

ATOPOS

Art and space, work of art and location. It is a profound and organic mutual relation which has always existed since man traced the first frieze of Lascaux. A focussing on the relationships between text and context, a materialisation of the world and the world itself.

It is a fact that the work of art enclosed in its traditional limits, has long since inverted its role, identifying itself with the environment or even the action of the artist (for instance with Schwitters's sediments of memory or the drippings of Pollock). Consequently the pictorial creation breaks down every barrier between interior and exterior, surface and frame, exceeding the limits of picture, wall, room, building, etc... "It is no longer a window or a true portal onto the world, but a threshold between different languages" (Celant). It is therefore an experience which in a way establishes a new approach to vision, a new space of display. Having abandoned all reassuring convictions and references, (the limits), it goes on to underline its own motivations, to question the foundations of its own formal procedure. In other words, the pictorial creation becomes practical and in so doing at the same time shows itself and is shown, becoming its own reflection and its own story.

This leads us to trespass the constricting disciplines of sculpture and painting, to question the work of art as the revelation of a specific part of space (assigning it as logos to topos), establishing it instead as a system of indefinite relationships (as logos about topos).

Carlo Benatti's work originates from a series of unanswered questions, such as: which is the artists space? What are the limits which establish "how art must be presented to the observer, to the outer world? In what way should he propose the languages of vision and display?"

At first sight the answer seems to focus on the cut created by the frame, on the gap it introduces between reality and fiction, between the every-day object and the artistic product. And consequently on the fact that it removes the work of art from everything else, rendering it intangible and ideal. It is not only a matter of asserting the effectiveness of this particular isolation and "mise en scène"; others like Klimt and Seurat have made the same experience, involving the limits in the pictorial expression. Neither is it a question of introducing the frame into the picture, like an element among other elements, in the manner of De Chirico and Magritte. One would not go beyond the concept of painting and the frame would not present itself as a problem, but only as a text within a text, as an invention of space within the work of art.

Instead Benatti hangs the frame directly on the wall, he exposes for everyone to see this customary image of inwardness, he builds a picture with the limits of the picture itself. Giulio Paolini works in a similar fashion when he fixes his attention on the back of the picture or on the blank canvas. It is a way of reflecting on the way of creating art, the materials involved, on that which stands beyond, behind and around the work of art. Only in Paolini's work this process excludes a clear manifestation, a concrete revelation of the image; there is a potential vision, a virtual representation, shifting the attention from that which is supported (the painting) to the support (the wall), from after to before.

The Torinese artist goes on to state: "The finality of this work consists in evoking the idea of a continuous evolving of a possible space". In suggesting something which is not yet outlined, proposed, displayed.

For Benatti instead it is a question of concentrating on the primary meaning of action and expression, of applying himself to the building up of the image, until the latter reaches a physical fulness, a structural evidence. His process of reversing the pictorial language is done "a posteriori", using every possible implement (even if they are always minimal, almost paradigmatic implements: the wooden borders of frames, a very aseptic if not altogether covering painting).

The observer is inclined to wonder what the picture contains, what is going on in "the sacred enclosure" of art. Well, to simply state that we are faced with a deviation of sign and meaning, an overturning of the parts, a movement of the outer towards the inner is restricting and perhaps misleading. It is sufficient to analyse the provocative statement of Peter Handke: "the interior from the exterior of the interior", to realise that today the notion of space is at least fluctuating if not altogether indefinite and undefinable.

Already Heidegger in his text "Art and space", maintained that to form is equivalent to circumscribe, like including or excluding with reference to the limit". And Benatti seems to wonder whether what matters is that which limits the work of art or that which is limited in it. Only he goes no further than the question, without offering solutions. And should there be a solution it would be the one proposed by Duchamp in "Door: II, rue Larrey", a door which is always closed and at the same time always open - a symbolic transition which leads nowhere if not to the limit, to the passage, to the threshold.

Besides observing carefully these works of art, we notice that they are all permeated by a sort of "esprit de géométrie" which should lead us to a precise and circumscribed spacial definition. One realises instead that what matters is not the location but the structural course, its invariable starting anew from zero to combine itself according to mobile and indefinable models. A closed construction which appears open. Almost a representation of absence in so far as it proceeds by subtraction, by eliminating the location. An Atopos - a non location, which R. Barthes would describe as: "something unclassifiable, absolutely original and inaccessible".

In Benatti's works in fact we no longer know what the surface is nor where it is and the limits (the border lines) like the Atopie or the Tombeaux of the Belgian Jan Vercruyse, no longer divide but unite and above all create an "energetic confrontation" with space and with the observer.

All we have to do is to follow the course of these lines and we shall find ourselves in the open. But if the sacredness of the frame disappears how can we identify the artistic fétiche? And on the contrary if all is frame where is the image?

Piero Manzoni invented the "socle du monde", an empty pedestal to be used by any one. Perhaps Benatti suggests "le cadre de la surface", an empty picture which however, to quote Paolini, "gives space to the power of imagination which every one of us possesses".

LUIGI MENEGHELLI