

The Language of Europe

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Everything that is there appears in photography. In painting everything that should be there appears. The strength of a hundred and fifty years of photography, before the arrival electronic systems that manipulate images, has created in our perception a kind of idleness, thus the relationship between photography and reality is direct, whilst the pictorial representation of the same reality is totally indirect. This is still true today, however with significant quantitative variants: in fact, as far as relations with reality are concerned, painting has remained coherent to its longstanding statutes, while photography instead, is under transformation, even if it maintains a much stronger link with reality. It tricks our sight, which doesn't always capture the visual and objective pretexts that makes a photo the registration of a field of vision.

How come we are talking about the manipulation of photographic images, which escapes the statutes of painting, when we talk about the works of Claudio Gobbi, who never ever wanted to be a painter, nor has he ever implemented the electronic elaboration of images, nor even traditional contrivances, like over exposure, colouring etc. How is it that in his photography we perceive some kind of "trick", which in other cases is evidently created through manipulation. His internal shots provoke a sense of suspense, of "lacking" although his subjects are not particularly mysterious, not shot in an enigmatical manner. It is clear the theatre, one of Gobbi's favourite locations, is the ultimate place of make believe, but, what about the changing rooms? The Foyer? The meeting rooms of a club in the suburbs? A church hall? A dance hall? Somehow, Gobbi manages to draw together all these places under the sign on a common atmosphere, created with a dual sociological and linguistic register. Sociological because through all his photographs taken in many different European cities, "Prague, Warsaw, Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, Milan..." we discover a vocation towards sociological research, carried out only the way a photographer can : through details, similarities, colours, the similar positioning of objects, furniture and decor, a relationship is established between places that pinpoint in the end a common culture, a European climate (in as much as research on old Europe may seem out of date, like holidays on the lake).

It is by no chance, that he seeks out, not only cities in which middle class, yet poor cultures are more deeply rooted, but also the typologies of places where it is probably easier to unveil them. In fact, just like in ancient paintings, it is in the same " hand of the artist that we recognize automatic details", which the painter applies to compositions ears, hands eyes thus creating a common atmosphere. The same kind of civilization can also be found in certain places and in certain habits, which could be for example, a theatre that isn't exactly in the city centre, or even a club for the elderly.

Gobbi demonstrates an extraordinary talent for capturing these aspects, by suggesting a harmonic plot which form and stop a European "social" horizon, however this aspect would never be so efficacious if it were not accompanied or rather, permeated by that so called linguistic issue we had begun to speak before, in regards to tricking our vision or suspending depicted atmospheres. Each snapshot has its own special symmetry, which already lies in the place where it is taken, which constitutes the demonstration of some kind of "sense of order" and is the simulation of middle-class decorum yet, "simmetry" from the artist point of view, who tends to favor this stylistic element, even when he photographs glimpses of things that are not truly symmetric, is however accentuated. Highlighting symmetries, which is a pure abstract geometrical attitude, between fake leather sofas or the doors that separate the entrances to men's toilets and women's, which already means the establishment of a dystonic atmosphere compared to reality.

However it is that “lacking”, that suspension, which we touched upon before, that gives a meaning to everything, and also justifies the sociological aspect of this European “screening”. The key missing element is the human race, but, in Gobbi’s photographs there is a residue of us, in small details that escape that sense of order, which if it is perfect, is also inhuman. Nevertheless it is not the missing elements that make these photos alien. The truth is that Gobbi behaves in real life as though he were before a canvas (probably without realizing it), this means that he eliminates all the elements that could disturb our vision of the scene, due to their excess of reality and because they could disturb our field of vision deeply. Thus something is physically missing in the places he immortalises “ a few posters on the wall, groups of objects placed upon windowsills etc”, this becomes a conceptual lack, because it transforms the meaning of photography, of that single click, as well as the very idea of taking photos. Photography remains photography, it doesn’t become pictorial expressiveness, but moves away from reality, thanks to this simple action, that vanquishes and reduces the no man’s land of certain disciplines.

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