

Only one hand

In reference to the celebrated essay by Warburg about the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes: Fritz Saxl, said during his commemorative discourse in 1929 for the death of the master, that when reading Warburg's words about the Ferrara masterpiece, he found himself in the presence of a kind of history of art that, instead of being obsessed with a method of classification where works are subdivided according to periods and schools - and therefore shrouded in history - they are instead able to show the "migratory paths of ancient forms". This history of art doesn't seek to impale the illustrious cadavers and timeless treasures lying on the terrain of art's past using the etymologist's pins but, instead, succeeds in endowing them with new life and movement. Even though Warburg's method was often misinterpreted - and was soon relegated to a back shelf of the history of the history of art which made it inoffensive and impotent - today, it has been finally been metabolized and it is well-known that Warburg's work is essentially that of an extremely free spirit able to cross over the narrow borders assigned to the discipline of the history of art to venture into the no man's land of a new "nameless science". It's possible, however, that not enough attention has been accorded it particularly when remembering the melancholic comment of the student and friend of Saxl in the 1912 conference which said that it is just with the works of the extraordinary cycle for Borso d'Este that this method found it possible to express its own truth through the power of the images themselves. As we gaze at the Salone dei Mesi we can therefore see how image, in the Warburg method, provides the very foundation of theory instead of merely verifying it. In fact, the images of Cosmè Tura, Francesco del Cossa, Baldassarre d'Este and of all the innumerable masters to have composed the cycle of Schifanoia enclose within themselves this power and infinite potential. This allows them to pierce through time and to create strong and evident caesurae in the history of art and even to shake the very foundations of such a recent science (if we wish to use the term "science") in such a profound way that the very concept of time and of our activities in time (which are usually used to measure ourselves to understand art) are shaken, too. In a certain sense, the walls of Palazzo Schifanoia, like Warburg, give the viewer the unique experience of a short circuit in time where the illusion of perspective - given its lengthy duration evidencing the profound diversities linked to eras and personalities - is condensed into the precise view that the history of the "unthinkable practice of images", called art in our culture, has to do with the endless repetition of a single gesture. Here, the issue of pinpointing the artist - whether a master or simply an anonymous painter ("the hands of the weakest workers" to use Longhi's words written for the Ferrara cycle) isn't at all essential. The multiplicity of vision which the enigmatic critic-philologist of Schifanoia presents to our view, isn't an intellectual pose marked by historical erudition obsessed with attribution of the work to a particular artist but instead a sort of Averroism of images where each hand, in a unique way, unites in an anonymous and impersonal endless gesture with the primary attribution of pure power and infinite potential. Just like in the Averroist tradition, in fact, the single intellect connects itself through the images to the pure thought potential of the *intelletto materiale*. In the same way, in this unpublished history of art, the single artist's hand enters into a more or less conscious relationship with the gesture that came before it and continues to survive in it. In this history of images still to be, the marks traced by the artist are never the continuation of a model but, instead, an expression of the power constantly present in the artist's work which the artist, himself, is blind to. An invisible power guides the hand which traces and re-traces that for which no memory is possible but which is marked only by infinite and blind commemoration. There is no ascent or descent but only a simple relationship with an inexhaustible power in an infinite attempt to imagine the tangible power of the anonymous gesture. The history of art, from this viewpoint, is basically only the history of the repetition of the gesture expressed in the image which leaves a mark on the surface: *sous-venir du geste*. In this territory of the image and of the infinite repetition of gesture, what really counts isn't the hand to make the gesture -not, therefore, its attribution - but rather the exposure to the gesture which vibrates and resonates in the image, itself, possibly in only an insignificant detail. The *souvenir* of the anonymous gesture of Schifanoia is the force behind De Marco's entire cycle. In some cases, the image is out of focus but, here and there, details appear which shed light on the whole significance of the vision. A

