

The pursuit of sense, Rebecca De Marchi, Pantani-Surace, Gli Ori, Prato, 2006.

The fixity of matter and the notion that it constitutes a bank of memories is “a non-sense”. “For a Waldensian, objects, all objects... are inanimate things, matter without spirit... identity, for them, is everything that can be carried within, and which, indeed, does not have and cannot have a tangible home, a material abode... Identity lies *in that which has no place*.”¹

This fragment of the thought of Father Giorgio Tourn is quoted by Antonio Scurati. Over time I made sure that Antonio, like Lia and Giovanni before him, visited the eco-museum of Rorà (a small, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say a tiny Waldensian mountain village in the Province of Turin), so they could give expression to it in words and forms. *Ti amo (I Love You)* is the work presented by Lia and Giovanni for the museum, where, by means of a conceptual leap, they open a dialogue between the time of permanence and memory on the one hand and that of the ephemeral and of care on the other. It is a tribute to Maresciallo Morel, the leaseholder of the quarry of Rorà in the nineteenth century; he grasped the realistic illusoriness of photography and its potential to freeze and to affirm an age, and used it to photograph the quarry, inscribing on a photographic plate, as if in a rock, his motto ‘Labor et Virtus’, work and virtue. The pair of artists counterpose it with the words ‘ti amo’, ‘I love you’, which is a manifesto, appearing temporarily on an artificial wall in the form of traces of dampness destined to vanish immediately, to evaporate, and the presence of which is entrusted to the care of the custodian of the eco-museum: Father Tourn.

It is an emotive, dematerialized act of devotion which, it now seems to me, after the clarification offered by Scurati’s work, subtly interprets the expression of self, which must be constantly renewed and which is inherent to both faith and to artistic work. In this work the imprint of contemporaneity – I am referring to what coincides with our everyday existence – has an affinity that is perhaps more formal (due to its impermanence) than substantial (due to a lack of shared causes), but nonetheless very strong. Obviously I am not referring to the importance of today’s material well-being, which is predominant in a consumer society, but to its counterpoint, which is closely related to consumerism, namely the rapidity with which it is superseded and, in a certain sense, its lack of inherent value. Economic value, symbolic value, identity value. The contemporaneity of the work of Lia and Giovanni, which dialectically and problematically tackles the frequent superficiality and partiality that distinguish this age, in entirely different ways is in tune with the positions that characterize the Waldensian world and its austerity, a spirituality without excessive permissiveness or licence.

The work of Lia and Giovanni gives expression to a hidden voice, which surfaces like a question that cannot be satisfied with a single answer, perhaps not by any answer; its force lies precisely in the fact that it can always be reformulated afresh. It has a Proustian flavour to it, in which rediscovery, casual or persistent, is projected towards the search for a taste that belongs to another moment of personal history – experienced or known –, which carries with it an endless mesh of meanings that must be linked to each other and to present history (I define it like this and not as news by virtue of its cultural importance).

The contexts that Lia and Giovanni come into contact with provide fresh opportunities for experimentation, scope for further verification of perceptions that belong to the individual sphere but which stem from and are directed towards a collective dimension. Inevitably, then, they generate an inner change, small changes of state that are drawn from the background of the artists but at the same time bring about a transformation, even if it is only minimal and temporary, in the place where they work. As Letizia Ragaglia notes, “they insert a moment of amazement and poetry into the everyday”, which produces echoes in visitors.²

¹ Antonio Scurati, *Breve viaggio contro natura in Val Pellice in Eco e Narciso. 14 scrittori per un paesaggio*, Sironi Editore, Milan 2005

² Letizia Ragaglia, *Quattroventi*, Manciano, 2003

Their work thus forms part of a constant process of verification, starting from different points of departure that share a similar mode of development and which are marked by the process-based nature and relativity of Lia and Giovanni's work: creation and undoing (the endless carpet of glazed terracotta confetti that are destined to be reduced to dust as visitors to the exhibition walk over them, thereby running against the cult status and untouchability of the art work, in *Non spiegatemi perché la pioggia si trasforma in grandine*; the melting of the ice crystals of a Baroque candelabrum destined to turn into a puddle, in *Se la memoria mi dice il vero*; the cyclic disappearance of the text and its reappearance through an act of nutrition, in *Un po' è vero* and *Ti amo*), the reshaping of space offered by their mirrors, the apparent organic nature of the walls in, *Con una mano sulle ossa alza lo sguardo*, the complicit betrayal of the entryphones at Manciano (*Un oscuro complotto*), the sophisticated magic of the voiceless dance at the Certosa di Calci (*Hop*). These whispers surface and demand to be heard. We are in a field extraneous to obsessiveness. Rather it is a question of paying attention to something that can be approached intuitively in order to grasp complexity rendered palpable by the presence of the works, the dissolution of which is imminent and where the keynote is immediacy. The limited means and effectiveness of their work resemble the literary form of the haiku.

"A non-sense... his [Father Tourn's] judgement is at the same time perfunctory and Solomonic. I already envy this small, wiry, white-haired man. I envy him because he is capable of evaluating the senselessness of something with the drastic serenity of judgement of someone who can count upon the meaningfulness of other things. I instinctively feel that I agree with him, but...". This is how Scurati continues, showing how a dogma provides clear-cut references but also how, at the same time, the perpetual search for sense can contribute to the formulation of judgements. The sense that the works of Lia Pantani and Giovanni Surace invite us to pursue.