

TWO FACED IMAGES

by lorenza miretti

Every artistic object must be thought of as an integral part of a great spiderweb: a sort of genealogical tree studded with bonds of blood or acquired ones, united to relatives of adoption and children or parents, repudiated.

With this image in front of the eyes - with which we can summarize whole decades of studies on art (figurative or literary indiscriminately), on its origin and reception (and if we want to reveal some names, Michail Bachtin and Roberto Longhi would suffice) - we have to think about the works of Clara Ghelli introduced on this occasion. Immersed in a temporal lapse that embraces past, present and future, they take us back to the whole production of the artist, to her poetics and to her search not resolved in slavish repetition of her forms of origin but in a continuous transformation of the same, as solicited by ever changing external impulses: we think then about the Trees of '91, to the Lunar fluctuations of '94, to the cycle of the Emergencies of '96 and to The Cry of this last year.

*We find here a selection of the "historical" works that in a diachronic path reveal the salient moments of the artist's production (grouped together in the catalog in the part subtitled **The Forms**) and an ampler group of work of the latest years (the section **The Faces**) that testify the results of the most recent searches. So past (**The Forms**) and present (**The Faces**) indeed appear to us as the two faces, the two different faces, of a same poetics (and ironically of a same catalog) that already project us toward the future with a taste of works still "fresh of color" (Meditation 1, 2002).*

This double temporality in Clara Ghelli is widened by a further, deep dualism that invests the narrative procedure used "to relate" the objects.

At the origin of her path, the artist has portrayed on her canvas a nature not described with abandonment and taste for detail, but synthesized in primary forms, in forests of which only the vertical trunks are distinguished or the spherical masses of the tops, when, even they are not seen, suspended in a space, apparently empty, undulated traces to signal expressionistically the natural forms reduced to un-natural presences entrusted to the color (Trees, 1991). And in this case, the illustrious names of Kandinsky and Franz Marc have been well remembered.

Then, in the first years of the nineties, this nature "of spatiality" reached extreme results discharging every natural semblance in favor of that which was spatial. There is no more figuration in Clara's canvases now totally absorbed by spatial games fit to accent the expressionistic datum of a gesture that livens up even the color and gives sense to the surviving forms. Circles now predominate from the contours more

or less shattered but always clearly recognizable (Lunar fluctuations), or the canvases introduce themselves divided in panels which are strongly geometrized (squares or rectangles) inside which free outlet is given to the more impulsive, less rigorous and rational expressive modes.

The threads of our ideal cobweb bring us in this case to those informal suggestions in which the total gestural liberty (that of Pollock's or of Vedova's) starts to re-compose itself in more rational constituent unities (toward the space). And the connections with certain searches in the sixties of the bolognese Mario Nanni are easily recognized.

But the decade doesn't end when the space of the canvas is already subdivided even further: no longer a picture within the picture, but one within the other and in the other again, with this last dominated by brushstrokes that are recomposed in a new figurativeness. In faces built through accumulation of the single parts as if the artist had among the hands the geometrically rigid forms of the everlasting Lego, companion of so many infancies, and not the supple and bristly tip of the brush, capable of plastic softness stretched on the surface. Informal liberty is changed into a futurist synthesis of Boccionian ancestry.

The more properly childish thickness becomes, then, even more explicit when these faces leave their place to scraps of animation sequences torn from the cartoons. Small comic-like sequences that directly refer, on one side, to an disneyan infancy, on the other to a pop art maturity, with the fathers of the movement - Lichtenstein and Warhol (but let us not forget the Italian Adami) - as guardians. So, the sweet and well-known images of Snowwhite and Cinderella, resurfacing from the artist's past meet and interchange with the almost contemporary faces already present in the canvases of the two American artists.

As the pop painters, Clara selects the particulars and magnifies them reproducing them by hand with notable graphic skill, but she distinguishes herself from them through one peculiarity of her own. We understand, these pictures can be interpreted as a sort of bidimensional matrioska: a frame, often painted with extremely subdued colors so as to resemble a passepartout, delimits a first pictorial space containing another window, often smaller and in a lateral position.

Let us put aside the frame, let us also put aside this last window (containing the comic strips of which we have spoken) and let's concentrate on the first image edged by the passepartout. In it, abstract forms always dominate: cubistic compositions, for the disposition of volumes, and futurist to intersect with diagonals capable of giving movement, compositions that are the direct heirs of that nature reduced to simple dispositions of volume that we have then seen transform themselves in informal expressionism.

We are facing of a sort of embryonic phase in which the figure (the faces or the cartoons) is not yet formed in her parts, is not yet rationalized. This is the reign of the

pure form and of color, released by every representative wish inborn in the figurative images. But really the color acts as the adhesive of the whole composition since, although being spread in the ample and flat background painting of the cartoons and shaded, almost "frayed", in the abstract zone, it almost never changes the tonal stamp giving an evident fundamental unity to the work.

So, under more careful observation, the two spaces reveal themselves as the two faces of a same image broken up, shattered, as deprived of sense on the one side, rationalized and immediately enjoyable in its descriptive simplicity (and it is not by chance that the cartoon is an image without depth, without shadings) on the other. In these pictures the rational and the irrational part of art face each other; here we recognize the origin and the definitive resolution of the figure; here are the yin and the yang of the painting.