

Histories / Ourstories

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Painting, quite simply, captures the gaze. It does not *offer* itself to the eye, which might accept or decline the invitation to skim its surface and explore the hidden world of which it is the manifestation. It inexorably *imposes* its presence. Neither too close nor too distant, at times playing with infinite distances: every painting needs and demands a gaze in order to establish its location. Claudia Peill's painting occupies an area that is apparently isolated and effectively illusory and yet it is not to be perceived as a fragment. Fragments remain of service to the whole, like those antique statues of which only parts survive, varying in their importance but speaking of the missing body in its entirety.

The limits of the canvas are artificial: there is no reason to believe that the painting extends beyond them unless we feel a sense of loss or of something lacking, whatever the process of demarcation. The boundaries of Claudia Peill's painting do not lie in its physical limits, in the frame that encloses a coherent whole, but in the method of focalization that renders visible something hidden, and that exposes a point of view in its purity. At the moment in which it is fixed as an image, any visual representation presents its viewers with the same evident fact: this is a diffused synthesis of the many possible "vistas" onto the world.

The question posed by painting therefore regards its own unity.

An artist's idea takes concrete form in the search for a model that possesses more than one of the features of that idea: a journey towards a dimension that is absolute, a path that runs between the world of ideas and the world of things.

Like an individual who needs an injection of energy in order to effect his or her own existence.

Temporality is therefore one of the essential elements of this painting. In rendering a fugitive moment eternal, it captures something of time itself, conscious of the risk of freezing under the effects of melancholy, like a conventional still life.

It is time itself that is in question – time as the linear progression of things. Claudia's painting expresses that concept repeatedly, which is no surprise: time cannot be reduced, mathematically, to the terms of objective reality but slips into subjectivity and is inseparable from the processes by which it is measured. Time and again, from one painting to the next, but also within a single work. Past and future do not exist. There are simply three presents: past present, present, future present.

This combination explains the state in which Claudia Peill's pictorial space exists: is a play of emotions, perhaps, shifting from the artist to the canvas and from the canvas to the body and spirit of the viewer. This "game" provides a bridge connecting interior space and the exterior space and moderating and mediating between the forces that influence the individual and the areas touched by the desires that they generate. The artist finds, here, an archaic experience. The magic of this reticulated world, in which places and moments converge in the nodes of energy that are the relationships between man and his surroundings. Anyone walking through a landscape experiences, with greater or lesser clarity, that sense of a natural world in which a place, a time, a tree, a pathway or the rising of the sun have a value that mere geography cannot explain. And the rules of which lie in the imagination.

Claudia Peill's works, if we look carefully, generally evolve as a narrative, as narratives/stories whose meaning offers a kind of indirect answer; an answer that develops and unfolds in an imaginary terrain shared by artist and public. These "stories" are born of, or perhaps derive from multiple and very different sources, although all converge towards a single point. They all speak of transmission, of recollection, of

memory, of human relations, of “body”. They all converge around an ideal force, which for the artist is a conviction and almost a certainty: that memory is possible through interrelationship, and only through interrelationship. They all speak by means of a continual oscillation, by means of a system of binary relationships between opposites: the said and the unsaid; light and dark; the limpid and the opaque. To a certain extent they also recall the relationships that, in our lives and our experience of the world, unite “truth” and “fallacy”. They speak of the two as a single entity: because for art “fallacy” is an inherent element of truth just as truth can only be established through “fallacy”.

In this way all of Claudia Peill’s works weave circles of meaning around her universe; they indicate modes of access to and means of diffusion of a “sense”, of a creation which, since it speaks of transmission, must be – as hers is – easily transmittable.

Claudia Peill has always created stories, although in this case it might be more appropriate to say “narrative supports”: the viewer being asked to recompose and reinterpret them. (*Feedback, Neon, Pericolo di Morte*) In essence her work is therefore more allusive than it is narrative; more enigmatic than, as it sometimes seems, vaguely and/or truly autobiographical. The works that can be said to have inaugurated her journey are conceived as testaments to an existence, presented in no particular order; as in an album of memories (*Yo-yo, Una Volta, What’s your name*): like a collection of fragmented and fragmentary pieces of information about “her past”, they mark the beginning of a long series of returns to the past and to memory.

