

Marta Sforini ▯ MIRROR IMAGES

of surfaces, strata and self-perception

Contemporary art includes a wide range of works that employ reflective mirrored surfaces and can be categorised somewhere between sociological interpretation and self-knowledge. The mirror is the subject and object of discursive study. As an object of portrayal, it has enjoyed great cultural and historical importance for several centuries, focussing on themes such as self-reflection, the image of the soul, the transitory nature of existence, or transitions between reality and magical parallel universes. A major role is played not only by symbolism and formal aesthetics, but also by a psychological and virtual perspective on the mirror iconography of the past. The mirror is a medium of self-perception, of "I" constructs, and of other projection surfaces and spaces. Its complex and multi-layered interpretation of perception has been the subject of a great deal of study and literary discourse. Jacques Lacan's writings on the "I" function play a not insignificant role when considering pictorial theory and the production of art.

The mirror images of Marta Sforini do not allow us to see our own reflections. This characteristic disappears in the reflection of another level. In Sforini's work, the mirror returns as an artistically displayed subject and object, in an ornamental frame. As a metaphor of reflection, it broadens one's horizons with regard to self-knowledge and self-reflection. The surfaces of Sforini's mirrors open inwardly and reveal spatial profundity at first glance. The artist looks behind the mirror, thus allowing a wide variety of imaginary reflections. Her images evoke a different type of perception: narcissistic self-perception and the space seen within it disappear. Self-examination is thrown back at the beholder. The deliberately fragmentary and repetitive representation of empty and abstract areas engenders something akin to a search for clues. When one looks at Sforini's mirrors, other images are created: those of memories, past events, places and history. That is why they at first seem to be historically charged: mirror images torn out of the history of art in order to reassemble them in the present and invite new examination. An overtly retrospective look at historical Renaissance settings forms the framework for a personal relationship and the musings of the artist concerning the past, memory and remembrance, thus resulting in self-recognition and reinvigorating retained fragments of consciousness. Sforini's mirrors are not only the instruments and scenarios whereby souls can be depicted, but also serve as her muses and accomplices.

Her painted mirrors are far removed from being a reflective medium for light and fleeting images of whatever may happen before them: they are stored images that challenge the observer quite differently. The recognition of oneself or even the familiar is "distorted". None of the images are retained. The viewer is no longer simply the subject and observer of the images at the same time: the artist makes use of profound surfaces to direct our awareness and perception to the unfamiliar and other people. We are required to reflect upon them, thus revealing images of another self, provoking realisations and possibly the acceptance of cultural differences.

The gestural images are consecutively layered oil paintings or monotypes. Sforzi uses this technique to link the discourse with the application of glass as a carrier medium. On the one hand, Sforzi's multiplication of fragmentary mirror images is used to reflect a topography of memorial landscapes, and on the other hand, thematises the essential conditions of our perception. Her repetition of a motif seems to create a new order. Sforzi does not entirely eschew the ornamental. In her earlier works, the historical / architectural elements were not only detailed studies, but also chronicles and references to eras in full bloom, replete with beauty and decadence – without, however, using a traditional painting simply as a means of recording the past. On the contrary, they served as a (personal) liberation from burdens, hierarchies and constraints in both the artistic process and the increasingly reduced fragmentation. In the later mirror images, the ornamental gives way to a new compositional freedom: the forms dissolve. Her works are less expansive and more monochromatic - very green or very black. Both colours have a mysterious effect. Green is reminiscent of the surface of water, which was the first mirror in history. In Greek mythology, Narcissus encountered his reflection in a pond and fell in love with what he thought was another young man, unaware that he was seeing himself.

Black is the most mysterious of all colours, fascinating in its unfathomable associations. If we examine the mirror images more closely, we become aware of a multitude of intermediate shades that vary between real and abstract planes, inner and outer spaces, and moods and states of mind. Marta Sforzi's innumerable explorations are reflections on multi-faceted encounters with herself and ourselves.

Epilogue

□Marta Sforzi's artistic focus lies on spaces: periods of time and physically and mentally-shaped inner space. Her intense and extensive attention to these motifs may stem from her architectural studies and her origin. Her paintings act as a kind of witness: they document her cultural roots artistically, while simultaneously reflecting on their importance to her. Space and time define Sforzi's artistic process, which alternates between presence and absence. The memories that she draws upon to paint the pictures do not fill all the spaces. Do the lack of relationships and expansive shapes refer to breaks in the narrated story, or do they challenge us to complete it ourselves with our own memories?

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