

Autobiography

by Brizia Minerva

On the process of looking and thought construction in painting, Flavio de Marco points out, in his work, that the only true subject of every genre is the look.

It is exactly the look, implemented by the act of painting that makes the pictorial work exist as such, constituting its subject.

But what is the look in the image world of our era? What does it mean to own a look in this slow and progressive transformation of the world into images in which we are the subjects, the consumers and the producers? It is on the liminal ground of these considerations that his investigation takes form as he himself says: "the manner in which our way of the perception of reality has changed through a daily digital storm, makes me automatically reflect on a few things... these things prevent me from painting in the spell of the surfaces, I don't believe it and I don't need it. It is necessary to interpret and resolve this thing critically. Of course, I can also decide to ignore how this storm has changed our way of relating to images, of seeing, but how is it possible to keep out the act of painting, which is the convergence of all the problems of the look, the very place of the look! The painting can't be a look that runs parallel to the world, it must be about the world."¹

The threshold of the look is the canvas, on which the signs, the joints, the happenings of this particular *Autobiografia*, come to the surface as if on the skin. At its base the understanding that the unpredictable and transformative flux of images and recollections is the very meaning of the vision.

The development of this narrative is articulated in three moments that superimpose and are integrated with one another: the look on the history of art, the look on the landscape, and the look on the digital windows that refer to places already seen as from the monitor of our computer.

It would appear that de Marco is telling us that art is the first stage in order to comprehend the question of the image. To return to the creative gesture, the artistic gesture. The mere painting. And in fact his instruments are drawings, brushes, canvases, the colors with which he processes the embodiment of a new vision.

The fixity of painting is necessary to render the unstoppable iconic movement of the contemporary digital world visible. However differently it is conceptualized, either with flat surfaces against monochrome or with dense and thick brushstrokes apt to evoke the ghosts of art that are dear to the artist - from Leon Battista Alberti to Bellini, from Courbet, Seurat to Casciaro, but also Malevich, Fontana and other contemporary artists such as Reinhardt, Stella, Hockney - the act of painting enshrines the space of reflection and thought.

The landscape is the special field of experimentation that de Marco has been tackling since 2009 and which has culminated in the exhibition titled *Stella* (2014)², a software island, a non existing place of all possible landscapes and metaphor of a posthuman and anesthetized society in which everything, from desire to consumption, is standardized.

The landscape, as visual experience, is always an expression of an inner image of the subject. Its perception is constantly changing based on the cultural data that determine it.

¹ Flavio de Marco's interview by Lorenzo Taini in Giovanni Maria Accame (a cura di), *La Superficie Inquieta*, catalogo della mostra (Rocca di Bentivoglio, Bazzano), Edizione Aspasia, Bologna, 2003, pp. 89-96

² Flavio de Marco, *Stella*, Danilo Montanari Editore, Ravenna 2013.

Nevertheless the current technological and digital dimension strongly conditions its scope. There are no unspoiled landscapes, everything, one way or another, has been seen, recorded, reproduced, filmed and lies within us as a persistent déjà vu.

Let's start from the passage of a landscape that functions as a background to St. Jerome Bellini, *Landscape (Bellini)* -2001 / 201, the image stands as the eruption of a fragment in the continuity of the story . To allow this disruption of time is the frame of a heartbeat, the oscillation between the recalling of the work, of the significance of its past, and the opening of a new vision produced by a computer screen within which it unravels , relegating it to the present.

In the large triptych of *Paesaggio (una domenica al Parco Sempione)* 2010/2016, the reference to the *pointillism* of Seurat is an explicit tribute. The image of La Grande Jatte from a dreamlike scene becomes an aroused vision that turns into the deployment of Parco Sempione rendered as an historicised product and filtered by art and its stereotypes.

The idea is that of a series of epigrams, a sort of alphabet of vision in which the representation is a symbol of a past both subjective and anonymous. The white rectangle that occupies the center of the frame becomes the metaphor of painting as a way out, the window that opens up onto another place.

From the end of the nineties the artist transposes computer screens into painting. They are windows that open to the world just like the orthogonal box that since the Renaissance has defined the perspective space. Here too the gap with the history of art produces the necessary friction to create new nuclei of sense. These screens that he calls Landscape open and multiply just as it happens in our daily relationship with the digital reality. An image refers to another, new accesses and possibilities unfold, more points of view create plural and simultaneous visions until they determine “ l'insieme vuoto”³ (the void ensemble)of the present. And it is this setback, this blackout of vision that is indicated to us by the black and flat screen of his landscapes.

From the disillusionment and denial of the look, the artist goes on to produce new inserts on the monochrome drafts of the nineties; the possibility of representation, of another place, of artificial paradises, postcards of places that do not exist but that we all recognize, is born again; the upside-down silhouette of palm trees on the background of tropical sunsets, *Landscape*, 2005/2006; the snowy mountain from the label of a 'mineral water which stands on a black monochrome, *Landscape (blues)* 1996/2016; the chromatic synthesis of all this at the end of a monochrome painting in landscape format, perhaps the boundary line between the earth and the sky, titled *Atelier*, 1998/2016; the emotion of painting found in a marina with a sailing ship, re-painted by the artist and inserted in a jagged landscape of screens, *Landscape con ready made*, 2007/2016, up to the liberating gesture of an unexpected gash of colour in the *Landscape*, 2015/2016 , which in an instant restores the vitality and truth of art in the unquiet path of his *Autobiography*.

³ Federico Ferrari, *L'insieme vuoto. Per una pragmatica dell'immagine*, Truccazzano 2013, Johan & Levi Editore, pp. 9–12.