

## THE ZENIT AND NADIR OF A REGARD

A recent cycle of works by Diego Esposito provides food for thought about the altered aesthetic and conceptual foundations of a contemporary work of art. In fact, among the many tensions that vitalized 20th-century artists, some drove them to conceive their work according to artistic criteria and aspects which accentuated its freedom from conventionality or prevalent customs (albeit of art) and, in any case, from the widespread norm which encouraged the enjoyment of a work without further stimulating the viewer's usual perceptive faculties and curiosities. I refer precisely to that series of plastic experiences which focused in various ways on stimulating our capacity for imagination bordering on the limits of possible perception or on those presuppositions of perception on which aesthetics was based until the 1950s. In keeping with this chronological anchor and among the earliest signs of that influence, I would be inclined to cite certain works by Yves Klein or Piero Manzoni, and subsequently by other artists such as Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti, Gino De Dominicis, Eliseo Mattiacci, Claudio Parmiggiani and, on a parallel course at times, even Diego Esposito.

Klein, in 1958 in fact, initially expressed his pursuit of what was beyond the material world in his *The Void* shown at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, although he later castigated it in his acts in Hessenuis in Antwerp (1959) and in Paris, along the Seine (1962). Manzoni strained the tolerance of his admirers' esteem and faith in art with his *Artist's Shit* (1961), along with the other artists cited above who pressed the existence and fruition of a work of art toward other arduous limits. Boetti, for instance, focused on that state of the imponderable typical of a large part of reality. The intention of his *Annual Lamp* (1966) was to create a device that *semel in anno* would come to life – like the realization of an idea which, quite probably, escaped almost everyone's attention – and turn itself on and off in the space of just a few instants. De Dominicis, on the other hand, not only focused on the impalpability of a plastic body in his "pyramids" and invisible "statues", but also on the utopian goal of the immortality of his own self. Mario Merz intended his works in the shape of an igloo to hide the reality of his existence by tracing the famous, imperious exhortation written in neon around the domes "Objet cache-toi" (1968). Parmiggiani, frequently challenged perception and even imagination and, according to various intuitions and creations characterized by the subtraction of materiality and by absences, gave birth to such works as his *Displacement* (1970), *Earth* (1988) and even *Clavis* (1975), the first of a series ultimately scattered around the world.

It is precisely in this range of experiences that a conspicuous and interesting part of Diego Esposito's work can be situated. In fact, during a stay in Turkey in October, 1986, he performed and, at the same time, documented an act which ritualized the occultation of one of his works in ceramic. He boarded a boat with the work and in the open sea facing the Bosphorus Strait, after briefly showing the conical, multicolored sculpture inclined toward north-west on the railing of the small island lighthouse, Leander's Tower, he lowered the work into the blue waters of the Strait and sank it.

The object, which from that moment on became invisible, nevertheless left the memory imprinted with a powerful and lasting sense of suggestion. It is clear, as it was for Parmig-

giani's *Earth*, that the impossibility of observing a work does not cancel its existence. Esposito, in that gesture, consigned the duration and safeguarding of the poetic properties of his work to memory rather than to sight.

This act had been suggested to him – with a certain probability – by a group of his previous creations called *Invisible Objects* (1985). Esposito had considered those works invisible since, in their development, his use of a high-powered flame had turned his shapes red-hot and apparently invisible. It followed, in my opinion, that his subsequent works, which we can see in the present show, were the result of possible declinations of that necessity for dematerializing them and thereby for highlighting the conceptual properties they inherently contained.

On the basis of those presuppositions, in 1995 Esposito executed the first of a cycle of works which is still in progress. He placed his *Hephaestus*, a large block of green Mergozzo granite set with a chrome-plated brass eyepiece in the garden of Giorgio Fantoni's Villa Pasina in Asolo (Vicenza). The monolith – conspicuously visible this time – took its title from the Greek God of fire and metal forging (Vulcan), the son of Zeus and Hera who was born lame and hurled twice from Mount Olympus into the sea by his father, but saved and nursed by the Nymphs Thetis and Eurynome on the island of Lemnos. According to mythology, he was also associated with Prometheus and his trials and tribulations.

Another work apparently similar to *Hephaestus* but made of serpentine green marble – the same marble found in the Prato and Florence Cathedrals and widely used throughout Tuscany in important examples of Romanesque architecture – is in the permanent collection of the Museo Pecci in Prato, placed in the garden circling the museum in a position precisely coinciding with the coordinates of its title: 43° 51' 678" N – 11° 6' 570" W (2001).

In the wake of such executions, new versions of similar plastic shapes are currently under way and destined to California, Argentina, Germany, Korea, Japan, China. But it is of prime importance for us to understand the possible relationships between this cycle of Esposito's works and those prior to it. Equally important is finding the nexus between these and the dominant concept underlying the work of Klein, Boetti or Parmiggiani. If we consider the topological significance on which Esposito's decision to disperse his works in such mutually distant but viewable locations was based, we can understand the reciprocal invisibility that leads the viewer of each work to imagine the others and compare them mnemonically in his mind. The fact that they are simultaneously unobservable does not prevent those works from sharing a sensibility acting as a hinge on thought rather than merely on physical perception. Furthermore, in each of those mirroring "eyepieces" the blue of the sky reflects a vast spatial dimension and, like the mouth of a well, is phenomenologically capable of introjecting latitude, density and dizzying depth into it. The convex orb, like a mirror, with the refractory capacity of its mineral inertia unleashes the imagination's potential for accommodating infinite space. It is as if what is outside and inside a body were joined in the well of a regard, the same way the sky and earthly depths meld together according to an invisible but poetically significant *axis mundi*. Or, as if the

acts of artists, in the geological chaos prior to mankind, had inserted a device into our awareness which, like an antenna, was capable of perceiving, of amplifying and revealing dimensions of order and harmony never previously perceived. In this light, there are numerous similarities between Esposito's most recent creation and his previous works which both evoked the quality of sound and the archetype of the well. The detailed indications for positioning each of these sculptures is the objective and impelling vehicle of an ideal relation in pursuit of a simultaneous compresence and ubiquity beyond that which is actually real and possible. But, as Dostoyevsky taught us, that which takes place in our thoughts already belongs to the sphere of reality.

*Bruno Corà*

From *Diego Esposito*. 43° 51' 678" N – 11° 6' 570" W, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, 2004.