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ALFREDO PIRRI PASSI 2003-2012

Text by Giuliano Modesti, Corrado Bologna, Angelandrea Rorro, Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli, Stefania Frezzotti, Achille Bonito Oliva, Ludovico Pratesi, Valentina Valentini, Federico Fusi, Daria Filardo, Alfredo Pirri, Jannis Kounellis, Vicenç Altaió, Federica Zanco, Luciana Rogozinski

Conversazione tra Eugenio La Rocca e Ludovico Pratesi

Conversations between Eugenio La Rocca and Ludovico Pratesi

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Gli Ori s.r.l.

www.gliori.it

ufficiostampa@gliori.it

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The volume issued to accompany Alfredo Pirri's exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome has presented the opportunity to retrace all the 'passi' (steps) taken by the artist over the period from 2003 until now.

It deals with a series of works consisting of large pieces of shattered mirrored flooring designed to represent 'steps' in constant dialogue with the surrounding architecture.

"The mirror", says Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli, "is an ambivalent symbol, as shown by the two opposing allegories which, in traditional iconography, present it as an attribute: Vanitas and Veritas. In this case, the broken mirror too becomes ambivalent, having as it does a traditional value as a negative – inherent in the shattering of the subject-matter together with its image – but here, it derives from this the status of a positive, by confronting and overcoming superstition."

[Translation: James Benn]

One of the texts from the book:

Alfredo Pirri, Passi (National Gallery of Modern Art) 2011

Alfredo Pirri

Hall of Ceremonies

...architecture is the sole cause of sculpture. The spirit of architecture is sculpture, and the construction of sculpture is architecture...

Arturo Martini, Scultura lingua morta, 1945

The entrance to the museum is a symbolic threshold, a simultaneously self-critical and celebratory area of passage. Going through it is a ceremony that accentuates the perception of a spatial and temporal dimension that is unreal yet at the same time radically and intimately material. With this work I would like to give viewers the impression that, by moving around in the space, they can modify the view of it by performing a two-fold, simultaneous action of demolishing and reconstructing the image. The viewers' experience leads them to think that they themselves are subjects of the work, in the action of looking at themselves upside down and feeling the infinitesimal space to be like a skin linking and separating them from their image, leading them to be part of it in a 'natural' way, just as they are part of the world. Being inside the work takes us away from the idea that art is a mirror of the world, because – on the contrary – that tiny, skin-like portion of space which divides the spectator's feet from his or her double is sufficient to produce a perceptual displacement that projects the viewer into the centre of a story, a broken narrative that prevents any consolatory participation. A story that celebrates beauty (together with its transience), glory (together with its failure), desire (and its loss). The experience of this narration, the cluster of these feelings and ways of knowing, and the ensuing images, make the spectator's steps uncertain, like someone on a melting iceberg, where rapid temperature changes open up crevices, make the ice increasingly thin and allow the water beneath to lick around the feet, making us feel part of a process of change and in a precarious state upon it. Privileged, immobile spectators of all this are the nineteenth-century sculptures, stripped of their plinths and restored to their real, human dimensions, like fallen angels responsible (together with the viewers) for the breaking of the sky above us. The work, then, is no longer the perspectival mirror of our dreams, but a place of stone designed to receive our weaknesses in a different light from the one we have left behind us when entering the museum. Outside is a terrestrial, vital light, inside the light of a transition towards a place where the distinction between life and non-life loses its customary meaning. In this path, the funeral mask of the sculptor Antonio Canova, kept in a cabinet that pins it to the ground like a nut on metal, evokes an expanded, fragmented body scattered everywhere in the museum's many rooms, but here related only by a plaster face. It is a small, human face which might be held in two hands cupped together as if to drink cool water gushing from a source. The plaster face is surrounded by female, childish, literary sculptures with bowed gazes, which contemplate themselves in the frozen pond of their representation, finding new life in it, in a light that unites them with the real life of the spectators.

This most wonderful book that you have ever seen is so well-made in design, paper, printing and layout organisation you will read it in one breath.

After a good introduction of the concept of Pirri, his choice for mirrors and the sound of breaking glass, all different projects are documented with good photos, sketches, maps and texts leading the reader through the process Alfredo Pirri made between 2003 and 2012. The English translations of the Italian essays you will find at the end of the book.

The well-documented site-specific installations do not only show the architectural spaces, the art shown in them, their histories and appearances but also resonate by walking through the work in the reactions of the visitors by the fragmentation of the images and the sensorial sensation.

Even by reading this book one can imagine that this time-based art expression is one of a kind one has to experience oneself as soon as possible. That is still possible with the permanent installation at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, in the Palazzo Te – Palazzo San Sebastiano in Mantova, Italy, through 11 November, and within the project Biennale D-O Ark Underground in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (all 3 items to be found in Glass is more!) until 26 September, 2013.

A book everyone should have and cherish!

Angela van der Burght