

# A THOUGHT OF PAINTING

In the painted works by Diego Esposito (who I have known for many years) I have always sensed the inescapable and characteristic presence of a so-called “thinking” element. Seen in a certain light, this is peremptory proof yet it is no easy matter to identify - without reductions or generalization - most authentic nature. I believe, especially, that it would be important to understand *where* this element works so as to grasp its unique ability to generate. I will try to do so in these notes which will refer to the ample one-man show that Diego Esposito held at Palazzo Fabroni the spring of 1998. For that occasion he also created several new pieces. Naturally, in speaking of a “thinking” trait of painting, I am not saying anything new. It is indeed true that painting has always had a complex relationship with thought. In painting it is possible, on the one hand, to see the effects of a powerful internal axis which, always secretly at work, sometimes aspires to promote exclusively and in a declared way the intellectual values of the image, its ability to mime conceptual thought to the point of completely replacing it. When this axis prevails (as in fact happens in a singularly cyclical way) we muse observe that its results offer us nothing that thought would not have known how to achieve on its own. Saturated as it is with concepts, the image, in such cases, does not stimulate any truly original conception. This position, however, can be overturned because painting’s thought can aim at concentrating itself entirely in the sensitive material of sight. There is, in fact, no doubt that the organization of the visible, together with the traces left there by the act of seeing, reveals a schematization that is completely incarnated in the image; a silent and autonomous articulation of the visible world that leads us to conclude that painting is able to conceive and reflect on its own.

However, in this case too (albeit to a minor degree) painting offers nothing to thought for the very reason (opposed to the first) that it really does not intend to make anything of it. Hostile to any dialogue with the “other”, here the image withdraws into its magnificent self-sufficiency.

But there is also a third kind of relationship between painting and thought. More precisely, it has to do with a relationship which, being impossible to reduce to the other two, explores rather their crossing of reciprocal borders. So it is here that what I would define as a real “thought of painting” arises. Its elected place is that intermediate area which opens up between image and concept and which, in this opening, alludes to something that precedes both of them and keeps them in a relationship that is constant in its structure but inexhaustible in its manifestations. If this intermediate area is, as I believe, the “thinking” element of Diego Esposito’s painting, we can expect that the single works or maybe even the entire arrangement of a large show would each time constitute the visible configuration of this phenomenon.

I will talk about this possibility by developing several lines of thought: in other words, I will try to recall here one or two of the many things that came to mind as, last May, I walked through the rooms of Palazzo Fabroni. So what follow, then, are - in the two meanings of the possessive form - the thoughts of painting.

The first thought was, typically, a hint of anticipation: right from the entrance and then with increased authority, something tells the visitor, “If you want to see, look for the rules”. Will there be, for instance, a rule of colour able to unify the great richness and apparent heterogeneity of these works? And will this rule, in turn, have a relationship to the forms and the space? And again: couldn’t such a strong request for one or more principles of unification be, by chance, a general rule valid for the entire course of the exhibition? If it is like this - and there is no doubt but that it is like this - then the visible will contain just as much as the invisible, the forms present will contain as much as what connects them and distinguishes them because what they “show” (the rule of sight) is not, in all senses, a thing that can be seen.

The large wooden arch in the first room seemed to confirm this hypothesis and even articulate it with further and unexpected contributions. Only what is connected can be held at a distance, I thought as I observed the arch; and again: an arch is thrown from one wall to another, thus an entire spatial dimension, that had never been there before, is literally *highlighted* by this link. In this way space has entered a new order of the visible by virtue of a light in the form of a marvellously arched and heavy piece of wood. This wood, which is light in space, served as my first, very visible rule. And so, as I walked up a flight of stairs, I was not surprised to discover the gold which, invisible from the ground, covers the convex part of the arch. It did not surprise me because I had just thought, or rather seen, that even that which shows belongs, like one of its manifestations, to the sense of sight. Let me draw my conclusions. One rule tells me that I am authorized to go from the visible to the invisible, to oscillate between the present and the absent without the slightest danger of being uprooted from the senses. This is because the senses anchor me to the point that I have already found - in the gold’s genuine splendor - the incarnation of my idea that wood can light up space. I find myself on this balancing point or in this interval, but I am firmly here because the sensible world has given me a rule - and not only a vague feeling whereby to think and see. Now it will only be a question of corroborating, modifying or integrating this rule. In this way I discover that I could follow any of several itineraries. That is, I discover that my rule is, in turn, a source of rules. I discover it when the intense blue of the *Cascata* makes me reconsider the ideas of joining and separating in a different and even more productive way. I observe that if the form of the cascade takes care to deconstruct the connected spaces of the consecutive rooms that it crosses, it is up to colour to reconstruct a new unity which, however, is only subordinately spatial. And I ask myself: where does this new interval place me, this order that keeps me in the balance between deconstruction and reconstruction, between space, form and colour? And how can such, a perfectly cohered structural order offer me and deny me at the same time the certainty of a stable support? I suddenly realize that this question requires time. That is, I realize that it could never be exhausted with an exact reply because its resolution is entrusted to a process in which I can only anticipate - as if listening to a piece of music - the possible returns and eventual concentration, at the end, in a single

figure. I will seek out that blue again if I really want to understand the connecting mechanism. And, of course, I will find it. I will find it in different ways and again in the last room, set into the polychrome score which, evidently, right from the beginning dictated the temporal "movement".

So it was not enough, then, to put thought to work in a spatial area able to postpone the presence and the visible without disincarnating them; the sensible tract of the form, its outlining fields of colour, had to know how to attract thought right into the temporal quality of the opening, unexpectedly making it into chromatic material. The form thus holds colour closed in its boundaries and at the same time allows it to unfold, elsewhere, as a pure returning emergence, a regulated rhythmic manifestation.

Elsewhere and here, too, of course: here where I am seeing it. Here where I am thinking it. Here where it could never be so integral if it wasn't, and instead it is, the reciprocal crossing of the border between that blue and its thought.

*Pietro Montani (1998)*