

Rincontrarsi a Venezia

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*Oh man, trust and hope,
for when heaven protects you,
nature has no jurisdiction;
the impossible can often come true.*

[G. Badoaro, C. Monteverdi, *The return of Ulysses to his Homeland*, Act Two, Scene Seven]

“The impossible often comes true” is sung by Ulysses and Telemachus when they reunite in the second act of Monteverdi’s celebrated opera “*The return of Ulysses to his Homeland*,” a work that was composed in Venice with a libretto written by Giacomo Badoaro and presented for the first time at the San Giovanni e Paolo theatre in 1640. The reunion of Ulysses and Telemachus is certainly one of the most moving and beautiful in the history of world literature. To give life to it on stage is exactly the power of the impossible coming to be. There is trust and hope that the impossible will come true, that reuniting is possible, while knowing that, at the foundation of the reunion, there is a tragic and merciless dialectic at work: that between the forces of time and fate.

The force of time because we will never again see the same person or the same city that we left behind. The Ulysses that embraces his son again is certainly not the Ulysses that left, and even Ithaca is totally different, and certainly the man who sees Ulysses return is no longer the newborn baby left behind. The force of fate because anything could have happened in the time between the departure and the return: the reunion was never a guarantee, and at the foundation there is always the mysterious and tragic dimension of pure possibility that resides more in the world of hope than that of reality and that demands a necessary transformation both in ourselves and in the people, the places, and the objects that we encounter again. It is not by chance that the

prologue of Monteverde's opera is a dialogue between Human frailty, Time, Fortune and Love. There is also another element to consider: in order to return, it is first necessary to get lost. The greek term "nostos" not only means "homecoming," but is the origin of the word "nostalgia," which has to do with pain and absence, and which indicates the separation between oneself and that which one loves most. If it was not like this, everything would vanish from pure indifference. In reality, every reunion cannot be but the confrontation between that which we and the other have both become.

All of these elements, the dialectic between time and fate, the impossible coming to be, the hope of return, the nostalgia, the perennial transformation of the fluidity of everything, bring to mind one constant image: Ulysses' sea, Heraclitus' river, the water. Fabrizio Plessi's series entitled *Splash* is an homage to the water, understood as the flux of life and memory. In fact, according to Plessi, "the water is an ancient, ancestral, primordial element," the eternal movement of water is a metaphor for the fluidity of time, the sliding together of events, the perpetual alternation between meetings, conflicts, and reunions that characterize human life.

Faced with this continuous movement, art has always had a precise task: to fix, arrange, rearrange, reorganize, resignify that which otherwise would get lost in the currents forever. This is what Maurizio Pellegrin does, who in this way is classic, which is clear in how Massimo Donà interpreted the work in his beautiful essay "Sive interrogan mundus. On the objectual relationality of Maurizio Pellegrin." According to Donà, "more than make something, the artist has to (which Maurizio Pellegrin knows well, as each of his works are a testimony of exemplary form) reconstitute the sense of an original relationship." Building new relationships saves things from the waters of the river that Leon Battista Alberti called "life and time," different objects come back to life and can reunite in a new arrangement that the artist creates according to the rules of their own art. With these rules, things are saved from the perennial flux of becoming.

The waters of Heraclitus' river are, however, not too distant from the Democritus' fire. This is well-known by Plessi, who also dedicated very important works to the subject of fire: "as I like opposites," he affirmed, "fire has fascinated me, a fire that doesn't burn." For centuries, water and fire have met again and again in the lagoon, where, to quote Toots Zynsky, "the furnaces were roaring." Even the choice of colours in Zynsky's works refers to the profound dialectic that divides the initial meeting from the reunion, the moment that has passed and that which is to come. "Black, grey, and red," Zynsky affirmed, "are powerful colours, the colours of life and death." However, there is more, if transformation is the element that directs our meetings and reunions, it is here that the artist puts to work the struggle between opposites that Democritus saw in the fire. It is the artist who manipulates, with their own hands, the process of the eternal mutation of things, guiding it down an aesthetic path that transforms the eternal struggle between elements into a coherent and determined process of artistic creation.

