

Francesco Moschini  
*Il Luogo della Memoria*  
("The Place of Memory")

When I proposed to Elvio Chiricozzi that he prepare an exhibition covering his entire artistic career, I was thinking of the artistic importance of the all-inclusiveness of Cassiano dal Pozzo's memorable Paper Museum for both the Roman art world of the seventeenth century and, thanks to its suggestiveness, for future generations of artists. With this in mind, we decided to focus on Chiricozzi's more intimist pieces in the form of a large quantity of drawings that could recreate the path of his work over the last fifteen years.

The title of the exhibition, *Mi apparisti vestita* ("You Appeared to Me Clothed"), alludes specifically to the gallery space, completely "clothed" in small drawings, studies, and papers. Rather than reflecting a sort of *horror vacui*, this type of exhibition suggests a *summa enciclopedica*, whose materialization and unfolding provide an opportunity to review and reflect on E. Chiricozzi's entire oeuvre – work that in no way looks regressively or nostalgically to the past, but, on the contrary, foreshadows the future.

Since the gallery appears here truly as a place of memory, the careful choice of work - with its simultaneous presence of figures, animals and objects that seem not so much to move as to drift in a void - reveals the artist's conception of the world as a kind of "swarming", whose least perceptible tremors deserve attention.

The missing homogeneity of Chiricozzi's various formats in this somewhat mad "picture gallery" is miraculously regained in the unity of the five full-fledged "stations", which correspond to the five walls of the exhibition space. Similarly, in the absence of any pre-established horizontal or vertical sequence, the viewer of the exhibition is compelled to continually redirect his focus on individual tessera of the "mosaic" in a sort of ping-pong between the walls and the observer. With the obligatory pauses, this eventually creates a kaleidoscopic stratification of images, frozen and immutable in the finality of their gestures and in their regained diversity.

It is even difficult to orient oneself and decide with which portion of the wall to begin viewing the exhibition, given the vertigo, imbalance, and bewilderment aroused by the "tumult of the whole", fruit of its visual intensity. Thanks only to several "tessera" that appear as stable points - virtual fixed stars in the exhibition firmament – is it possible to pin down the sequence and discover an unexpected geometry bestowing order on the whole scene, since these "tessera" are so dazzlingly able to haul the viewer's gaze into their magmatic materiality. Thus, this seductive, engrossing complicity transforms them into occasions to pause and reflect.

This state of "solicited" disorientation leads the entire operation into the conceptual dimensions of Duchamp's "ready mades" (minus the idea of the "triflingness" of the work), works whose lost aura was restored by the critical choice of the artist, and not by chance favoured by M. Duchamp from among the multitude of serial productions.

On the contrary, E. Chiricozzi's operation highlights the personal, autobiographical character of the "tessera": it is not a matter of "infinite regress" or of exhaustive variations on a theme, but of a spasmodic re-proposal of many of the artist's numerous "fixations". Just as those immutable icons of body fragments for favours received covering the walls of certain places of worship vary according to their quality of production, yet nonetheless give an overall impression of intentional unity, in the same way these "devotional acts" are allied in their diffuse monochrome character, broken only by certain shadowy gaps or by the occasional bright tonalities scattered throughout the exhibition.

What matters here is that the individual pages are never preparatory studies for larger works. In theory, they could be, but certainly not beginning from that embryonic concept which always prevails through its unity and formal completeness. Indeed, the transparency and glaze in the shadows of these pages suggest a way of “thinking big”. Despite their small size, they contain the same tension as E. Chiricozzi’s large format paintings, the same complexity reminiscent of Leonardo’s study of the human body, of flight and fluids, but then adroitly made to collapse with the jarring “wire” drawing, almost as if to reduce the figures to manikins, *a la* Schlemmer.

The recurrent archaic reference of certain postures appearing here and there as well as the primordial sensation evoked by some of the pages recall a longed-for propitiatory tribal solitude, highlighted further by explicit references to a savage, bestial quality. All of this exists in the name of a longed-for original purity or of the beauty of a lost paradise, which forcibly shifts everything into an “atopic” dimension. There is no welcoming space for these figures, for these beings, for these plants, except perhaps what they themselves have been able to create by closing in upon themselves, virtually transforming into cocoons in an unassailable, impenetrable space of their own.