

The World Is neither True nor Real, but Alive.

Friedrich Nietzsche¹

There is a rapid and limited span of time over which humanity has constructed its existence and there is an archaic and perceptually infinite time that escapes the control of the human being: it is the everlasting instant of nature, an uninterrupted flow whose effects are revealed to our gaze as traces left by a passage. Like punctuation, those traces define a before and an after, fix a temporal interval and assign meaning to events. Thus the footprint, for example, allows us to understand when an animal has passed and in what direction it was going. In the same way modern humankind has constructed monuments and buildings to mark its presence in a particular place and at a specific moment.

So the sign or even what is meant by the minimal gesture is the element that intersects and runs horizontally through different temporal perspectives: in the animist vision it is the manifestation of the spirit, while in contemporary culture it is the affirmation of the singular and subjective point of view. In this sense, the research of the young Brazilian artist Maria Laet can be seen as poetics of the sign. Through the use of materials with organic qualities (like gauze, balloons, fibre or sand, wind, breath and milk) and relying chiefly on the media of photography and drawing, her works express the need for and the possibility of a reconciliation of the human gesture with nature.

As the artist herself suggests, 'all the elements in nature express the different ways in which we relate to the world, to others and to ourselves. Personally I am attracted by fluid materials because they possess a certain amount of malleability in relation to the context. They have the capacity to reproduce and be part of the movement of the real, of something that is organic, mutable and impalpable.'

The traces left by a balloon, by the artist's own body, by graphite on paper or by milk on asphalt are the a-temporal residues of an action performed, but one from which the viewer is systematically excluded, a continual allusion to a gesture that slips through the fingers. Maria Laet's works are an exercise in essentiality and elegance that, while they are hidden from the sight of the viewer, hint at a process that is an accumulation of moments.

Trace is the present tense of what has already happened. It is the memory of an action fixed, for example, on the porosity of paper as in the series *Untitled (Dialogue Series. Blowing)*, 2008, in which the artist has blown on small amounts of ink, creating forms that are not calculated but wholly random, or in the traces left by balloons in the space of a room, as in the work *Untitled (Dialogue Series. Balloon and Body)*, 2007.

The poetics of gesture, like Gaston Bachelard's material imagination, requires an identification and analysis of the specific forms through which reality is made manifest. In this sense Maria Laet has been influenced, although in an entirely indirect way, by the Constructivist and Gestalt tendencies

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *La Filosofia nell'epoca tragica dei Greci e scritti dal 1870 al 1873*, a cura di Giorgio Colli e Mazzino Montinari, tr. di Giorgio Colli, Adelphi, Milano 1973.

of the Neoconcrete movement, which saw the work of art as a living organism, as a *quasi-corpus*. This is the historical and cultural root that the artist continues systematically to re-examine and re-elaborate through her work. Thus in its bare essentiality

Untitled, 2010, a video that shows a performer in the act of playing a tuba with a transparent membrane fixed over the end, expresses the poetic sense of phenomenal reality, that of the laboured breathing which is reflected in the contraction and expansion of the thin membrane.

So Maria Laet does not believe in the disappearance of nature and its replacement by the exclusive power of social relations, as the French philosopher Gabriel Tarde had imagined in *Fragment d'histoire future*.

If the human and the natural must necessarily coexist for their mutual survival it is because, as the artist herself pointed out, there is a real correspondence of forms and movements, a total and organic architecture that is at one and the same time the property of humanity and of nature.

The artist succeeds in capturing the moments of greatest tension and attraction between different vital substances, and she does it by fixing the event on paper or in a photograph at the moment it takes shape. The simplicity and decisiveness of the gesture, moreover, express the awareness of a living totality in which humankind and nature are parts of a heterogeneous whole.

Any attempt to separate them is therefore just another reason for reaffirming their indivisible union.

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