

...To where everything begins... di Luca Massimo Barbero

There exists a “place” we would all like to go back to. There is no getting away from it even if we have tried: it is the “Land” our roots have absorbed lymph from and shed poison on. By depicting it we realise it is there...where everything began...and that, paradoxically, by giving it a form, a shape, we cause it to recede.

When the “place of origin” is depicted it multiplies, doubles, coalesces, and shows itself elsewhere in other guises. And this is the beginning of an obsessive journey. Desire – not sad but victorious and necessary – is transformed into an intimate and then universal narrative about the *force* of its origins and the marks with which man evokes and constructs it, concentrating it.

Let there be no doubt about it: the beginning is not the address of a household, nor is it the accent our tongue became used to as it found its way around its earliest phonemes. It is a deep sound that materializes over the years, at first indistinct and soothing – because it accompanies us naturally – then syncopated and alternated and, as it is slowly divorced from the present, it becomes more ample and has an articulation that has to be searched for and discovered. The sounds become more complicated as they fathom images, trace out journeys or search for sources that can be embodied and help us understand this desire. The “place” has become Culture, Source, Root, as immense and profound as its figure is strong and totemic...and almost helps its contemplation. Every culture finds in these ideal traces the signs of its origins, the force of its Mystery and, if we contemplate them profoundly, an almost heroic inevitability, one that is certainly “religious”. I’ am not talking about *simple* symbols, archetypes, or “primitive” images but, rather, with the possibility of depicting those sounds that rise from the depths of the earth to man...and that transform themselves into images.

The works of Arcangelo take on and shoulder this responsibility for orchestrating sounds, from what is indistinct to the final composition, to that continual and deep tonality that leads both Myth and History to a rare and complete cohabitation.

Certainly, to depict the “Places of Man”, the basic traces of a culture that leaves things in its wake, that makes discoveries and deposits them like some millennial sediment, is a titanic task, *an ascent of the volcano* and a descent into the infinity of the crater.

The path of every culture is scattered with signs that become sounds, then words, then images that become, once again, signs and symbols and so on in a millennial and infinite circle. The artist has immersed his eyes and senses in this sea of history and of millennia and, trusting in his deepest feelings, he also immerses his hands in those parts of these circles that tell of facts and memories and, above all, of the life of man.

Arcangelo has not uprooted (nor even quoted) homely or exotic cultures; he has not extracted pre-digested symbols of this or that part of history (or made use of archaeology) but, instead, he has caused the Source to re-emerge and has traced out again as possible map for following the Origins of Man's Worlds. So we are not surprised to see his binary use of obstinate yet mystic mapmaking together with a dream (not its sense of being sweet but as something more like prophesy) "evocation" of fully-rounded works. And in some of these, the forms of which oblige us to refer to them as "sculpture", the artist has initially and purposely deposited convulsive and original sounds. The painted and clay Anfore are, in the artist's words: "*containers of precious things...all that history handed down to us*". And in these containers precious real historical things have been deposited and are ready for an eternal journey... in the same way that time conserves and hands on. And our ears have been pressed close to these containers of time in order to "see" ...and they have handed back signs, images: colours immersed in a space without any possible perspective if it were not for the light of the depths of the earth. As a result of this "radical listening", and by searching – with closed eyes – for the signs that imprint Legends, Myths, and Rites on the Image, the artist has met up with new Figures, the Sunnites, and has discovered with them the fantastic remains of the lost Gods and, above all, of lost Man. From earth to earth, in the picture space the artist builds up immerse transparent traces, bodies that are the etched transcriptions of civilization, presences that, by making themselves clear, accompany us... terribly...and the more we try to possess and define them, the more they disappear; it is like trying to imprison a sound. Once again we are dealing with an attempt at evocation, the mystic ritual consists of this infinite listening to this "original sound" dispersed and gathered up by time. It is within this "gathering" that we must place the evocations of painting, of the drawings concerned with fetishes and that here, in Bologna, gather around the works on show. I saw them appear in Arcangelo's studio: first the great canvases spread over the walls like sails or holy shrouds... (unusual, certainly, but inevitable) and then the large open drawers pulled out of severe containers. It was as though I have always known them, that they belonged to me or that they were simply supinely waiting for something. And yet, in meeting up with them again, they seemed new as a result of their evocations and allusions, of the "spirits" and images that they harboured. It is man who resists and returns, and it is the figure which "places" itself, which is active each time we unveil it in order to look at it: unique, multiple, unavoidable. The *Feticci* (fetishes) summon up around themselves impossible auras in which the colour has congealed and amplified the sounds, external and formless thoughts that blaze up and sink into the eyes. Their stillness is fictitious because it is "transported" through time, and thus is actually mobile and unstoppable. Neither shouts nor aesthetic vapours accompany

this. Arcangelo has led us to the Place to which we would all like to return by ignoring geography and cultures, biographies and origins, and he has firmly handed us back the occurrences and narratives of that Place which now is not only universal, but inhabited by the essence of man, not by a “race” or a “people”. And once again there is writing and its impossibility of limiting itself to being a written alphabet instead of rhythm, space, sound. In certain drawings, the fundamental soul of the artist, armed with all the disenchantment of those who have sunk their hands into the magma, has placed page after page like a diary that has become “something else” “another’s” and ours. Litanies, Vespers, Mourners are printed on top...and emerge as though they were collective rites and sounds; they dig their innocent claws in the sketched-in heads and shoulders of the fetishes, they overwhelm them with sounds and words, they hold them “upright”, they enchant them, and accompany them, despite themselves and despite our wishes, like the sound of a religion...every religion...A distant mantra from a land that has lost both east and west, the sounds of the fetishes cause a new journey to begin... the one in which Arcangelo has immersed “his” land, transporting it by sea and air, on ships and vessels evoking, without nostalgia, existence through “mark-making”.

Is this a possible but deceptive achievement like Armida’s sumptuous gardens? This is, in fact, suggested by the “enchanted” *Orti* (gardens). The material bends, deposits, congeals and radiates. The garden is that of man, of his way of living and cultivating, it leads from the landscape to poetry. In a “working day” the artist has noted: “landscape of the soul...emotionally troubled and fragile worlds...”. These are enclosed paradises, perfect natural zones where the landscape” puts itself into focus and then distends: a dreamed-of and magical harbor. Another “rite”? Another “gathering” place? And yet when we arrive there through our vision it disturbs, surprises, and entralls us: a land of fruit and flowers, of tranquil shimmering lakes. These are gardens dominated by shadows and that rear up, materialize, grow huge: the fragments of heavy pruning...a point of arrival comes to mind... I cast a glance...a read a litany from one of the sheets of a *Feticcio* :” ...and he retired...to a hermitage...to undergo Heavy Penance”... Arcangelo has presented us, again, with a possible place for mystery, and his journey towards the Origin...has made us even more aware...that...we aspire to go back...to where everything began.

Testo di Luca Massimo Barbero tratto dal catalogo della mostra “*Feticci*” realizzata alla Otto Gallery di Bologna, Grafiche dell’Artiere, Bologna 2002