

La quadratura del cerchio Squaring the Circle

"Sensitizing empty space, intended as a dynamic moment of light, is the initial act of an inquiry that concretizes a presence extremely coherent with the urgency of recovering a qualitative supremacy of aesthetic making. This presence is an object-idea for which the object is the minimum contact of the idea with external reality."

I think of Francesco Lo Savio, of the concepts contained in these words of his written in 1961, but also of other sculptors like Uncini and Carrino of Gruppo Uno, and still more generally of all those Gestalt explorations developed during the sixties in Europe and America, when I observe and analyze the works of Delphine Valli that animate this exhibition. It might be risky for an art historian to juxtapose such eminent figures from the history of art, and in particular the history of sculpture in the twentieth century, with an artist of the latest generation, but I do it with some degree of conviction, conviction which comes from close knowledge of Valli's works not only from a perceptual point of view but also and particularly from the point of view of the thought that has generated them. In other words, in her working methodology I've found strong formal, procedural and conceptual analogies with the methodologies of the artists of the sixties. I recognise the same rigour imbuing the inquiry, or rather the capacity to make it a field of application for cognitive investigations into the interweaving relations between line, surface, volume, form and space, and into the consequent perceptual mechanisms triggered by their union and/or disjunction. I notice too a common sense of challenge in facing the problems of sculptural creation and of the drawings closely related to sculpture, always considered on the basis of the space in which they are to be inserted. And if we speak of challenge, the one made by Delphine Valli to the Galleria Ex Elettrofonica might be described as a match on a level playing field. On one side, the space of the gallery, characterised by curved forms that imprint a circular movement on the environment; on the other the sculptures, the installations, the drawings that set themselves against that environment with geometric forms that play mainly on acute and right angles. To this the artist introduces the term circumambulation as the most suited to expressing the existential dimension of the works exhibited and made purposely to trigger a dialogue with the environment. This concept, transferred over historical epochs from the cosmos to almost all the religions of the world, generally indicates a centripetal movement tracing a circumference around a real or ideal centre. "The title of the exhibition," writes the artist, "derives from the space of the gallery, which implies a path of this kind; I've operated a transfer from real to conceptual motion, as if all the work were straining towards a central point, an existential kernel."

We try to immerse ourselves in these works, ideally fused with the space that contains them, in order to understand the artist's intent. All the

works have been placed in such a way as to create a path that unfolds along the whole perimeter of the gallery. They are works that live within their own space of expressive autonomy, but at the same time they can be brought back to a single project. They are forms, as I said earlier, of a geometrical matrix, but they have little or nothing to do with the mathematical exactitude of squares, triangles and other forms that belong to this typology.

We're alerted straight away, the moment we perceive them, of a slippage, a certain ambiguity of representation due to a swerve, an error that leaves our senses perplexed and makes the certainties of a regular and pre-ordained vision vacillate. Whether sculptures or installations, all of the works are related in their propensity to offer themselves as impossible surfaces.

"The limit of the image", the artist maintains, "is that it determines a form". A further challenge of the artist, then, is that of avoiding immobility by creating transitory forms. This is another peculiarity that shows through when we observe the works on display: there's a sense of mutability that imbues all the works, as if wanting to direct attention to their indeterminacy and at the same time existing within an apparent concreteness. Even the colour used in painting portions of the surfaces performs this task of perpetual transformation. The colours employed are actually the first three of the alchemical procedure: black (nigredo), green (viriditas) and white (albedo). For Valli the alchemical process that she sets in motion within her works becomes a metaphor for the invisible transformations of our existence. Red (rubedo), contemplated but invisible, is not present in the works since it corresponds to the phase of concretization, or to the realization of the works themselves.

So, though indirectly, all the works rotate or rather, to use a term dear to Valli, circumambulate around the same concept. Delphine gets there through abstractions that we can interpret as successive subtractions to arrive at the central nucleus of the problematic object of investigation. The artist writes: "It's a question of thought directing an effort to avert itself from any concrete consideration: the circumstances, the reasons, the context - in short, to withdraw from the constructive relativity of experience and from questions of fact."

What emerges finally from these works and from the thought that gave rise to them is the capacity of Delphine Valli to live the artistic experience in a totalizing manner, to render it a life project by inhabiting a space-time appertaining to the art from which she manages to draw the qualities of amazement, estrangement and magic of just this dimension, restoring them in the end, as if by a spell, to the real world.

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