

Letter to Leonardo Blanco

Urbino, April 2004-05-01

Dear Leonardo,

We met through a third person whom you still occasionally see and whom I have known for years but haven't seen for a long time. Neither I, in the past, nor you, who were in a completely different place, would ever have thought that one day we would meet, almost as a result of a 'short circuit' of the thoughts running through the mind of this third person – as if lines had been drawn towards a sort of escape route. Thus one grey day I found myself travelling along a certain stretch of road, I turned off at a particular cross-roads and reached a large open space where you were waiting for me amongst canvases hanging on walls, paper images piled up or spread out on tables and other papers which dotted the floor here and there. As if I were inside a form of narrative, I walked among your works and you talked to me about them with the anxiety (understandable, particularly during a first meeting) of someone who fears either saying too much or too little. Around you, your works accompanied your words, every so often adding other phrases and concepts to them. You showed me figurative 'languages', pseudo-figurative and archaic developments that were all gradually abandoned in favour of a greater 'abstraction' (linguistic conventions, terrible labels that are always incomplete and dissatisfying) which nonetheless constantly attends reality.

Your works trace a fine line (which you trace every day) but full of queries that touch on existence, the randomness of phenomena, the possibility of their true perception, the difficulty of attaining awareness of this. I feel able to say that the founding question, from which the other questions that you ask (primarily yourself) derive a host of suggestions, lies in the relationship between the chance event and the state of consciousness that implies free will. Your work can also be inspired by an openness towards the suggestion of an unexpected colour but which you must then, with meditated reflection, successively hide and then allow to lightly re-emerge, to free and at the same time channel into spacial structures that are not obvious but are equally precise and existing, almost trying to give or to find 'order within chaos.'

Leonardo, it has been said of your work that "it is only in appearance similar to the emotional language of the informal" (F. Michelotti). I agree with this statement in terms of your different and unique way of proceeding. Your constant and determined way of meditating on 'being' and its meaning makes it more difficult for me to transport your works outside what are certain focal points of phenomenology and existentialism. It also seems to me that you can be fully inserted in the more current debate on 'chaos', 'the laws of disorder', 'determinism' and 'its supersedence'.

"Our century is witness to other formidable discoveries: quantum mechanics, which regulates the phenomena of the atomic and subatomic world, the theory of relativity, the discovery of nuclear forces. These inspiring triumphs appear to be further confirmation of the illuminist faith in man's ability to dominate events in an ever better way and control and foresee their development. Nonetheless, the discoveries of the past twenty years have cast some shadows on this optimistic outlook and have undermined the foundations of an illusion which lasted more than three centuries. The main event, which many consider by now to be the third great scientific revolution of this century after relativity and quantum mechanics, is the discovery of 'deterministic chaos'... What is universal order? What is

man's place? And is he subject to the laws of nature or does he enjoy a special privilege, freedom?" (G. Casati).

Leonardo, in your works I perceive the manifest intention to penetrate to the intimate essence of surrounding reality, an engrossed meditation on the doubts that accompany your knowledge of an equilibrium that is never definitively stable, a dynamic process that I do not however necessarily read as a sign of conflict but rather as the difficult tension towards an achievable harmonisation, even if not everlasting.

"The way in which a colour is applied is more important than the choice of colour",
"beginning a painting is like embarking on an unknown adventure. The artist would have scarce interest if he knew the outcome before he started, if he were to make a painting that was already complete in his soul..." (J. Dubuffet).

Even when the concept of chance was touched on (a concept that was even denied by Pollock, among others, despite being repeatedly associated with him), I was not referring to the idea of the unconscious. I believe that in your work, the search for an increasingly close relationship between 'being conscious' and 'existing' is much more pressing and that your daily dialogue with the 'canvas' leads to the doubts of a consciousness which each time interrogates itself about the possibility of attaining full 'existing'.

Yours,
Franco Martelli