So the explicitly declared plan in her earliest creative period is to restore or, to put it better, to construct fragments of memory and of situations experienced. For this reason Peill utilizes photographic images, manipulated and, it seems, subjected to an initial form of annotation/registration of the time that has passed, while the “mute” section that flanks them is simply the unoccupied space of a screen/blackboard which it is left to the viewer to fill, complete and overwrite. But it also fills, in some ineffable way, the lapse of time that precedes and follows the spatial/temporal/corporeal information held in the image. The photographs utilized are not in themselves particularly instructive; they are the mere echo of a “documentary” objectivity; their identity is “other”. Some of her works are very deliberately fashioned along these lines and present, as their only material references, “documents” that are utterly and intentionally indistinct, only vaguely resembling reality. (*Peso Piuma ...*)

In her works of the early 2000s, up until the *Leptis Magna-Giorno/Notte* series, Claudia Peill seems “distant” from any fiction; her work, one might say, relates to a sort of desire to reconstruct the imaginary and project it into existence; to bundle together memories (rather than recollections) composing – for the viewer – the outlines of a “body”, of an existence as real as it is imaginary, as personal as it is collective. It is here, where the individual and the universal converge, that the artist chooses to reveal existence and her proof of it: the more random the evidence and the visual elements, the better they convey the universal experience of the sensations of existence itself and the artist’s idiosyncrasies. In fact above and beyond the outward reality that they transmit and describe, they also portray (albeit imperfectly and by omission) an artist obsessed with the idea of loss and of disappearance, focused on the question of identity, profoundly conscious of the absurdity of life.

Claudia Peill subjugates a contemporary medium (photography) rich only in stories devoid of history, and reveals the vanity of existence. “Every life is unique but all lives resemble one another”, seems to be the message of all the works in which she exhibits ranges and types of images rendered alike because they have been similarly aged by the passing of time and possess a similar spatial nebulosity: they mirror the gaps and imprecision of memory, the flickering of recollections, the falsity of perceptions. To see and to remember are not innate faculties; one learns to see and one learns to remember. (*Mimetico, Moresco ...*)

With and in all of this the artist seems to express the profoundest of her convictions: reality only exists as and thanks to the story, and the story is the only means by which it can be communicated.

For an artist whose work is rooted in the desire to communicate, singularity is of no value unless it is disconnected from any specific identity. In other words, the value of a work of art and of the tale it tells is dependent on its being a great deal more than anecdote.

The story that Claudia Peill tells in her works is ours. It is that of every viewer who recognizes him or herself in this general portrait of life, of reality, of everyday existence.

The character of this process (of making portraits and making stories) appears not to be the result of a process of stylization or of abstraction, because it is always in the detail of a particular subject that the artist brings us into contact with the universal.

The appropriation of images (the singularity of which often reflects the rules governing the “artistic photography” of family albums, postcards, photos of landscapes, holidays or travellers’ destinations) speaks of a deliberate appropriation of an ordinary art form that owes nothing to popular art in the sense of a folk art, but is simply a modern imagery, that of our own times, our own image. And it is thanks to the very cohesiveness and attractiveness of these intrinsic characteristics that Claudia Peill finds herself united with the viewer: the primary issue is not that of difference and differences but that of being part of a culture, a community and an era. Her motive is not aesthetic, nor political, it is existential.

The apparent insignificance of the photographic images does not invalidate the emblematic quality of Claudia Peill’s work but, on the contrary, her entire project draws nourishment from this quality and from a profound historical intent: she presents a wordless tale of humanity; history exactly as it is when captured at a specific moment in time, without the filters of intention or of a particular overtone. To put it another way, the artist’s entire oeuvre traces out a sort of cartography of the commonplace emotions that compose the portrait of our times, just as we live them and exactly as they have been lived.

The problem lies not in inventing life but in questioning it or, more simply, reading it; because that which we call life is not evidence, but opacity: a form of blindness; a kind of anaesthesia.

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