

Aldo Grazzi

Evanescenze

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With Aldo Grazzi's exhibition *Evanescenze* at Spazio Berlendis, we wanted to continue the long-standing collaboration with the artist that began in 2013 with the first solo exhibition presented at Marignana Arte. That first exhibition was followed by several others in a journey that recently led to the exhibition *Illusioni* (Illusions) and the release of the book *Illusioni. Il tempo è dalla mia parte* (Illusioni. Time is on my side).

While the exhibition *Illusioni* was centered on the works that Grazzi created by making the Masai art of bead weaving his own, with *Evanescenze* (Evanescences) *Spazio Berlendis* hosts a series of works that the artist created between 1994 and 2006 using fibre nets as a support on which he drew impalpable and visionary figures and geometries with his scissors. Underlying these works is a conception of a repeated artistic gesture that, like a mantra, investigates and visually expresses a meditation on the mystical and spiritual dimension of the human experience. The exhibited works are thus essential to understand the languages of a complex and multiform artistic research, a complexity that - as Luca Massimo Barbero has rightly emphasized - never surrenders and could never be reduced to didactic forms.

For these reasons, we felt that only the words of the artist could guide the visitor along the exhibition. The interview with Aldo Grazzi that follows this brief introduction was conducted with this aim: in the artist's words we find the autobiographical depth of the origin of these works. We also find the underlying elements of his philosophical vision, the awareness of the insuperability of the distance between the word that describes and the work of art that expresses - in an *evanescent* and therefore evolving way - a profound spiritual and aesthetic quest.

However, we would like to add one further element to Aldo's discourse about the choices behind the creation of his works. During a conversation on the set-up of the exhibition, we were deeply struck by an observation he made on the idea of paradise, on how the immateriality and spirituality of the works on display referred for him to that dimension. We thought of one of Dante's most beautiful tercets, the one in which the poet, trying to describe the supreme vision, his gaze at the end of the journey, describes the origin of the truth of all things as a book: *In its profundity I saw ingathered / and bound by love into one single volume / what, in the universe, seems separate, scattered!*

¹ In Italian: *nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna / legato con amore in un volume / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna*. English reference: Columbia University, Digital Dante:

<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-33/>

The pages of our lives are "scattered", they look like flying sheets of paper in disarray. In reality, a profound order binds them together since their origin. This image is perhaps best suited to define the path of this exhibition. The human figure - essentialized and placed as the harmonic canon of all the compositions – is presented in the continuous becoming of its *evanescence* in all the series on display. From *Pagine* (Pages) to *Contatti* (Contacts), from *Ruota e rifletti* (Rotate and reflect) to *Gira e rigira* (Twist and turn), to *Assiali* (Axials). Grazzi's art, however, is not limited to considering the human figure as the elementary unity of complex harmonies. It goes further, elevating it to a canon of disorder, precisely because - as he says in the interview - "perhaps disorder is just such an exaggerated order that our mind struggles to comprehend".

That of Aldo Grazzi is a rebellious paradise. It is rebellious because it is built from man and using man as the canon of all harmony. The human figure lives in the 'squared' pages, in the flying sheets of his experience. But if in Dante the poet does not have the words to describe the divine vision, here the artist no longer has a figure capable of defining the harmony of the infinite. This is why in *Preghiere* (Prayers), the last series in the exhibition, the image of man can no longer be drawn. In the almost hypnotic mantra that cuts through the drawing, the human being finds space only as an absence: only the artist's thought remains, representing nothing but his own gesture.

Interview with Aldo Grazzi

Let's start from the beginning. What is the origin of the works in this exhibition?

To the joy of my mum and dad, I announce that from today I am here too: Aldo Grazzi, May 14th, 1954. I was born in Pomponesco, a small municipality in the Lower Po Valley on the Po River where I spent my childhood.

Did that past bear any relation to the exhibited works? What is there of that time, in the work you have been doing by cutting out nets?

