

Essay By Ilaria Bonacossa

Stéphanie Nava's exhibition *L'Ombre de l'autre rive (The Shade of the Other Riverbank)* leads us through spaces emotionally charged with suggestions and memories, threats and promises. Her landscapes and installations create in a few square metres mental places capable of taking the viewer on a disturbing journey in space and time. Corrupting domestic spaces and architectural landscapes in a subtle way, her works display an irrepressible and alienating vital force.

The first thing you encounter on entering the gallery is a sort of chest, on which five double drawings from the *Repressed Spaces* series are displayed: drawings that seem to be asking the question of what is obscene nowadays: the destructive and emotional fury of the drawings hidden from the public's gaze or the icy and controlled repression of the bourgeois spaces represented on the front? The feral side of these drawings seems to spring spontaneously from the hand of the artist, who has subsequently imagined an empty slice of domestic interior, one that might pick up and perhaps contain the wild spirit living on the back of the sheet of paper. This work speaks of how through the act of drawing the artist tries to capture something intangible, taming the world that surrounds her.

The large environmental installation *Objet de traduction (Object of Translation)* is a tube that winds through the gallery, wrapping and coiling itself around the architectural structure and passing from one floor to another, guiding the public in their exploration of the artist's works. The installation is organized around two points of view marked by two chairs: one looking outwards framed by the window of the mezzanine and another internal, 'blind' one in the basement, set in front of the wall, where the public encounters a drawing of the landscape that can be seen from the window on the upper floor. A link between internal and external spaces, between the old architectural structure and its contemporary renovation, this plastic tube turns into a sort of Ariadne's thread; a vehicle for the transfer of words, a telescope for the voice, so that someone on the mezzanine can tell another person looking at the drawing in the underground room what he or she sees. A tangible representation of the transport of words, this tube allows two people who are physically distant, to communicate. Stéphanie Nava seems to have taken her inspiration for this installation from the words of the famous Italian physicist Giambattista della Porta: 'If any man shall make leaden pipes exceedingly long, [...] and shall speak in them some or many words, [and] if a man as the words are spoken shall stop the end of the pipe, and [another man] at the other end shall do the like, the voice may be intercepted in the middle, and be shut up as in a prison. And when the mouth is opened, the voice will come forth [...].'

The diptych *Oui (Yes)* represents two people: a man and a woman by themselves, who seem to be displaying a votive offering and whose faces are covered by landscapes. Who are they? What are they doing? The work speaks of a missed encounter, of the impossibility of giving yourself to another, through the exchange between two different, complementary but also irrevocably incompatible habitats like a forest and a city. The title is a reference to Thomas Bernhard's novel *Ja*, which tells the story of an impossible love affair (the protagonist begins a relationship with a woman who has already been abandoned by her husband – an engineer – in a very dark forest where he has built a house-bunker). Thus the affirmative yes of the title that sets the seal on the unconditional acceptance of the other instead speaks of compromise and of the sacrifices and humiliations implied by all relationships .

*Tectonique du désastre amoureux (Tectonics of Love Disaster)* is a sculpture-island, a kind of floe made of plaster almost two metres long, which represents an imaginary tamed landscape. The white surface in the middle contains a mountain and a forest and is surrounded by other semi-islands, small independent territories that grow like warts and escape, brushing against each other without ever really touching. It is a mental landscape for disastrous love affairs that is transformed completely as the point of view from which it is observed changes, partly through the plays of light and shade created by the womb of black rubber hanging under the forest.

The installation *Les Caducs, les persistants, les délaissés (The Deciduous, the Persistent, the Forsaken)* is structured like a gigantic 'memorial score', a three-dimensional and mobile image of the flow of our memories and emotions. Just as music scores make music visible, Stéphanie Nava's work

metaphorically represents the incomprehensible process of selection that everyone applies to their own memories. In fact her works represent the complex relationship between physical locations and our obsessions and repressions, evoking an expanded natural time marked by infinite returns in which human vicissitudes are just insignificant details.

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