

Like a sky with low clouds
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A century from the birth of Ennio Flaiano (1910-1972), during the inaugural ceremony of Festival Internazionale Letterature di Roma, in 2010, the art critic and philosopher Gillo Dorfles took part in a public debate in which he responded to ten aphorisms taken from *Diario degli errori* (Diary of Errors) and *Don't Forget* by the Italian writer. To the famous aphorism "He who believes in himself lives with his feet firmly planted on a cloud", Dorfles responded with the same sincere lucidity and ready wit that was so typical of the style of Flaiano himself: "To find oneself on clouds is not only enjoyable, but also intelligent".

So it is not only dreamers who are in a way are not rational, but rather creative and endowed a multiform intelligence. Thus it follows that whoever makes an entirely conscious decision to tread on clouds, walks high carrying out a mental exercise "firmly" conceptual, which may overturn the common way of thinking or alter the normal perception of reality and facts, just as Ennio Flaiano did in his prose.

Among these *walkers* we find Elvio Chiricozzi.

In 2013 Chiricozzi created the site specific installation *Sky Room* (2013) for Franz Paludetto in the Castello di Rivara near Turin. This was a vast sky done in black and white that spread across the floor until it covered every corner of the exhibition room. At the entrance to the exhibition, almost in tribute to the inscription over the door of Dante's Hell, the visitor was greeted by Flaiano's aphorism, "A dreamer is a man with his feet firmly planted on clouds". Elvio Chiricozzi's intention – his message, using the terms of the literary critic

– becomes immediately clear and evident: play along with the artist's "high" game, rise up, walk in clouds, free yourselves of the weight imposed by gravity (both practical and contingent) and leave room for dreams. The architecture of the real, built on the foundations of common sense, direct experience and consolidated knowledge, are contrasted by a new and unusual ecologic architecture of condensation,

which never repeats itself, is constantly in movement, and is impalpable and ethereal. Whether you call it a dream, a cloud or art, the substance does not change. It echoes the words that Prospero, the legitimate Duke of Milan proclaims in the epilogue of *The Tempest* (1611) by William Shakespeare – *And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.* (Act IV, Scene 1). Only an idealist, or dreamer, tries to stop the flow of Nature.

Clouds are a recurrent theme in Chiricozzi's most recent works. He never gives in to the artifices of a Baroque or decorative style but rather tends toward an increasing coherence, without any type of caesura, moving through the use of a variety of techniques and materials. Each sky, each cloud, whether placed on a wall or on the floor, blocks in time a single, unrepeatable atmospheric instant in our sky. For the artist, clouds are both a manifestation of Nature and acts of thought. They are the artistic form of mental aspiration, daydreams triggered by life.

Clouds take shape if many of their elements, writes Lucretius in De Rerum Natura (1st century BC), *flying high in the sky at a certain point come together [...] held together by air. In this way they first form small clouds and then these join to become more and more numerous. They grow continuously and these are blown about by the wind which transforms them into a violent storm* (Book VI, 3).

And the large work entitled, *Nulla è rimasta immutata fuorché le nuvole* (Nothing is unchanged except the clouds, 2015) portrays precisely a "violent storm" the baleful meteorological variable that strikes without apparent reverses of dynamism. Once again the title contains a literary reference, this time to a quote found in Walter Benjamin's *Esperienza e povertà* (Experience and poverty, 1933) written following the destruction of World War I and the ascent of the Nazi-Fascist

regimes. According to the author the annihilation of a generation in the First World War had had the consequence of resetting all our experiences lived up to that moment and the destruction of the private and public spaces allowed the construction of new pseudo-environments, lacking any the connotations referable to the pre-war civilization.

But what had remained unchanged? A generation – said Benjamin – which had gone to school in horse-drawn trolleys, was under the open skies in a landscape in which nothing had remained unchanged except the clouds.

Observing these white clouds carefully, against the backdrop of a dark and threatening sky, one recognises in their ambiguous and rarefied though strongly symbolic shapes an iconography central to the history of western art: a mirror image of Michelangelo's Creazione di Adamo (Creation of Adam) from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But there is more than this symbolism in this work, because the two panels that make up the work (in order from left to right, God and Adam) find themselves in the grip of *Suono per nuvole* (Sound for clouds, 2015), in which infinite tonalities of yellow (the colour of betrayal!) contrast with the black and white more typical of Chiricozzi's works. Occasionally there is space for a monochromatic and tonal colour that remodels the depth of the sky in an overturning of the laws of perspective. Might this be a warning of upcoming change? or a "visual" manifestation of a veiled moral judgement on history? Or, perhaps, a spontaneous declaration of lay spirituality?

We are not to know, as it should be. What is certain is the finiteness of existence, of the dream to live and, as a consequence, of art itself and of its "clouds".

Chiricozzi himself declared as much a few years ago in his series *Ritroverai le nubi* (You shall rediscover the clouds, 2013), inspired by poems of Cesare Pavese collected in his *La terra e la morte* (The Land and Death, 1945).

The lines go as follows – *You shall rediscover the clouds / and the canebrake and voices / as a shadow of the moon. / You shall rediscover words / beyond the brief / nocturnal life of games, / beyond the glow of childhood. / Remaining silent will be sweet. / You are the land and the vineyard. / A luminous silence / will burn the land / as bonfires do the evening.* (October 30-31, 1945).

These are the clouds of memory, charged with that passing nostalgia, which Chiricozzi's life experiences bring along. For the artist, rediscovering these clouds has meant becoming aware of his own past, re-elaborating his present experience using the language of art, making it universally understandable and projecting it into the future. From personal experience one moves to a higher level, that of our collective consciousness and this involves the essence of our humanity.

Thanks to the work of Elvio Chiricozzi poetry has become image and image knowledge.