

Dual Gazes

Alberto Dambruoso

Around ten years have passed since I came one of my first outings as a militant critic and the occasion was a two-man show of "Peill-Koivisto" to inaugurate the exhibition season at the Museo Laboratorio d'Arte Contemporanea at the University of La Sapienza in Rome.

I remember that my sensation on leaving the exhibition and returning home was very positive: the two artists' pieces worked well together, and the number and sequence were also just right, but above all what transpired was a strong sense of planning, mixed with a good dose of formal virtuosity in terms of the structure of the compositions on display. However, the thing that attracted my attention perhaps more than anything else was Peill's clever combination of two such notoriously antithetical means as photograph and painting, with the intent of making them one, a sole image.

On occasion of this solo in the historic Galleria Mara Coccia, I am being offered the opportunity to verify those first youthful impressions in this written accompaniment to the exhibition. So the first consideration I am drawn to make concerns the so-called sphere of the intention, which seems to have continued, without interruption, from the work in her debut exhibitions to those making up this exhibition. What I am referring to could also be defined as the most significant constant in her art, that is, her capacity to make the work a sort of device which invites the spectator to come closer, in order to capture him and then swallow him up. In bringing about the work's particular "carnivorous" bent, the artist uses the technique of assemblage, which joins the painting and photography together at the same level of representation. The union between the two different media prompts those enigmatic, ambiguous, suspended visions that have always characterized the work of Claudia Peill.

This seems to be the hinge around which to analyze the steps taken by the artist over recent years. It enables us to note the continuity in the tension arising from the cuts, the caesuras, the gaps that are created between photography and painting and then lead to the spectator's state of suspension and unconditioned abandonment in the face of these combined paintings.

Instead another consideration touches on the painting. From her first works to these latest ones, I have noticed a definite leap forward, most likely related to the artist's increased awareness of the means that she has acquired over around twenty years of research.

A confidence highlighted above all in the strong ranges of colour which at times light up her works. Strong blasts that act as a counter weight to the placid veiling.

To now concentrate on the pieces presented in the exhibition, once the spectator has entered the range of action of the works which stretch out before him, incorporating him in a single, timeless dimension, he realizes that the photographic images usually forming the diptychs or triptychs arise from the same source: they have been taken from the vast repertoire of icons that the artist has found in the eternal city of Rome, that great open air museum, while picking out and zooming in on details from statues, bas-reliefs, marble inscriptions and anything else offered to the gaze of passers-by.

However, these are images that reveal themselves bit by bit, be it because of the particular angle, sometimes lingering on details that are unrecognizable at the first sight, or, above all, thanks to the artist's ability to make them almost disappear, fading like a film, through a monochromatic veil of paint that crosses the whole surface, blending the two different media together.

The result is a work of great completeness and formal elegance. A sort of perfect fit, the result of a long production process that leads the artist to develop her works with extreme precision (given that, among other things, as the artist states several times, there is never any room for chance in her research "because there is no chance"). Standing before her works we feel a sort of inner equilibrium that has to be related to the work's same dual nature. The cold extreme of photography meets the warmth of painting to equal each other out. Neither of the two media dominates the other, in the same way as the "photographic" figure does not prevail over the abstract painting.

Fragmented close-ups of statues, clips, portions and pieces of an antique past thus slowly appear to the spectator's extended gaze. These are the memories of our everyday life, of that which silently surrounds us and often we forget and which finally, thanks to Claudia's works, causes us to reflect on our history, on our past, on our time-honored and indispensable culture.

Text from catalogue of the exhibition **Doppi Sguardi**
Roma 2012
Galleria Mara Coccia