

Redesigning the space by Angela Madesani

The idea that space can be redesigned through photography has fascinated me for a long time. There are numerous artists in whose research we could see this attempt, here we have chosen only four belonging to different generations, with different stories. The artists we refer to look, through the room, at the space in front of them and interpret it, read it, draw it, propose it beyond a purely objective dimension. "Our gaze - wrote Georges Perec¹- travels through space and gives us the illusion of relief and distance. This is exactly how we build space: with a top and a bottom, a left and a right, a front and a back, a near and a distance».

On display are two large dark-toned photos by **Massimo Vitali**, the first *Ponta dos Mosteiros Dark* (2018) was taken in the Azores Islands, an Atlantic archipelago with a temperate climate. On the peaks of the volcanoes it rains almost every day and on the beach, almost every day, there is the sun. The light used is natural. The rocky bottom of volcanic origin is so dark that the colors of the swimwear and objects stand out. Here everything is lava, everything is hard and pungent and the light changes very quickly.

It is as if through the people, the presences that populate his photography and make it immediately recognizable, Vitali redesigns the space, remeasures it through another category. His is a social space, strongly anthropized that we can connect to his education. "Presences, which are what attracts me most, have a significant influence on the space that surrounds them. My photos represent a mix between landscape architecture and the influence that man has on the landscape itself»². Human presences, as in this case, colored and normalizing, play down the situation. Thus the man in the blue costume who becomes a sort of *punctum*, to quote Roland Barthes.

The other photograph on display is set in Marseille, Friche de la Belle de May-On Air- (2017). We are around nine in the evening on the roof of a former tobacco factory, which, thanks to an intelligent policy of reconversion of the spaces, has been transformed into a space that hosts many activities, from catering, to exhibitions, to recreation. A disk jockey is placed on its platform. But if he looks carefully to the right, one understands that the weather is changing, a rainstorm is about to arrive. Only half an hour later everything we see will no longer exist: it is the impermanence of phenomena. Also in this case Vitali is fascinated by human presences. It is a different ontological modality of space, both from a perceptive and vital point of view, a modality that could also have a relational matrix cut. The two photos have in common the slightly dark tones, propose references to the history of art, the post-Renaissance one, in which Vitali is very interested, when black comes into play fully, as in *The Flight into Egypt* by Adam Elsheimer from 1609, in which a particular sky appears, which according to some scholars is the result of a telescopic observation perfectly in line with the historical time in which the German artist created the work.

One of the main themes of **Andreas Gefeller's** research is the questioning of man's unique perception of space. On display are some of his works from the *Supervisions* and *The Japan Series* Series.

¹ G.Perec, *Specie di spazi*, Italian edition of Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1989; p.97 (French ed. 1974).

² M.Vitali from a conversation with the writer, December 2021.

The first gives the impression of a space visually captured at least 15 meters above the ground, a perfect zenith image, that is, made from a point at the zenith, which vertically and perpendicularly dominates the area shot.

It is a reflection of a perspective nature. He himself says that that job was born during a picnic with a friend, who had fallen asleep. Gefeller thus began, to pass the time, to play with the analogue camera and to photograph everything that he had next to him.

As he walked, he began to photograph every detail of space vertically from above. Later, back in the studio, he cut out the proofed images and created a collage that made him perceive this interesting point of view above the ground. Over time he has therefore specialized in that type of language, including through the use of computers. The of him is an evident, successful attempt of perceptual mutation and therefore of re-proposing space. Although it is a useless and obsolete question, it is natural to ask ourselves what kind of photographic operation we are facing. Is it documentation? In some ways, yes, because nothing has been added and everything corresponds perfectly to reality. The image is a trace of truth, it is indexical, the dimensions of things and their spatial position are perfectly correct. At the same time, however, we must realize that the perspective proposed in the image, in this way, never existed. The user might think he is in front of a real, instantaneous image, but this is not the case. The single shots are the result of a long process that lasts hours, sometimes days, in some cases, the most complex, even months. *Supervisions* is both documentation and construction of space, perfectly in line with the theme proposed by the exhibition. With the same operating mode, Gefeller worked on some shots of *The Japan Series*³. On that occasion he photographed the ubiquitous electricity poles with their tangle of cables, connections and technical equipment. Fascinated by the idea that lifeless technical things, such as cables and telephone wires, proliferate, grow and seem to escape human control, giving life to forms that recall those of nature. While nature is domesticated to the point of appearing as a sort of technological object. It's a chiasmatic, crisscrossed relation.

The reflection in this case is on the fiction that rages in our world in which it is created as a middle ground between being and appearing, to which the German artist is deeply attracted. It is a place between documentation and construction, between chaos and order, between life and death, between technology and nature, between representation and dissolution, between virtuality and reality, which has been and is the subject of primary reflection in Gefeller's research, is a sort of fil rouge that runs through it. In this sense, the observation of him towards the surrounding is a sort of rereading of the same, beyond easy dogmatism and obligatory reading.