tower in ruin marked by a ruin already present in origin, appears in a sort of *mise en abyme* of memory. The eye of the viewer has to strive to note what it sees because the vision is always about to crumble and to lose its focus again. Yellow reminders are glued to the screen and then to the canvas in an ephemeral attempt to remember and to note the gesture which flashes into view. These reminders are empty because devoid of words. They point to something the artist had remembered but has already forgotten. In another sense, they indicate that it's impossible for him to "remember" what belongs to an immemorial past. Though vision requires this return of memory to something which, even though it's before your eyes, needs to be newly remembered to become visible. This is an inescapable condition for the image to elaborate itself and, finally, to sometimes appear or reappear clothed in a different way. Other times, the levels of creative endeavor seem to multiply as if the stratification of interpretations must lead to an overlapping of images already contained in that single gesture which anonymously guides the artist's hand. It seems almost as if De Marco doesn't need a "new" image – or what we could call a primary image – instead, he has to bring his attention to a level where the image generates itself from what already exists and from its inevitable crumbling under the pressure of time. The grey flakes which corrode both the Schifanoia original and the contemporary returns to it, give life to a new image where, paradoxically, the stains of time become more readable to contemporary eyes than the original 15th century images. Grey stains on a blue background are at the highest level and on the top step of time where gesture returns to trace, even only for an instant, the surface of the images and the artist's hand dissolves the coat of white which has covered the Schifanoia frescoes for many years. Underneath, there is a multiple and innumerable quantity of strata that are almost like fossilized sediment. The image - by definition instantaneous, sometimes uncertain and in any case not schedulable – is of a movement or of a work process on vision and on the multiplication of potential points of view or of windows on the view. The image, in this way of viewing it, comes from below, ever further lower down on a level, (to use Photoshop language, the program to have elaborated part of this cycle) where it's no longer possible to see when the image is completed because its completion is there, intact, in every single frame. Everything is present in every single image because art is only the repetition of the gesture able to hold everything – its entire history – within itself. Each image is the freeing of the vision or the welcoming of the ever-intact power of the gesture that gives this power visibility. What De Marco's work points to is the *disposition* or *attitude* of the gesture. His work isn't so much to ready himself for the determination of the gesture into a particular form or shape but rather to open himself up to the potential or power which is always on the point of expression in the present. It is only with this frame of mind that it's possible to actually see because it permits form to appear and realize itself. This is only possible because of its connection to the gesture or formless power and the artist is simply the connection between power and action. Guiding this attitude to vision are the figures or – to use a term dear to Warburg – the ghosts moving throughout the great Ferrara cycle. The bodies of the deacons which duplicate and triplicate on various levels; in the month of June a severed head covered in eyes lying against an exhausted body on a mountain slope surrounded by animal indifference blind to the horror and, in March, a dog gazing at its reflection in a puddle. Ghosts, in fact, which follow migratory paths in the world of images allowing reconnection to the profound anachronism of a time which is no longer our own even though it has never ceased belonging to us. These ghosts beckon to us wordlessly. As Emanuele Coccia wrote in his celebrated *La trasparenza delle immagini* : “ The ghost doesn't generate a new form of thought nor a new thought: rather, it creates a connection (*habitudò*) or attitude (*aptitudo*) in us through which we are joined to the single intellect and this becomes the principle of our actions”. De Marco's images preserve traces of these ghosts and the memory of their coming into being from other earlier ghosts in a dizzying causal cascade whose source remains unfathomable. In this way, these passionately cool images permit a connection to the single, impersonal gesture which is the foundation of each figure and of each figurative act. This gesture is related to the single intellect which Averroè wrote of and, therefore, to thought, itself, and to the faculty for thought and to the very enigma of artistic endeavor in an art which moves beyond the confines of concept as it is perceived in modern times to open itself up to the issue of thought: the art of the thought process or, its mirrored reflection: the thought process of art. What remains as we stand before the replay of the Schifanoia cycle by De Marco in his attempt to recompose what in reality is already fragmented and lost since the beginning, is the memory, delicate and ephemeral, of the movement of a hand, a single

hand which is sometimes knowledgeable and sometimes ignorant, that traces the face of a humanity which is fragile and powerful, faraway and close by, where the boundaries between human and animal, animal and vegetable between form and formlessness totter on the brink of visibility and of visual manifestation. It seems that when I gaze through De Marco's silent windows I hear the faraway whisper of Claudio Parmiggiani who says in a barely perceptible voice: "from the hand of Altamira to Cimabue, to Masaccio, to Grünewald, to the *Flagellazione* of Piero, to Rembrandt, to Malevic, to the humblest painting, everything man has painted I see as infinitely overlapping images which allow us to glimpse a single painting as if the minds of all artists have guided a single, nameless hand"