

## **The imaginative extension of the work of Jorge Eielson**

Jorge Eielson's imagery is inhabited by the vision of a dense, many-faceted and plural universe which comes about as a result of changeable combinations that meld temporarily before dissolving and going on to give rise to an endless array of other combinations. Weaves of destinies, crossroads, parabolas of stars and of planets, constellations, ocean currents, the dust of the crowds in congested cities, grains of sand on the beaches and in the limitless deserts, precious stones on branches. Fascinated by the many facets of the world, to express them, as an authentically creative man, he stretches languages and media to the limits, making use of figurative art and literature, of performance and collage, of installation and photography, of poetry of word and poetry of sight, and of the novel. One of the exemplary models that guide him, as he has stated himself, "as the global image of human creation", is the shaman, the priest, the wise man, the wonder worker and poet, in an inextricable bundle to which he has devoted a portrait evocative of subtle hypnotic strength.

In his work, Eielson goes back over the shaman's path, identifying the axis of the world, the extremes of above and below, placing sculpture in the depths of the Earth and depicting luminous star-filled painting. Along with the dimension of height, he has continually focused on the world's horizontal extension, organising actions simultaneously along lines of latitude and longitude, involving Paris, Rome, New York and Lima.

But the most striking feature in Eielson's work is the essential cleanliness of the languages he adopts. There is no overlapping, no mixture between the numerous languages he employs, but separation, alignment, connections only in the form of echoes and affinities, respecting the specifics and autonomy of each. Eielson is well aware of what it takes to defend himself against the vertigo that threatens excessively stringent conceptions of multiplicity. If the "knot", the "quipu", the ancient sign of the Incas constitutes the visible emblem of his work, then that "knot" binds the dispersion of difference to the clarity of simplicity, reduced as it is to geometric structures whose cadence comes from protrusions that are actually bonds, his celebrated "knots".

These “knots” open spontaneously to a great wealth of solutions that are at once formal, chromatic and metamorphic. The forms multiply horizontal, vertical, oblique and circular motions; they compose pointed rays, calm fans, sails spread wide. At times they abandon the flat order to thrust out and invent cubic, three-dimensional structures. So does the “knot” pass from the painting to the installation; it abandons the wall to take up its place in the centre of real space. *Große Quipus der Nazionen*, installed in Munich back in 1972, was a remarkable example of this: an airy construction of flags rolled up and knotted to a light wooden frame, protected against the empty blue of the sky. But the “knot” was also the force that generated some memorable performances, at the Venice Biennale in 1972 and in Lima in 1978, where the “knot” linked the ‘operator’ – Eielson himself – to the body of a woman wrapped completely in the mysterious solemnity of a huge mantle made of rough cloth.

In addition to the variety of its structures, the “knot” opens the way to a very lively range of colours. The “knot” is colour, whether monochrome or polychrome: in the latter case, those colours are added and separated internally in rhythmic intervals by a musical score rich with tensions. It is tempting to argue that the splendid period of the Fauves in painting is now being followed by the long period of the “Fauve of object”, whose sole protagonist is the Peruvian Eielson.

Yet we shall never cease plumbing the depths of wealth in Eielson’s “knot”. In moments of particularly contemplative mood, we detect the snake’s coils swirling in it, its skin wonderfully bedecked with glistening scales; its coils winding and unwinding: the snake is an archetypal figure that belongs to all civilisations and is the symbol of how time returns endlessly. The “knot” includes metaphorical reference to the presence of the divine, the order of threads that irremediably bind, restrain and break the Fates, the three heavenly sisters. Finally, it represents the ultimate challenge, the obstacle that always opposes a resolute will, as witnessed by the Gordian knot and the flash of Alexander’s sword, the first of an array of men whose impatience and audacity led them to put their trust in an act of violent decision. The “knot” is the great web woven by Eielson as a conjunction of opposites, a weave of diverse energies, held together by fatal imposition. As it mirrors human destiny, so does it reflect the world’s own “nodal” constitution, in accordance with the perspective of modern science: it links our super-technological present to the archaic civilisations of the pre-Columbian

peoples who took the use of the knot to a high degree of complexity. Ultimately, the “knot” that ties together Eielson’s multi-faceted view bonds above all two diverging qualities – abstraction and concreteness – with intentional verve. The “knot” is both the one and the other: a geometric structure, as I have already stated, but also objectiveness, the mental component and the tangible physical component. It approaches *nouveau réalisme*, but refutes it resolutely, because it has glanced – but only from a distance – at any example of “new abstraction”. We look at them, we contemplate them, we feel driven to touch them with our hands.

So much wealth was preceded by a poetic experience that still progresses in parallel and, also, by a figurative experience that led to the “knot” and then spilled over into performances and installations. Poetically, this experience has taken the shape of the expression of the poet’s existential subjectivity and physical life, before being applied to a process of reduction of the word itself and to an approach verging on the graphic image and on silence. In this facet, we can capture poetry’s maximum formal vicinity to the essential simplicity of the practice of “knots”. Figuratively, the experience has taken the form of an “endless” exploration of the artist’s native landscape, the coast of Peru, in painting of matter mixed with cements and soils. Next, in an approach to the existence of mankind, he expressed himself by manipulating everyday objects on the surface of the canvas: garments, jackets, hats and jeans that he tore, burned, cut and, finally, knotted. For a personal, necessary motive of his own, he rediscovered an gesture that is ancient, primordial and essential, not just for life, but for material survival itself.

It is this material and corporal component that gives Eielson’s “knot” structures their extraordinary concreteness. To cap it all, the word for knot in Spanish is *nudo*, which in Italian means nude, as the artist has told us many a time. The knotted, coloured fabric covers the nudity of the body, its presence-absence. But it also covers the secret, naked truth of the world and of life, concealed for ever behind the emptiness of secrecy.

For many years now, literary culture has been ready to acknowledge the high value achieved by Eielson’s poetry. Figurative culture, with its apparently greater openness, though in practice still anchored to too many prejudices summarised in

the immediate recognisability of the sign practised by the artist, almost as though it were a style of fashion, is at last finding its feet in the manifold wealth of Eielson's creativity and is ready to attribute to this Peruvian artist, an international outsider and crossroads of so many cultures, the central position that he deserves.

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