

Landscapes of Immanence

"Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." The perceptive dimension of this definition formulated by the European Landscape Convention and adopted in 2000 by the Committee of Ministers of Culture and Environment of the Council of Europe, could basically describe the first key to the interpretation of the works of Alberto Di Fabio. The linguistic and legislative *querelle* rising from its erroneous translation in Italian, (where "area" would become "a certain part of the territory", thus restraining the original definition) provides a further suggestion. The relationship between man and nature is frequently understood as a *dual*, almost antagonistic relationship, in which we can intercept the prevalence of one over the other and vice versa, neglecting the reality of its being part of a Whole.

What centuries of philosophical and spiritual doctrines, scientific research and aesthetic speculation explored, each one with its own peculiar tools, finds an immediate and co-present representation through the kaleidoscopic lens with which the artist leads us into the complex universe of his paintings. An alchemical filter able to switch back and forth from elements as infinitesimal as atoms and photons, to the colossal and destabilizing dimensions of astral bodies, going through the whole of creation at a glance.

For Di Fabio, the observation of nature starts from the contemplation of landscape features of his native land: Abruzzo. The mountains of his first cycle of paintings of the Nineties, represent the first survey instrument, starting from their morphology, but at the same time from the perception obtained by changing points of view. So the cliffs turn blue, green, red, white, as if to trace the changing of the seasons, the sequence of hours, of states of mind, in a confirmation of the teachings of Cézanne and his new formalization of the landscape that began with the cycle of *Montaigne Sainte-Victoire* (1905). At ground zero of contemporary painting, making a clean sweep of the mediation offered by traditional knowledge, Alberto Di Fabio starts a journey into the depths of matter that will lead him towards the most hidden and primordial.

The gash in the landscape cleaves ever more deeply to isolate the details and to explore its molecular structure: you pass from the rocks to the minerals and then closer to the forms of organic life and the chains of DNA, as in Darwinian evolution towards more articulated forms of existence and knowledge. The scientific investigation, followed hand in hand by esthetic research and the influence of the 'masters' Di Fabio met in New York and in Paris, lead him to two propulsive thrusts: the centripetal force toward the core of the matter and the centrifugal one to grasp its synthesis through formal abstraction.

However, it is still not enough. Alberto Di Fabio feels the need for a genuine and direct relationship with nature, which finds its clearest, but at the same time its most intimate expression in the performance he realized on his beloved island of Ponza. In 2004, the exhibition *Ri-impianto* in the Gallery of Umberto Di Marino, at Giugliano in Campania, in a peripheral urban area marked by serious environmental problems, accounts for the lyrical and lonely action to plant hundreds of trees along the perimeter of a valley that threatened to become an open dump, just in the middle of one of the most significant natural beauties of our heritage. The difference between the social and symbolic gesture to re-implant the seed of care for the territory in contexts spoiled by consumerism goes beyond the famous collective action à la Beuys because of the time span of this action on the landscape. Over the last ten years, the artist continued to devote himself to the

restoration of this area, saving it from the ruin of neglect and creating a space of imaginative freedom and utopia. The relationship with the landscape is shown in all its evidence in the interaction between natural and human factors, opening endless possibilities of aesthetic imagination and of development of new thought patterns. Just as Plato founded his Academy in woods near Athens, in 387 BC the ambitious vision of Di Fabio housed over the years artists and curators interested in an experience of total immersion into nature and within themselves.

Over time, in fact, also the attention of his pictorial *corpus* begins to move increasingly from external observation of what surrounds us to the internal observation of neural synapses, while recording such perceptual phenomena. The search for the representation of the organic world becomes increasingly frantic, rhythmic, electrical, kinetic, synesthetic. As in a climax, one moves from the first step of empirical experience to the next grade of knowledge and, through meditation, to the ultimate synthesis of contamination between the data transmitted to the brain through the five senses.

Slowly, gradually an undercurrent, emerged from his first paintings against the backdrop of the mountains and later recalled in all his following cycles, becomes more and more urgent: the fascination with the East and the ancient transcendental doctrines. No more footholds: the mind travels through parallel dimensions in search of the quantum Whole: what Anaximander called *ápeiron*, the limitless, the infinite or rather the indefinite, and what in Hindu cosmology is identified with the god Shiva, the force that dissolves and destroys worlds, but at the same time regenerates them.

Some have identified its principle in the spirit of creation, others through the laws of physics have come to state that nothing is created and nothing is destroyed, but everything is transformed. Today we ask ourselves about the boson and the Higgs field. In a game of references, starting from Heraclitus and Democritus to get to the antimatter research and to the self-determination of atomic particles, the artist emphasizes that every ambitious description of the landscape must necessarily pass through cosmological intuition. The same intuition led him in recent years towards a heated debate with the scientific community, which confirms the unexpected presence in his paintings of complex mathematical formulas, welding an ever closer collaboration that finds fulfillment in his work with CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

In his recent cycles, in fact, the interpretation of nature becomes more "jazz", as suggested by a transcendent look that goes beyond the boundaries of earth, into the infinity of the cosmos. The formal representation collapses into "dripping", the mountains of the first works now ruin dismantled and deconstructed in *Landscape of the mind* (2010). At a closer look, however, it is not a matter of the dissolution of the landscape, but of a higher degree of knowledge, in which the visible gives way to the invisible, to the eternal and regenerating force, in touch with the divine. The painting gesture becomes ritual, the canvas opens wide into a third and a fourth dimension, the stippled and the stratification of various levels of matter try to restore order in the Chaos. The neuronal system is blurry, gets out of focus in the background in *Untitled* 2008, while synapses emerge fiercely, until they give way to the explosion of *Forza Forte* (2010). Looking at the works of Di Fabio, means getting the opportunity to observe the slow passage from one phase to another, in a research that becomes organic, sensitive to the passing of time, of history, of life.

Made the necessary preconditions, we can understand the lyrical drive that exhorts the artist even on this occasion to denounce the aberration of a reckless land management, such as recently happened in Campania, with severe impairment of its natural and cultural heritage. Napoli made of its landscape, on the one hand, a stereotype of traditional folklore by serially repeating the pictorial iconography that was developed by

the landscape painters of the nineteenth century, and on the other hand a symbol of decadence and corruption through the languages of the daily news. So the strongest method of awakening of the collective consciousness remains the aesthetic displacement, the breaking of the usual vision, so overused as to become obvious for better or for worse. Art denounces through beauty, recovers the universal harmony through the dismay of the Sublime and the feeling of being infinitely small in front of the power of nature; a first step to recover the interaction and deep respect for the huge mystery of which man is part.

The precious papers superimposed on the traditional view of the Gulf from the Piazza d'Armi describe the psychological reactions offered to the viewer who suddenly finds himself enjoying this simultaneous sight. They become at the same time a representation of the landscape and of those who see it from the inside. In the same way Castel Sant' Elmo, imposing monument built by man to protect the entire city, blends with the rest of creation, represented by the pictures of galaxies taken by the Hubble Telescope and embedded in the invitation cards. Our eyes move back from the micro to the macro, what changes is the point of view, the elevation of the mind, time. The telescope returns images of formations at the origins of the cosmos, over thirteen billion light years away from us: the past, the present and the future fade away, the journey into "parallel landscapes" along a possible trajectory, the continuous cycle of life resumes elsewhere.

Nicoletta Daldanise

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