If in Plessi we have the representation of becoming, in Pellegrin the creation of new orders in the fluidity of everything, in Zynsky the manipulation of the materials of this becoming, then in Ferdinando Scianna we could say that art breaks the endless transformation of things in order to construct a story made of instants that escape from the dimension of time. "In reality," affirmed Scianna, "that which interests me is telling the stories

of the things around me, the things that I am passionate about, the things that make me angry, the things that I like. For me, photography and storytelling are not split.” Between the meeting and the reunion, no longer is there distance, the dimension of time containing the story is built in the passing of instants that become fixed forever. By doing this, the artist seems to save the meeting from the devastations of time, and instead eternalizes it, and allows the viewer of the artwork to reunite with an image that, on one hand, will remain fixed this way forever, and on the other will always come back to life and transform in the game of the user’s interpretive gaze. In fact, if the reunion is always a new meeting between that which we and the other have become, it is also true that whatever establishes the parameters of comparison between that which was and that into which things have transformed, is always an incessant interpretation. Reuniting with a City, or an object, or a person puts us at the mercy of the games of how we remembered them, how we understand the time that has passed, and how we understand that which we now have in front of us.

For years, the theoretical reflection and artistic production of Maurizio Donzelli have investigated this theme, that of the somewhat “constructive” role of the observer on the artwork they have in front of them. This is also true of the transformative effect that the gaze of whoever is observing has on the observed object. In the *Mirrors*, the spectator is in dialogue with the work, they transform it and become transformed, because this, at its foundation, is the secret that exists in every mirror: that which I see in a mirror is not really myself, and I cannot look at a mirror without going through, by force, the interpretation that I have of my own image in that moment. Therefore, the reunion here is a reunion through art that brings me to reflect on how observing reality always and necessarily means transforming it: the Ithaca that Ulysses reunites with (and reinterprets with new categories) has come back into his sight after too many years of travels and adventures to be seen again in the same way as before. In reality, we could say that it is only possible to reunite with our own different interpretation that is in a dialectic game with the mechanisms of memory.

However, if that which I can meet and reunite with is always and only my own interpretation of that which is in front of me, and moreover an interpretation that is destined to change over time, then at our foundation we are nothing but monads closed unto ourselves. This aspect seems to invite us to reflect on the work of Francesco Candeloro. This is a very timely reflection in a contemporary world characterized more and more by the shattering of social relations and the depletion of the pure image of the human being. How can images closed unto themselves communicate, interact, reunite? On this subject, more than relevant are the words of Francesco Poli who wrote: “one on side, each cube is a kind of monad closed unto itself and self-referential [...] but on the other side, at the same time, the cubes form a coherent set of presences in the middle of which visitors can move around, and with whom they can dialogue through the continuous and unpredictable relationship with the eyes of the people who see them from the most diverse angles.” Once again, it is the hermeneutic relationship between the work of art and the spectator that creates the dialogue that transforms monads closed unto themselves into a network of connections, of meetings and reunions.

In the prologue of Monteverdi’s opera, Human frailty dialogues with Time, Fortune and Love. Love as it is understood in the Greek sense, love as desire, as a force that attracts human beings toward one another. The

last theme connected to reunion that the exhibition wants to explore has to do with this concept. A true reunion offers itself always and only because it is desired, and desire necessarily comes from the body. The works of João Vilhena selected for the exhibition are aptly titled *L'amour des corps* and perhaps they express precisely the tension and the desire for a meeting (or a reunion) that has not yet come to be. Between the point of view of the spectator and the work is established an almost anticipatory relationship, an anticipation within which there is not only the fulfillment of that dialogical process between the user and the work of art, as has been discussed, but also a different kind of anticipation because it is engaged not with the analysis of abstract hermeneutic processes, but with an erotic voyeurism that speaks to the emotional and passionate component of man. It is the body (even before memory or reason) that desires the meeting, even if it is a meeting through stolen glances in a window.

The body does not, however, meet (and reunite with) only other human bodies. The body is nature and transforms with nature, is absorbed by it incessantly. As much in *Self-Deceit 2/5/7* from 1978 that are shown in the exhibition as in the work *Caryatid*, Francesca Woodman uses the body as the site of the initial meeting and the reunion with her own nature, and with the environment that surrounds it. In her notes, Woodman annotated: "the thing that I found most interesting was the feeling that the figure, more than hiding it from itself, was absorbed by a thick and humid atmosphere." The artist who can represent the becoming, organize it, shape it, fix it, interpret it, embody it, can also finally overcome in the "thick and humid atmosphere" of the most profound of reunions.