

BRUNO CORA ABOUT THE WORK OF JAN JEDLIČKA

Work of Jan Jedlička is very innovative. I met Jan Jedlička in the '90s, purely by accident. We were in a meeting with a number of artist friends, and someone introduced us to each other, it was Remo Salvadori. And we decided to set off on a journey... a visit to a friend, a writer named Loris Jacopo Bonomi, who lived in a castle in the Garfagnana area. The Garfagnana is still a very wild area of Tuscany, perhaps the harshest region. But in terms of harshness, perhaps we might talk of another place, the Maremma, which is where I actually got to know Jan's soul and his art. I remember a lot of things happened on that evening: it was pouring rain there was thunder and lightning... an evening from the end of the world! And in this castle, in the dark - at a certain point there was a power cut - we all felt like we were part of a Buñuel film. It was a fun evening.

We got to know one another, we looked at some interesting works, also works of literature. We even looked at a manuscript of the *Infinito* by Leopardi, who for us, in Italy, is an outright legend from a poetic/literary point of view. But after all this, it was the encounter with Jan that struck me the most, because he had a very discreet way of expressing himself, and usually, when you're getting to know an artist, they tend to be exuberant, they want to be at the centre of the scene, and in some ways even start to vie with one another, but on the contrary both Remo Salvadori and Jan were very softly spoken. And this aroused a great deal of curiosity in me to get to know him more and better. This was the start of a relationship, even a study partnership, revolving around his work, which I would now like to talk about. I believe the work of Jedlička stands out from that of many others because it is based on a number of fundamental elements. One key element is his great sensitivity towards everything that surrounds him. His attention is incredible. This is reflected widely in all his work: in photography, painting, drawing... A great deal of attention, typical of someone who finds a point of interest in everything he sees. There are no privileged elements: anything can give rise to a source of interest. This is the first aspect.

The second is his great skill in the use of various techniques: drawing technique, painting technique, engraving, intaglio technique, photography and filmmaking. In other words, a degree of versatility which is not common to all artists. And the third aspect is that anthropological foundation to his work. His interest in landscape is coupled with his interest in the people who live there, in an animal that lives there, a plant. A multifaceted and complex interest, one of an anthropological and phenomenological nature, which I find highly stimulating while looking at his work.

Each time, each cycle, each work, each season of work, as it were, stands out by virtue of this great richness, this possibility to come across subjects subjects that pique his interest and lead him to undertake a different sort of creation. Now I would like to speak about a number of these themes. First of all the Maremma. Of course, for an artist - as we know from the history of modern art - a landscape can constitute an endless theme of reflection.

Just as it was for Cezanne, with his *Sainte Victorie*, this famous mountain in Provence; observed for years, painted for years, with the desire to objectively grasp the essence of this visual reality which changed constantly, with the light, the time of day, the seasons. Likewise, where another artist is concerned like Monet, who spent over twenty years studying his *Nymphéas*, painting them, observing them. In a garden he put together himself in Giverny. That's another great experience. These are pages from the history of modern art that we can't forget. And so I would say that,

just like them... exactly like them but with a different subject, the work of Jedlička on the Maremma is an exemplary project; a work which entailed observation, staying in the place, and so an in-depth knowledge of the physical relationships of space, of light... Even the material of the place; nature and mankind, the people, the inhabitants.

All this complex reality, observed for forty years, it means an epidermal knowledge, knowing this territory like the back of your hand, and an almost daily practice of his artistic work, an enormous creative commitment. All this is highlighted, right from the drawing stage, which is one of the first ways in which an artist relates to a place, to a landscape in phenomenological terms. Asprawling landscape, desert-like, which in every season presents a different physiognomy. This constantly aroused his curiosity, his imagination, and it probably led Jan to experience several wonderful epiphanies, on realising that a stretch of mud, of earth, placed next to another, conjure up a chromatic relationship: two greys or two blacks, two ochres or two yellows.

This mud suddenly became a source of polychromy. To the point that we even achieved a number of painting results with these types of earth, once dried out and processed - even using ground-up stone - which may readily be compared to mosaics or to other polychrome techniques. For us Italians, also in Mediterranean culture, this is in our DNA. It's an element of great importance, because all our 15th and 16th-century art used types of earth to paint frescos, in churches, in palazzos, everywhere. We also see this colour in Jan's work, and indeed for us he has become a Mediterranean artist, an Italian. His returning to the same places ensures that we may appreciate this investigation, which he always deploys.

