

PRESENTATION FOR THE EXHIBITION OF CARLO BERNARDINI, ROBERTO FALCONIERI AND GIULIANO GIULIANI, Galleria L'Isola, TRENTO, OCTOBER 2000

THE AMBIGUOUS LIGHT OF ART

God said: "let there be light" and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night..."

From the Book of Genesis, "The Creation".

Light in art, in order to exist, needs to be confronted by its opposite, darkness... In Carlo Bernardini's paintings and art installations, darkness is the pre-requisite to magically transform light into matter, and also to play with shadows and their mysteriously fleeting state, beyond the realm of the apparent. In Roberto Falconieri's paintings darkness is used as a projection of the artist's state of mind, preferring the brightness of the mind to real-life light which "is disturbing to the eye". In Giuliano Giuliani's sculptures finally, we find emptiness opposed to fullness: or that scarcely perceptible place in which the intrinsic force of matter and the magical touch of the artist coincide... The Ambiguous Light of Art.

In order to make the incorporeal nature of light and shadows visible, the use of darkness has been paramount in the work of Carlo Bernardini for the realisation of his artwork, and as a channel for the relationship with the end-user.

Taking advantage of the unusual technical and material potential, such as phosphorous for paintings – where marks appear like mysterious traces – and the optic fibres for the installations – welcoming us in evocative virtual spaces – Bernardini regards darkness as a King allowing light to take shape. But if looking at the paintings – made by a phosphorous strata on which the artist then applies uniform white on white, or on grey glazing – one is astonished from the progressive appearance of unexpected shapes which reveal themselves, as a photo negative, when the light gets dim; one gets a sense of being in a virtual space by interacting with the art installations. In the room's darkness, the eye's retina gradually gets used to perceive the mysterious sculpture: a volume made from a very thin optic fibre in the darkness, which turns into several ray of lights, depending on one's position in the room at any given time.

Playing with light and shadows Bernardini takes us into a journey beyond what is apparent, in a place in which we derive a feeling from materially touching an object, being at the same time aware of its dark side energy. It is impossible to speak about Roberto Falconieri's work without mentioning the dark areas present in the composition of his paintings: for Falconieri light is not associated with real things, but it is part of a "mental" form of brightness which is then translated into form on the canvas.

By bestowing to art a miraculous power through which one's desires are fulfilled, the artist distances himself from a study of reality to enter in the mysterious realm of symbols.

As dream-like traces of mnemonic images, his landscapes always look unreal, and the light, as a consequence, seems unnatural too. Far from being a reassuring element, the light instils fear, it makes us uncomfortable and provokes anguish. In his urban landscapes, in which an apocalyptic atmosphere hovers about, the light is uncertain: either too bright, wearing away the colours, or feeble, cold and inanimate. Not a cathartic light then, but a projection of a dark force on the canvas. For Falconieri then, the bright areas of his paintings – such as the white areas – symbolise a state of uncertainty, while in the dark areas – in which the colour black is predominant - the artist seems to find internal peace.

The absence of human form is a constant in Falconieri's work. In the half-light filtering through the building's half closed windows and the balconies he paints, the artist shows the internal contemplative nature of his work; and with the small painting "La Luce" ("Light"), a light switch whose shadow is reflected on a wall, Falconieri invites us to ponder on the symbolic value of the opposite of light: darkness, seen as a refuge... By removing matter and creating a new rotation between full and empty spaces, the sculptor re-invents new paths of light and shadows. But while light lingers on "full" spaces, shadows occupy empty spaces, so that in sculpture too, the light is ambiguous, and only the emptiness of darkness reveals a true artistic accomplishment.

If it is appropriate to speak of the ambiguity of light in Carlo Bernardini and Roberto Falconieri's work, since they both see light as an artificial product, in Giuliano Giuliani's case the ambiguity resides in the difficulty to find the exact spot where the light emanating from the sculpture itself and the shadows meet with the natural light, which is also a by-product of the artist's manipulation of matter. Giuliano Giuliani sculpts on "travertino" blocks, in which he inserts different materials such as chalk, pigments, and even cloth. These "soft" materials act as a counterbalance to the harshness and porosity of the "travertino" stone – saturated with vital strength – and Giuliani creates new shapes where the chiaroscuro elements vary according to the material on which the light is reflected upon. In the sculpture "L'Onda" ("The Wave") for instance one can observe the contrast between the harshness of the "travertino", and the lightness of chalk. However, if the "travertino" stone holds and protects the sacred sea exhalation, the light reverberates through the sea wave (exemplified by a wave of chalk) on to the earth (exemplified by the "travertino" stone), giving back to the archaic matter a new vitality.

Elisabetta Giovagnoni.