennium’s end does not allow to seek refuge in abstraction anymore. The black screen is not an abstraction but a condition of blindness, of helplessness to see.

Over the years, the black window will begin to be populated with ready-made images, as in the great cycle dedicated to Palazzo Schifanoia’s frescos and then, increasingly, with attempts to recover formal models of tradition. From time to time, Courbet’s landscapes will appear, then Segantini’s, Sironi’s, Morandi’s, Hockney’s and Halley’s, etc. This is the entire path de Marco followed, his attempt to rethink the Western pictorial tradition in order to arrive at a new possibility of vision able to break the black screen.

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura*, Book I, 19. If interested in the issue of “window” in Occidental Painting, you can read Giovanni Iovane, “[Finestre]”, in *Id.*, *Negative Capability – Paintings*, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), 2013

Then, after this whole series of attempts, in the project titled *Isola di Stella* [Island of Star] an image is finally displayed, the possibility to imagine new landscapes appears. Thus, if we take, for example, *Paesaggio (Isola di Stella)* [Landscape (Island of Star)], a small acrylic and spray paint on canvas work, dated 2012, we feel that a new vision is finally possible. On this tiny canvas a landscape appears that I could not but define romantic: a palm tree blowing in the wind on a dark sky, layered, full of emotion. At the top, on the upper side of the picture, there is still a gray stripe, the command bar of a computer, even if no possible function is indicated, no application that could make appear or disappear window's content. The image is there, in front of our eyes, in an unmistakable way but, on closer inspection, it looks like a lived quote which at the same time is impossible, as a nostalgia which the artist can not help but surrender to. Suddenly a purple spatula interrupts the scene, shattering the illusion of a return to the origin. It is not possible to recompose the landscape. There is no chance to go back, to re-use unrecoverable models. If you did so, you would fall into a sterile quotations, viewing that is, in fact, a pure recognition. That imagery is now impossible and that strip of color makes it evident, showing at the same time the harrowing beauty of it. However, only when a shot of yellow spray, with its unexpected trickles, overlaps the purple spatula's aim of denial, finally, a new image appears. And in the third movement that goes beyond affirmation and negation, in that unexpected and unpredictable movement that arises from nothing, from a hopeless wait, that a cut is formed inside the pictorial window and an image can be finally seen. It was necessary this abandonment, this unexpected gesture, this belief in the possibility of coming back to see in order to make something appear. It was necessary, in a certain way, to think and live the utopia of a new landscape – the island that does not exist – to have a land again. Having a land, in painting, means to have the possibility of a landscape; it means to be able to imagine space opening up in front of the eyes once the window is open. Flavio de Marco, after fifteen years, has managed to open the window wide, and at the end of the night, he has seen a landscape again.

In a hypothetical, intimate and advertising-free exhibition (that would never be possible if not in the world of elective affinities) of what I judge more representative of de Marco, I would only save these two paintings. A single room would be enough. A painting on the wall to the right and the other one on the left. The viewer's eyes would only move from one painting to the other one, in alternation with no possibility of solution, from the black color of *Spazio pubblico privato pittorico (Paesaggio)* [Public Private Painting Space (Landscape)] to the sublime color of *Paesaggio (Isola di Stella)* [Landscape (Island of Star)]. If the lucky viewer could find the right rhythm, the right ability to toggle from the dark screen that swallows everything to the dazzling and yearning color of a night full of grace, then, within this oscillation of the eyes, he would inhabit the pictorial space which we are all immersed in: the landscape of contemporary life.