

Claudio Cerritelli "Freedom of thought-light"

In Sonia Costantini - Percorsi del colore 02, edizioni Nicolodi, Rovereto, novembre 2005

(Translated by Howard Rodger MacLean)

Constructing Colour was the title of an exhibition held about ten years ago in Milan in which Sonia Costantini presented her work with a group of paintings suspended on the shadows and the aurorae of light, on pictorial values gauged within the incorruptible vision of the monochrome, eternal obsession of doing painting at the limits of the visible. In developing the idea of those works, sustained by the purity of the geometrical structure, the artist has faced the physicalness of painting with slow movements of revelation of light, no longer anchored to the certainty of a measurable space but to the elusive thought of colour which goes to meet the infinite revealing of itself.

By way of the process of purification of the surface from whatever structural apparition, today her work has dissolved the modalities of geometry in the event of the light that comes out of colour, from it

emanating its own essence with slight discardings, by way of impalpable transparencies which exalt its changing glimmer of lightness.

In this exclusive 'journey' Costantini has removed the superfluous, the threshold of colour supports itself, it is the field of vibrations underlying the always different spreadings of the pigment: there is no limit to the specific nature of its becoming pure canto, mental emotion of the visible and imagination which is born from the freedom of sinking within the perception of the invisible.

The tension towards the regions/extents of the monochrome is inscribed in the history of the aniconic painting of the Twentieth Century. Its foundations are to be found in the wish for synthesis of the constitutive elements of painting. In consequence, it bears in mind the roots of Abstract Suprematism and pictorial Constructivism which spurred on the historical avant-garde towards a profound criticism of the concept of representation. Costantini feels part of this tradition. She is not, however, interested in the zero degree of painting in the radical version of Minimalism. Rather, she loves feeling the abstract as an idea united to experience, not closed within the tautological measure of the chromatic code but open to further meanings: evocations of the 'elsewhere' tied to the apprehensions of existence. In this perspective the analytical knowledge of the painted surface is the preliminary experience for the ritual exercise of the gesture that halts time, it suspends space in its own internal flowing, feeling it as a vital exercise, an interior vision which acts and reflects on light as place of meditation.

Colour constrains the artist to adopt different procedures, to move the matter according to different solutions in its laying and execution and to construct a pictorial project that solicits different levels of reading and control of the image. The essence of painting lies in the splendour of this profundity.

The investigation of the technical process modifies the very way of seeing colour, of imagining it as space which contains other spaces of contemplation within which the artist reaches out without having full understanding of it. On the other hand, Costantini's painting manifests itself by way of apparitions that derive from the strength of concentration of colour which illuminates the space. There cannot be an other cognition than that which is shown in the subjective becoming of colour, in the idea revealed on the painted surface, inside the stratifications which reveal the semblances of light.

Everything is allowed by only starting out from the intelligence of the hand, from its specific attitude or approach in guiding the discipline of painting as direct experience of matter, the sensitiveness of the hand that thinks colour, redeeming it from the world and putting it in a temporal totality that has no confines.

As is true of other monochrome artists, the use of the roller or the mechanical diffusion of colour as anonymous dimension of doing/proceeding does not exist as affirmation of the impersonal nature of the pictorial act. In fact, the demand for guaranteeing the originariness of colour depends on the individual character of the execution, on the technical refinement of the work process and above all on a particular psycho-physical tension in predisposing oneself with respect to the work as energetic exchange between the artist and the surface, between reason and emotion when faced by the canvas on which one has to take action.

In order to obtain transparency of the colour Costantini carries out an initial water spreading. She then intervenes with acrylic tempera and oil pigments treated with various intensities and vibrations due to the different pressures exerted by the spatula. In the concentration of the manual exercise one already has the way of thinking the surface, of structuring the minimal variations which from the centre to the edges determine the vision as the equilibrium of moments that are successive and necessary in order to fix the inexhaustible phenomenon of light. As often takes place in the experiences that explore the possibilities of a single colour, also in this case the ideational and operative planes end up by coinciding. They cannot act in different times, the one after the other. They coincide in the same process of elaboration. For Costantini to possess technique already means determining the vision of the painting, being in the space of existence with the elements necessary for its affirmation. To think painting is therefore to think the life of the colour, to have its transfiguring process to mind, imagining it as an indivisible whole and the genesis of a coherent course from the first to the last gesture.

This identity is pursued as the mark of behaviour that is not only aesthetic but also ethical in so far as the value of painting is a cognitive commitment which from individual experience is extended to a model of universal communication. It is therefore achieved by way of all the eyes of all those people who are able to reveal its concealed spaces, the breaths and pauses, the tones and the variations that are suspended within an infinite time of reading.

In every touch of colour one intuits the vibrating of the wrist which constructs the pictorial texture as the unrepeatable structure of the becoming of light by way of passages that are not programmable but verifiable on the single occasion, evaluating the ability of taking research to the maximum degree of development of imaginative tensions.

Regarding her recent paintings Costantini talks about the blurring of the colour towards the outside, she dismisses composition concern and exalts the transparency of the surface as the moment of a totality that is not measurable, a field of continuous vibration, expansive luminosity made up of surfacings and flashes. What takes place in every work is a question of lightnesses and weights that depend on the mixings of the colour, on the cold tones which withdraw and the warm tones which advance following the principle of alternate mutations, differences that the surface detains as only just visible pulsations.

These are the qualities which the artist looks for by way of a refining of the technique which challenges the essence of light, investigating the specific terms of knowledge of the cadmium red and the white, the violet-grey, the pink, the blue-green and the

yellow, chromatic dominants in which the concretion of the perceptive act derives from syntheses of light which with difficulty are to be encountered in reality.

These unexpected - or unsuspected - conjunctions create states of wonder which can never be traced back to the conceptual practice of painting. It is always the physicalness of the pigment that makes one feel the invention of the light which 'jumps' from one point to the other, generating spaces which transcend themselves, icons of pure colour where human perception almost touches the dimension of the sacred.

In this sense colour-light is the archetype of a spatiality to which we belong both as origin and destiny, as the home of sight in its pure state, the place of the acknowledgement of distance from the world of appearances, architecture of the mind which has dissolved the limits marked by reality.

Unwilling to consider the verisimilitudes of representation, Costantini's painting also holds out against the rhetorics of abstract painting which quantifies the rules of language within the conventional register of geometry, chromatic equilibriums and linear symmetries. As if the abstract iconography were the guarantee of an authentic way of thinking form as the interrogation and listening of its secret sonorities.

Finally, if we consider the degree of importance that can be ascribed to the exhibition place and the incidence of environmental light which conditions its times of perception then we cannot but underline the reading difficulty of the interactive process between painted light and atmospheric light, between the surface and the wall and between the perimeter of the colour and its extension in the surrounding space.

And the quality of the colour with respect to its photographic reproduction is even more elusive in that the complex identity of the painted surface - which to the naked eye is charged with subjective emotions and dispositions - when in relation to the mechanical eye of photography undergoes even more evident alterations with respect to its complex identity.

This betrayal is inevitable in a type of painting based on the unaccountable tones of colour-light. The sole possibility is to abandon the illusion that the work can be reproduced in so far as its very nature is unrepeatable and its visual quality difficult to emulate.

This concern only disappears by accepting that authentic relationship which painting today asks the reader who wants to dialogue with this still possible space of freedom, as is the case when faced by the painting carried out by Sonia Costantini: a vision of what one doesn't see, the unveiling of a reality which the colour solicits in the irreversible and absolute matter of light.