



CAPRI IN SETTANTA PAESAGGI RIPETUTI, 37x41x12 cm, 2000

In the imperfect

Giannetto Bravi was born in Tripoli, Libya, in 1938. He left this city a few years later during the Second World War, and returned only briefly at the age of fourteen. I do not wish to draw facile psychological conclusions, but I believe that his particular form of tourism, his desire to depart constantly so as to be able to find again "where we start from" has something to do with these biographical circumstances.

Bravi grew up in Naples and this was where he began to get to know and become involved in the art world, accompanied by Gianni Pisani and introduced by the exceptional Lucio Amelio. It was to this city that he addressed his unflinchingly sincere but at the same time ingenious regrets, later having the support of Dina Carola's "Galleri il Centro". Without his tearful good bye to the city of Vesuvius when he left for work-related reasons in the early seventies, Bravi would not have been able to use his nostalgia, scrupulously cultivated like a hot house plant, as a source for his abundant and persistent creativity.



VESUVIO IN VENTISETTE PAESAGGI RIPETUTI, 37x41x7 cm, 2001



POMPEI ALL'OMBRA DEL VESUVIO, 37x41x7 cm, 2001

Naples is a constant iconography in Bravi's work. From *Operazione Vesuvio* to *Picture collection*, he makes countless tributes to its Parthenopean identity, its history and its culture, but these are also progressively characterised by an aura of irrevocability, of "no longer" and, more so, of "not yet". During Bravi's journey, Naples too, has undergone a process of creating a myth that makes what was accidental, historical, natural and even archetypical. The balance *in itinere* in this process has, however, the flavour of a final verdict. The text written by

Lea Vergine for the catalogue of the exhibition *Naples you are beautiful enough to die for*¹¹ follows in its entirety.

11 Lea Vergine. *Simplicity like complexity* published in the exhibition catalogue, *Naples you are beautiful enough to die for*, Derbylus Gallery, Milan 1998.

"What does Giannetto Bravi tell us through the images, some heartrending, others neo-realistic or neo-naturalistic, dedicated to the Neapolitan land? Let's see. He has chosen episodes of costumes and views that today, make us smile. He has chosen fascinating glimpses and the face of a certain Naples (from the beginning of the century until the thirties) in which he presses an emotional pedal. He selects sentimental figures which he uses in nostalgic parody. He fishes in the city of the plebeians and sighing petit bourgeoisie, using their cries with ambiguous irony. Therefore the perfume - and the memory - remain of a time gone by, for which the author feels loving care. The pleasure remains of a languid vision which is amazed and sometimes moving. Is this what Bravi wants us to remember of his *exhibition of love* and *exhibition of costume*?



PERLE DI GOLOSITA, 2000



LUNA CHE RIDE, 40x62 cm, 2001

Of course not, not even minimally. Vesuvius erupting or just smoking, the Castle dell'Ovo, Via Partenope, the girl in tatters with a pitcher, the seller of graters, all these *places* which today seem ridiculous, tedious and dusty in their stale satisfaction are reprocessed as we can see them on the walls where they are cunningly seductive. Bravi's discussion is not as explicit as it seems. His *simplicity is complex*. His *memories* so apparently languid and passionate are a cold, careful patient simulation. Here, feelings are processed, *falsified* and reduced to "pictures". The image for preciously vulgar consumption (the Salerno greetings handwritten by some fool on the chubby and daisy crowned Sorrento

dancer) or the naïve advertisement (the Vesuvius funicular railway) represent what may be technically called "maximum effect". Why does Bravi photograph the photos, and the postcards? Because *here-and-now* and the *past* are the subjects of this work. That the Castle dell'Ovo used to *be just like that* is unarguable, and it has been separated from us, is recorded. This process is lived with a thread of suffering that cannot



IL CAPPELLO ROSSO, 143x97 cm, 2002

be dismissed. It concerns what Roland Barthes so superbly analysed. What Bravi has lost, and so have we, is not the story shown on the postcard, nor the Neapolitan characters, nor the images of "macaroni" but the *being* in all of this.

Not only that, but we have also lost the quality of all this, we have lost the quality of time. Bravi wants to tell us that we have not lost what is indispensable, but rather, what we have lost, what no longer exists, cannot be substituted".

The Naples recalled by Bravi is irretrievably lost. But what has been mislaid, warns Lea Vergine, is not "indispensable". The artist has paid loving care not so much to the "being" of the city, so much as to its ability to make us remember, to its consummate ability to know how to be passed on to future memory. This is the reason the sentiments put into play on the Parthenopean subjects, but also those in other cycles, seem "processed, falsified". The "simulation" is already about to set off, even if mixed with an equal dose of frankness. It is precisely in this mixture that we can find one of the characteristic traits of our artist. It remains to identify what is "indispensable", something that is not at all easy to do.

Turning once again to Roland Barthes, also referred to by Lea Vergine, we can say that what Bravi couldn't help doing was to put his works into the imperfect tense. This was not so much because he did not want to risk losing the event itself, "the being in all this", already irrevocably lost, but rather the fascination that emanates from it. In Barthes' opinion, in fact, "The imperfect is the tense of fascination"¹². This seductive power derives from its ability to create a fertile, and above all, advantageous suspension thanks to which an "imperfect presence", that is, an incomplete time, that is "open" and is not precisely delimited can only bring about an "imperfect death". Bravi's journey through his works is always recounted in the imperfect, perhaps so as to leave an escape route, an opportunity to exorcise the inescapability of the itinerary, the bitter end of the journey. In this case, too, there is an imperfect solution which achieves "neither oblivion nor resurrection" but "simply, the exhausting lure of memory".¹³

Roberto Borghi



NOTTURNO AL CANTO DELLE SIRENE, 233x81 cm, 2001

¹² Roland Barthes *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Paris 1977 (translation. *A Lover's Discourse Fragments* -London 1978, P. 217)

¹³ ibid