

REFLECTIONS

by Cynthia Penna Simonelli

A new version of sensorial and visual perception created by young artists from Italy and the United States who take on the theme of light and space.

Lisa Bartleson works in the wake of the Californian “Light and Space” movement which received ample and definitive recognition in 2011/2012 when the Getty Museum organized a series of events in cooperation with no less than 80 public and private institutions across the whole territory of California.

The movement focuses on and is rooted in both the special light characterizing that area, determined by the presence of the vast Pacific, and the simultaneous presence of the deserts in the immediate inland. This unique combination has inspired whole generations of artists, from the Forties of last century until today, and specifically centers on what the human eye may see of nature in the surroundings (due to which the movement is also part of Land Art) and what it perceives in relation to the light present in the territory as well as its refraction on the surfaces.

Lisa Bartleson explores light and space in works made in what may be defined as a new mosaic technique; a modern mosaic made of hundreds of small pieces of Mylar, a plastic substance that saw the light of day in the USA around the Fifties of last century, which are assembled and superimposed on one another in a chromatic progress, almost as if to form a kind of grid or scales like those that form the skin of fish.

Bartleson cannot do without light and color, without the infinite nuances that the light offers the gaze, that break down into millions of shades. From Roman mosaics made of pieces of brick, through the assemblage technique, to the new modern mosaic which seem like computer pixels that have been enlarged and fixed to the support. Finally, the surface of this new mosaic, the whole work, is “drowned”, submerged in transparent resin that makes it completely lucid and reflecting. Yet another experimentation, which allows the onlooker to perceive not only the sense of depth within the structure of the painting, created by the color itself, composed on the surface, but also a “refraction” of the light caused by the refraction of light on the surface.

This kinetic/visual experiment is typically Californian, linked to the tradition of the “Light and Space” movement, but at the same time it is incredibly and perhaps unconsciously connected to the tradition of Italian mosaics.

The Italian version of the study on light and space is given a totally different declination by the two Italian artists featured in the exhibition: Max Coppeta and Amedeo Sanzone.

Max Coppeta focuses on the interferences which light may generate and obtain from glass, which is his principal material.

Also in this case it is a matter of a superimposition, this time of glass “leaves” on which a drop of resin has been immersed and drowned. The drop is certainly now allowed to fall by chance; it is guided perfectly so that every drop positioned on the surface of a single glass leaf corresponds to the center of the larger or smaller drop placed in the center of another glass leaf. The accumulation of glass leaves gives rise to a sculptural mass in its own right, while the gaze is focused and trained, narrowed in and widening out, moving towards or away from the center of the work composed of resin drops. The element that acts as a catalyst on the gaze is the drop as such, but the peculiarity of the work consists of the fact that the onlooker is included in the frame, and allowed to see his or her own image reflected in the resin drops and reproduced, through the glass leaves, towards an indefinite and undetermined space.

As in Bartleson’s works, also here the gaze remains within the work itself, but the latter reflects the whole surrounding context, incorporating it into the work and making it become a part of it.

And this theme is even more accentuated by the work of Sanzone, who works with Plexiglas or Lexan, two completely reflecting surface which thus immediately restore or return (in a bounce-back) the image of the spectator, reflected on the surface of the work. The intention is to create a double vision, of the spectator and of the surroundings, which is thus incorporated in the work, becoming an essential part of it.

It is a matter of an experimentation of a new way to look at the work of art, in which the spectator plays an active role. However, this does not take place in the “kinetic” sense, that is through the onlooker’s movements in front of the work, but in a wholly “passive” sense, i.e. merely through the spectator’s standing before the work.

While the surface is not a mirror as such, it reflects; what interests the three artists is the reflection of the surface, perceived by the spectator: the research of all three artists focuses on the distortion of vision that may be achieved, on the perception of the work itself as a visual element and subject of observation, as well as on reflection of light and on what the surface of the work reflects and sends back to the spectator.

A vision of the painting as such, which may in the individual case consist of an accumulation of small pieces of Mylar, drops of resin superimposed on thin leaves of glass or Swarovski crystals or steel elements inserted on the Lexan surface: this is how the work is perceived at first glance. But this immediate vision is enriched by the reflected image of the spectator and the surrounding context WITHIN the painting; or in other words a research on a double visual track which the three artists from very different origins and cultural backgrounds have in common.

The awareness of one’s presence determined by the incorporation of the spectator in the work creates a new consciousness of one’s own condition as subject/object, not only of vision but of being, of one’s own existence.

Recognizing that the shade reflected in the work is his or her own shade, the spectator comes to reflect on his or her own existence as subject/object of a whole, and to ask: am I inside the work and thus virtual and not real, object of an artistic creation, which is nevertheless an artificial creation of someone else? But at the same time, as I am a real subject, am I using the work of art as an expression of my physicality, and have I as a consequence myself created the work?

The three artists have taken on a great challenge, fearlessly, with their natural counterparts; as others have done before them, in other times and places. Because art is, and will always be, a challenge, a personal battle between the one who creates art and the one who looks at it!!!