

Francesca Grilli's work is pervaded by the themes of memory and testimony; for the artist individual and collective history is a sphere of possibilities, a set of circumstances and events, sometimes realized, sometimes passed over or repressed, at others indescribable, not directly transmittable, but always ready

to resurface. Her works, underpinned by a profound analytical lucidity, tend to take the form of subtle but pregnant narrations, made up of slippages of meaning and subtexts. The aspect of performance plays an

important role.

In the case of ORO ("GOLD!"), as in some of her other recent projects, the artist has gone back in time, into

the history of Western culture, to the sources of modern knowledge. What has re-emerged is the complex

milieu of the system of esoteric and alchemical thought. Alchemical philosophy was a blend of scientific research and desire for salvation, immaterial principles and reflections on the corporeal nature of what exists in the world. The idea of possible spiritual development and the significance of growth and liberation

for the individual and for humanity as a whole were associated with an element of absolute symbolic value,

gold.

Out of this came the idea for a composite project that, in a continual movement back and forth, between past and present, makes reference to a sense of decay and catastrophe and gives tangible form to the longing for renewal in our own time, to the sense of the now inescapable necessity of change.

Right from the title of the exhibition, Francesca Grilli already expresses the hope for a new era of plenty: just as the alchemists believed in a sequence of four historical ages, the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages – that would repeat themselves cyclically – Grilli declares her belief in an organic cyclicity and an imminent transition from the contemporary Iron Age to a new Golden Age. A profound transformation, symbolized by the figure of a falcon flying inside the library of the Benedictine monastery of San Giovanni in

Parma, where the video was shot.

If the library is par excellence the place for the transfer of knowledge between generations and for exchange between cultures, the library of San Giovanni combines, in its frescoes, historical, symbolic and

sapiential elements drawn from the biblical and classical tradition and from the alchemical and cabbalistic

one. Against the backdrop of these contents, in an atmosphere of enigmatic suspense, Francesca Grilli initiates a sort of arcane ritual by releasing a falcon and allowing it to circle, free but also constrained, between the frescoed walls. While the falcon flies, and its movement is mirrored in the mythological motifs

of the paintings, a voice recites Ovid's story of King Midas in the silbo gomero, an ancient and now almost

extinct whistled language used only on the island of La Gomera, in the Canaries. The silbo, regarded as a

noble tongue by the alchemists, is a sort of phonetic transliteration inspired by birdsong; i.e., according to

legend, the mythical universal language that preceded the construction of the Tower of Babel and the diversification of tongues.

"It is said!, writes Francesca Grilli, "that when God told Adam to give the things he had created suitable names, ones that would be able to define their innermost characteristics perfectly, he "spoke" in the language of birds. In other words he used perfect phonetics to condense the whole being of every created

thing in a "word".!

At the end of the story the falcon alights and devours a piece of meat, going back to satisfy its instincts as a

bird of prey.

The project includes a series of sculptures in bronze, iron and silver, related to the imagery of the falcon: thirty-three hawk feathers cast in bronze and treated with iron, and two pairs of wings, made of bronze and

silver. Their location on the floor alludes to the feathers lost during moulting, but the metals utilized refer to the three alchemical Ages of Silver, Bronze and Iron; the fact that they are oriented downwards speaks of a

flight towards the underworld, or the fall, the moment of decline in which the feather, growing heavy, abandons all the lightness of flight.

But like every moult, the loss of feathers brings with it a sense of transition and transformation. In the space

of the gallery, on the upper floor, is displayed a series of self-portraits in which the ectoplasmic figure of the

artist is surrounded by vibrant auras of light. They are Polaroid pictures taken with a camera capable of capturing a person's magnetic field. The images were produced over the course of three months in which

Francesca Grilli swallowed phials containing progressively larger doses of gold.

The project envisages the presence, with a high emotional impact, of a falcon: the proximity with the living

and free animal will bring a sense of energy into the rarefied space of the exhibition, but also one of subjection, of disquiet, of great instability.

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