

GALLERIA MASSIMO MININI

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giovanni anselmo

I met Giovanni Anselmo at the Sperone Gallery on Corso San Maurizio in Turin, back when I would go on pilgrimages to that temple of Arte Povera and minimalism: a radical, humble, austere space, concrete floor with little holes left by the roller, expansion anchors, white walls...

In those days, the slightest detail would enter the work to become part of it, and “Entering the Work” was the title of a famous piece where Anselmo, after placing his camera on a tripod with a timer, ran full tilt down a grassy slope. When the time was up, the camera would snap a shot of him having “entered the work.”

Details have been central to the work of contemporary artists for some time now, the way Last Judgments or pitched battles were in past centuries.

Why do artists no longer paint battle scenes with troops, helicopters, atomic bombs and all the equivalent paraphernalia of today’s wars, which rage on nonetheless?

The fact is that our vision of the World and Universe is constantly challenged by the revelations of science, which pushes the frontiers of our knowledge day by day, without ever reaching a point of stasis. We know that galaxies are moving away from each other at frightening speed. Then someone refutes this idea: so maybe they’re moving together at the same impressive speed.

Doubt is the hallmark of modern man, just as certainty characterized medieval or Renaissance man. That man who knew for a fact that the Earth was flat, that the sun revolved around it, God lived on high and devils in the furnace of fire, amid weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And Anselmo, a poet of that generation of Turin-based artists attuned to artistic developments around the world, saw his own shadow one long-ago day on Stromboli, with the morning sun projecting it towards infinity. The light of dawn, a flash of insight, the usual problem: Man can’t resign himself to death and tries with every means to find a way to survive, to prolong his journey first on Earth, then through the infinite universe.

The vehicle may be the mind, creativity, intuition, poetry, the dream of a stretched-out shadow, of a compass pointing to a far-off north, lined up with a slab of stone, a projector that casts a word (a detail) into the air, which will materialize only if someone seeks it out and really wants it. The way kids nowadays hunt Pokémon with their phones.

The revolution of conceptual art, the dematerialization of the object, has found an extraordinary exponent in Anselmo, who makes stones fly, lightens greys, rushes to enter into the work before it’s too late, paints an easterly ultramarine blue on the wall by a block of stone, which points north like a point of tension, energy, passage.

A place we will never reach, except through the mind, through our will, through the longing to arrive at an unknown moment, a safe harbor, a horizon that is a line or earth, to find a slab of anthracite three hundred million years old.

And so, as the Earth finds its bearings, the stars come a span closer, the greys grow lighter, we witness the interference in universal gravitation, and above all the artist allows us to see the panorama with the hand indicating it.

A photograph of infinity through the sky tells us that entering into the work is necessary if we want our breath to last, to take a safe direction in the cosmos, as the invisible is manifested with all its interference.

Western science, Zen philosophy, poetic insight, the artist’s vision, and the capacity to put all these approaches together: signals that Giovanni Anselmo both picks up and broadcasts.

We are in the desert and around us all is sand. We can make out nothing else. Whereas he has a built-in decoder that allows him to capture the wavelengths, forces, and images that hover in the air, but are invisible.

Anselmo renders them visible and presents them to us with open hands, like a gift: now we can see them too.

Massimo Minini