

Fabrizio D'Amico, The slow and out-of-date treasure of Sonia
in Sonia Costantini, PAC, Palazzo Massari, Ferrara, December 2001
(Translated by Howard Rodger MacLean)

One has to stay at length, and in silence, in front of the canvases by Sonia Costantini, a necessary condition of seeing. These canvases therefore demand a great deal from the person who approaches them, something which painting normally doesn't ask. And even if it is true, on the other hand, that real painting needs to distance the 'bulkiness' and noise of existence from itself in order to really make itself heard then this truth, a conditioning one in Costantini's case, creates a profoundly anomalous exception with respect to the time in which she lives. Out-of-date for this reason, consequently, prior to and more so than for the presumed outdatedness of the exercise today of the 'craft' of painting and of monochrome painting in particular. All things considered, were this the only question then it would suffice to give Costantini authoritative 'fathers' (ranging from Mondrian to Albers, Rothko and Reinhardt and to all of the analytical painting of the 1970's - a genealogy drawn up for her work on more than one occasion and with diverse plausibility).

And yet even admitting that a part - and only a part - of those names can really be considered "fathers" with regards to her work, I don't believe that to acknowledge in Costantini a personality which is congruously organic with that paradigmatic axis is able to bring us closer to a real understanding of her painting. A painting which takes place today - and it seems that one too often seems to want to forget this - surrounded by a world that regarding her declares quite different forms of extraneousness which Albers, let us say, could firstly have felt in Weimar and subsequently at Black Mountain College. And this does not only come to play on the possible perception of the work but also comes into play in its moment of germination - firstly and in an even more important way. This is because Costantini is perfectly aware at every point of what she does of the future that she is preparing for her painting: when she lucidly recognizes the boundless hiatus that will separate her painting from the world. And with trepidation she listens to its echo, arming herself with a visual culture - although not only this - that by way of defence she will interpose between herself and the noise of the world. As strong and as fragile as a diamond, from the very beginning of her career she already knew what she was preparing in this sense. For example, as she has confessed to Claudio Olivieri which is published at the end of this note, it is also for this reason that the destiny of her painting is always included and prefigured in her project.

It was therefore from its inception that Costantini's painting bears on its 'written skin' the unreconcilable alterity for its own time. And the artist is entirely aware of this in the same way that Canova was conscious of his being out-of-date with respect to his times. So Costantini is neoclassical, armed with pride and perhaps with melancholy, something that belongs to the person who knows that he or she is acting beyond one's own age. As Gerhard Richter was neoclassical when he painted with that Graup of his: that grey in which one could measure the sense of Man's loss when faced by the immense and the mystery of absence. The urgency of saying another word and, at the same time, the need for a silence to which to return.

Perhaps Richter's grey is the first image written within the code of monochrome painting which doubts its own 'verbal' ability. In this sense Costantini's

monochrome goes beyond Richter because once again the artist dreams that an absoluteness is possible, albeit starting out from a threshold of absolute and bitter purity. Although one cannot read and recognize her work for what it is without bearing in mind how it starts out from a mental place which lies beyond that extreme point that following Reinhardt also Richter touched. Neither can one really recognize Costantini's painting without presuming that it always feels the effort needed from here, from moving from here, in order to once again 'climb back up'.

It is at the summit of this 'hill', of this effort, that Costantini eventually finds her image (and this painting of untouchable expressive intensity has by now persisted for years: full of certainties and of an almost brazen presumption of beauty.

Steadfast to existence at its every point, to its turbulence and its memories).

Its surface is woven by an only just perceptible geometrizing architecture.

Although this 'design', almost a minimum alarm placed on the extreme limit of optical perceptibility, finally

sinks to such a degree within the thrilled surface of the colour as to turn out to be nothing other than an entirely mental warning of artifice of the pictorial construction: a final bastion opposed to the fruition of the work as pure, perceptible invasion of beauty. With any other contribution light on that surface - Costantini's true and bitter demon - is charged to erect and support these spaces invaded by silence. As if in wait, in expectation of the lengthy time of fruition.