

Memory and Matter

Reversing the title - and the narrative - of the essay written in 1896 by the French philosopher Henri Bergson *Materia e Memoria*¹, Galleria d'Arte Niccoli presents the works of four artists through the keys to the interpretation provided by Bergson's text over a century ago.

Addressing the dualism between spirit and matter, Bergson asserts man's reality as a system composed of images, the first of which is that of his own body: through this, man acts on the other images of the world, readjusting them through perception, to construct the reality that surrounds him. Perception is therefore expressed as an act of selection and retrieval of images from the chaotic reservoir of one's own memories which, through the body - acts as a conductor - triggers the perception of the present.

Artan (Shalsi), Alessandro Brighetti, CCH and Jessica Wilson construct the relationship between their own memory and the artistic material in different ways, which is thus marked and transformed on the basis of perceptions, sometimes similar and sometimes very different, of the reality that surrounds them.

Artan's two large plexiglass photographic plates move in the rarefied memory, inviting the viewer to a continuous optical wandering in search of a face that is out of sight. Images that hide themselves from the gaze in a world of images designed to reveal themselves, these icons - the verse painted in red connects the two works with the Balkan icons of his homeland, Albania - crush the public in a feeling of elusiveness that recalls that of memory gaps, of fragmentary memories. In dealing with the canvas at various distances or in using stratagems to grasp the image for a few seconds, the spectator experiences a constant search based on the frustration of his own visual means.

Jessica Wilson's minimalist work comes to life in the parallel and antithetical universe of the immediate sign: a dry and vital translation of her own baggage of images. The rapid stroke of colour by the British artist crystallises moments of personal experience and symbols of reality - starting with her own body and the archetypes of feminine and masculine - to activate the viewer's perception through a colourist vocabulary that goes back to the very source of two-dimensional but also three-dimensional representation, as happens in her *furniture*. As in a synecdoche - a rhetorical figure that uses the name of a single part to indicate the "whole" of which it is part -, it will be the spectator who reconstructs each individual episode starting from the British artist's "unique sign".

The totems of Central American origin by Alessandro Brighetti have the same perceptive appeal. Products of the artist's spiritual journey, the *Curanderas* strike the viewer's catastrophic imagination by projecting sequences of man-made environmental disasters

through small audio-video devices attached to the totems' tops. This ongoing tragedy - each *Curandera* embodies the sufferings of an element of life such as fire, water, air, earth and time - stimulates our memory in a desperate attempt to signal the imminent catastrophe. The ritual intervention suggested by the artist's work shows all the limits of a society incapable of reversing course through reason, a helpless spectator of this dance of death.

The works of CCH are based on the artist's own experience. These works, which overturn the concept of the "signal" to become open works of art, are nothing more than selections extracted from the artist's literary, cinematic and visual memory. Works such as the metal tubular *Attese (Waiting)* lead the public's perception towards a multiplicity of meanings, all correct and all fallacious at the same time: playful homonymy of Lucio Fontana's famous series, a homage to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, footholds in a dangerous and uncertain world, simple fetishes of the everyday life of public transport, these works show the trigger mechanism of the artist's memory open to the free interpretation of each individual viewer, breaking down the constraint of subjectivity from which they originate. It is no coincidence that each series of CCH's works is to be considered as still open.

It is up to the audience to activate their memories in order to read the present.

¹H. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (1986), revised and implemented in the 7a edition of 1911, tr. Adriano Pessina, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2009

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