The subjects that Jan Jedlička addresses are manifold. For example, at a certain time, he became curious about a very meaningful relationship There: that many people never think about, because they're afraid of reflecting on life and death, while for Jan this has always provided an eloquent subject of comparison. And he comes out with a collection of photographs on the city of the living and that of the dead. It features an extraordinary collection of cemetery architecture and funerary portraits, the thoughts of the living, as it were; that all this was once alive and it then became an inhabitable city, just as life leads us all to visit our loved ones. It's an eloquent experience, I think is worth getting to know. This led Jan to produce a number of books, which are indeed like chapters of history, or tales.

Among these, I like to recall this book called „Le Cuoche“ - The Cooks. What do cooks have to do with art? A lot, I might say! Because as I was saying, the anthropological element was one of his constant stimuli. Behind a window, framed in the wall of a restaurant, we have an image of what goes on in the kitchen; the behaviour of these women as they work. It's alchemy... they are the alchemists of cookery. Today, any cook can become a star. On television we have programmes about chefs cooking, and they have even risen to the point of placing the work of artists in the shade. In actual fact, this is a pioneering work. He anticipated this whole television and photographic trend. It's very beautiful, an extraordinary experience. There are also human relationships, established between Jan and these ladies working and producing food which he himself was very much part of. It's a complete work, as we say, be it from an artistic, aesthetic, photographic or anthropological point of view. Over time - a great number of these little books were produced, in which we rediscover these journeys of his. For example, this is a „Winter journey to the sea“ And here there's exceptional quality, I was talking about before.

The fact that he gets curious about lots of elements that are commonly overlooked. This is something typical of the artist... doing this. everything can be of interest: the fencing around a piece of land with barbed wire, train tracks, shop windows glimpsed at speed, even speed itself can become a subject; that the camera can record. And so everything becomes a reason for curiosity, interest, discovery. And this is a virtue that we all have when we're children, and then we lose it. Yet the artist maintains this curiosity throughout his life. This was also demonstrated by Picasso, who in this 20th century - which is actually now past history - was one of the first great children of history. I think there's a particular reflection that's important to make: on Jedlička's painting. Meaning his painting is not just

made of mud or ground-up stone, but also of a close philological relationship with the history of colour, which for example, speaking of Tonalism, has many an illustrious predecessor. I believe, it would not be wrong to consider his painting, and also to pick out the differences between his painting and that of an artist like Giorgio Morandi, in Italy, who always painted still lifes: bottles, vases - always the same subjects. with the shifting of chromatic relationships, his work became an endless philosophical reflection.

This is also what we see in Jedlička's painting, exactly the same! In the shift of chromatic relationships between the two patches of colour, we can understand that that almost philosophical reflection on colour is infinite, limitless; it could carry on for a hundred years. And on the other hand, with a more objective approach, we see there's a similar approach in the painting of Gerhard Richter, when he put together samples of thousands of colours. However, in Richter's observation, all this is due to his relationship with objectivity, almost with distance from reality, which Richter, as he says, portrays indifferently. Then there's the elaboration, through the element of mobility, of opacity, of movement, which often endows his work with an almost melancholic nature. And so he shifts into a dimension of time. The difference between these two great samplings of colour, one by Gerhard Richter and the other in Jedlička's painting, lies right here: that Jedlička participates in that colour: he digs it up with his own hands, he extracts it. It's not a paint that he goes and buys in a shop; it's a colour that comes from the type of graphic pantone that he chooses; it's a lived-in colour, a poetic colour; a colour which is always filtered by the light of the places where he extracts that soil. The experience I just described, with regard to colour - probably also recalled by the fact that both of these artists that I talked about, for ex. Gerhard Richter produced a stained-glass window in Cologne Cathedral, how they worked with a translucency. This experience that shows us how this use of colour may be applied to the decoration of sacred buildings, like a church, as well as to environments of this kind. It's the experience carried out together - because we began this work through the engineer Angelo Vecchio, who had designed a church in Catania, in Sicily, And he asked me who might be the artist best suited to making a series of works, using light, windows and stained glass. It immediately came to mind that the experience most akin to what he wanted was that of Jan Jedlička. And so we went together to Catania, and then that marked the start of the project.

This work was deployed and applied to various parts of this architecture, and I believe that every time - both during the planning stage and its execution, which entailed a very lengthy study on Jan's part - it was carried out in an excellent manner. - as this film shows - the success of this work lies in having to do with a rather problematic element, one which is always very difficult for a contemporary artist to approach: i.e. the concept of the sacred through the use of light.