There is an important relationship: my father was the town barber, as a child I loved to go to the shop in winter and stand by the sawdust stove where I would warm myself. Amidst the voices of the customers who were always discussing about something, I would follow the ticking of my father's scissors like a lullaby. It was a sound that brought me total relaxation and when I started working with nets, I heard the same sound as those scissors. This also encouraged me to continue, I want to hear that sound again.

You have made it perfectly clear to us, and in a very emotional way, the meaning of your choice: that of using a rather unusual tool for drawing, the scissors. But could you also tell us why you were attracted to nets, why you chose this type of material?

I had been drawing with beads for years, it had become a habit that I no longer abandoned. So much so that even now for me the drawing is in squares. I find it interesting because even in drawing, the square leads you to conceive a specific type of work. I think of carpets, tapestries, embroidery. When I saw the nets, I saw big square sheets and I wondered what I could do with them. This gave rise to my cutout idea: by enlarging those small squares I created a larger square for my design. My nets are large drawings, sculpture and painting. Although it makes sense to look at them as extreme painting, extreme in the very conditions and values of painting.

So, we have large drawings made with scissors, the reset of the basic values of painting that at the same time evoke the thought of an 'extreme' painting. Everything seems to fit into a vision that has as its center the idea of order and an extremely rational use of space. How do you come up with the compositions you create on your nets?

My works are compositions of forms. These creations originate from a specific canon, that of the human figure as the foundation of all proportion. Although my human figure is only expressed for what allows it to be recognized as such, it is this figure that creates all the relationships of the composition. It is from the human figure that the whole design is crafted through reflex patterns and rotations, plays of overlapping, weaving and anti-weaving, which create amazing effects. This is also where the difficulty of the work lies: since it is the figure itself that guides the entire composition, even the slightest error in one part of the work disrupts the order and sense of the whole.

Could you tell us in more detail about the series you decided to show in the exhibition at Spazio Berlendis?

I think what I said about the canon given by the human figure and its repetition reflected, upside down or turned within the composition already explains the series entitled *Ruota e riflessi* (Rotate and reflect). The series *Pieno* (Full), on the other hand, originated from a different need that in a certain sense is specular, but diametrically opposed, to the one underlying *Ruota e riflessi*. By dint of working on symmetry and proportions, at a certain point I couldn't stand that perfection any longer, I wanted to break it. But how to do that? I couldn't just randomly insert something in such a way that all that symmetrical, ordered system of lines would lose its meaning and shatter into disorder. I couldn't do that, so I tried to emphasize the idea of order: to make surfaces that were so orderly that they tended to become a sort of an Ariadne's thread capable of solving the labyrinth. In exaggerating the complexity of order, I realized that I was beginning to perceive it as disorder. Perhaps disorder is just an order so hyperbolized that our minds struggle to comprehend it. The *Zanzi* series developed from the same idea, that of doing something quite complicated as an interweaving of lines, but where the empty and full spaces were now in balance. Also, in the whole composition it was possible to see the search for harmony between the worked and unworked parts of the piece.

On the other hand, with the *Contatti* (Contacts) series I wanted to create small concentrations of forms, again based on the human figure. Each concentration stands in relation to the other connected with a line, thus creating something like a cosmic map where stars linked with lines form constellations. In *Pagine* (Pages), I wanted to do the opposite: the shapes are the same, but the relationships are missing, they are without contact. In *Assiali* (Axials) the order that was predominant in the other works change: there are many parts. It is as if I took apart *Ruota e rifletti* (Rotate and reflect) and instead of having the figures revolve around a center, I direct them and place them axially, one on top of the other with only one axis. The series *Pregchiere* (Prayers) were also an achievement for me. I abandoned any form and I stressed, even in me, the procedure, the idea of the mantra, the idea of repetition, the reiterated gesture.

One last question: why did you choose *Evanescenze* (Evanescence) as the title for this exhibition?

Because *evanescent* is what can change colour. Evanescent is something that is in slight motion: nets appear differently according to the way they are hit by light. This idea of evanescence is inherent in the nets themselves.