

That bellows like a cave. The light from outside burns the plate. Shadows confuse and reveal.
 The process is slow and requires attention, care and passion.
 A crafted optical bench, but precise enough to know the geometry.
 With surgical attention the light sculpts sculptural bodies.
 Blinding whites and deep blacks, abrupt passages and dissonant phrasing: impressions, like etymology - exact science - teaches.

It is a short circuit of suggestions that emerges from the photographic surface of the works of Luigi Ballario, all united by a mythological, almost heroic echo.

The places are peripheral, rural, not particularly welcoming, surrounded by deafening silence: the city, Prato, its birthplace, the Paduan countryside, but also the green of Dublin up to the Far East, the 798 district of Beijing. A body, often naked, breaks into those places and there it imposes itself physically, presenting itself as a muscular unit, with its heavy specific weight and with its face covered with improbable loopholes.

The first spark of this short circuit lights up thinking of the incipit of the fundamental text *Sulla Fotografia*, by Susan Sontag, in which the myth of Plato's cave is recalled: it is 1977 and the American criticism traces with admirable lucidity the contours of a condition of visual imprisonment that keeps humanity anchored to photographic images, giving the illusion of having the whole world in mind. Not only: through photography the world multiplies and with it the possibilities of interaction with what surrounds us.

Leaving aside the political and sociological influence of Sontag's considerations, the myth of the cave and photography intertwine here in a new direction. There is no imprisonment, but rather a certain captivity of the gaze that is not satisfied with just the eyes and therefore appropriates the photographic procedure so that it becomes the key to access the investigation of the world. There are no caves, ideal worlds and truths to reach, but different ways of looking and living, born in the darkness of a bellows. It is the affirmation of a process that neither settles in the cave nor outside it, but in the fateful moment of blinding, what lets the eyes burn and changes the look that will come.

Linguistic action has its root in Ballario's eyes, a sieve of what exists, and its essence is revealed in the priming process, that is in the chemical writing that light operates on the plate with dilated exposure times.

The operation is concentrated: light strikes boldly but chemistry reacts slowly. The artist is there, committed to being a body, not so much a craftsman but as an object, a thing among things.

What Ballario is interested in seems to be the discovery of the world through light and the possibility of stumbling in himself to recognize himself.

What remains of those impressions?

A pseudo presence that is the identification of an absence. The body is present at the time of laying and then appears as a luminous trace on the plate.

The antagonism between presence and absence is resolved in the strident dialogue, far from being peaceful, between positive and negative, black and white, the architectural support of a seeing conjugated to an instinctive randomness.

The very aspect of pure research, technical even before being poetic, gives another spark: the memory goes to the photographic experiments of the twenties of the last century, in the Bauhaus and surrealist sphere. Think of the Rayographies of Man Ray, the Schadografie of Christian Schad and even more of the experiments of Moholy Nagy. It is not simply aesthetic similarities, as in some cases they would not be so risky, as much as a recurrence of intentions: Ballario does not intend to create another world, but challenge the eye and the usual way of seeing, as well as being there.

What results is a skilful regular course in an only apparent randomness, the surprise of unusual points of view, the geometric enchantment of antagonisms, the harmonious alternation of whites and blacks that recall the sharp contrasts of Edward Weston; and, above all, the sculptural and performative potential of his photography.

The body, in fact, however much it traces, emerges from the surface, weighs in the eye and affirms itself as a survivor. The observer cannot neglect to question himself about the destiny of that body, about the history that brought him there because the physical tension that contracts the muscles of that body is

evident, which, however still, releases vitality.

Once again Sontag's reflections come to our aid and reveal the third spark that springs from Ballario's work: photography, or rather the photographic process, as the heroism of vision. Not only, as in the words of critics, the heroism of the gaze that pierces the banality of reality, interpreting it, but the heroism of the time dilated of the light that writes on the plate.

Once the miracle of the image is accomplished, light and time continue to act silently on the photographic surface, transforming the black and white of the print into unexpected chromatisms, blue and pink turns.

Light, an enchanting craftsman, reveals the slow passing of time, creates new forms, generates new colors and illuminates the immobility of that body in tension, quivering in the affirmation of its heroic presence in the world.

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