Fundamental is the title of the series to which **Giulia Marchi's** two works on display belong. It takes up the title that Rem Koohlas gave to the edition he curated of the Venice Architecture Biennale⁴ in 2014. The Dutch architect's reflection, which we report here, is on the concept of Junkspace, a junk space. «(...) Junkspace is the double body of space, a territory of compromised vision, of limited expectations, of reduced seriousness.

It is a Bermuda Triangle of concepts, an abandoned Petri dish: it erases distinctions, undermines every resolution, confuses intention with realization. It replaces the hierarchy with accumulation, composition with addition. (...) It appears as an apotheosis, spatially

³ Gefeller was invited to participate in the European Eyes on Japan event.

⁴ In that case *Fundamentals*.

grandiose, but the effect of its wealth is an extreme emptiness, a vicious parody of ambition that systematically erodes the credibility of building, perhaps forever...»⁵.

There will therefore come a time, fairly close, in which we will have to find an aesthetic canon for the garbage, for the waste, for the residual, which will be subject to transformation. A concept that goes beyond the idea of the Third Landscape coined by Gilles Clément. On display are two large images by Giulia Marchi, taken from this series, created in the new wing of the City Museum in Rimini⁶. In one the empty space and the fundamental elements of the architecture are highlighted, in the second the artist has placed a sort of sculpture, consisting of a piece of wood, taken from the garbage present on the site. It completely changes the perception of space.

His successful attempt is to give a formal aesthetic to waste materials. "The work stems from the desire to relate my artistic research with the writings of Koolhaas dedicated to the concept of space and the use we make of it. My photographic work was conceived and conceived only with what the space made available to me, no artifice, no intrusion, no artificial light. In these photographs appear only the objects that I managed to recover from the garbage, what was destined to be permanently eliminated »⁷.

The aesthetics of these images reflect the formal cleanliness of Russian Suprematism, at the roots of modern minimalism. What Giulia Marchi manages to create is a noncanonical vision of space. The particular shot means that what we are facing can almost seem like a room without walls. "In one image I redesign the space physically, adding an element and in the other, instead, I modify the space simply by looking from different points of view. Depending on the type of relationship between the elements, the vision that is given and perceived of it also changes »⁸.

Marchi rehabilitates discarded items for vision. The reference to Koolhaas is ambivalent and if she intervenes in one image, in the other she recognizes a fundamental form and manages it to see space in a different way once again.

The works of **Marina Caneve** proposed here are part of the work *A fior di terra*⁹, created for a network of municipalities in the Veneto region¹⁰. What interests her, as always, is the interaction between a more canonical landscape made up of concrete, material, scientific, technical elements and vernacular mythological magical-mythological aspects. The main fragments of these photos are nothing more than constitutive elements of the landscape. The idea of recomposition originates in the culture of ancient Greece, where the interdisciplinary nature of thought is fundamental. In this sense, cosmologies come to mind, the attempt to reconstruct the cosmos, in fact, by the ancient philosophers, starting from the school of Miletus.

«It is important to specify that the interdisciplinary attitude as I understand it has its roots in Greek culture - Plutarch already spoke of it - that is a contamination between culture and expert knowledge, to be faced in a way that is anything but amateurish but rather with openness and empathy"»¹¹.

⁵ R.Koolhaas, *Junkspace For a radical rethinking of urban space, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2006*.

⁶ It is a disused space which was intended to house the contemporary art collection.

⁷ G.Marchi in *Fundamental*, Galleria Matera, Roma, 2017.

⁸ G.Marchi, from a conversation with the writer, December 2021.

⁹ In fact, marble emerges from the earth. What has been extracted here for many years is of three types: red, biancone and verdello.

¹⁰ The operation was carried out as part of the 'Community / Culture / Heritage' project funded by a tender from the Cariverona Foundation.

¹¹ M.Caneve in conversation with the writer, December 2021.

In some images of the series with pieces of stone, casually placed on his window by the last remaining stonemason of Lusiana Conco¹², has recreated a spatiality, without intervention, except by using a neutral background, which contrasts with the mirroring one of the window. One of the images, in which the drawing of a column can be glimpsed, is the detail of a marble tomb, which in this photograph is placed in relation to the poor stones of the surrounding wall of the cemetery, in a sort of material contrast.

"I'm curious to visit cemeteries to see how the most characteristic element of a place is treated in such an important place". The cemetery is, in fact, a symbolic place, highly representative, especially in small communities like this one.

His is not a documentation, but the result of an exploration from which to draw the supporting details for the understanding of the whole. An inevitable reconstruction of space is created through the fragments. Fragments that are not only, as here, small portions, but real sections of the landscape, which are held together through the different parts of the whole.

For the installation, Caneve decided to place a large image on the gallery wall, a sort of wall paper, which collects the different elements. The background image presents boys and girls in the territory, it is the human presence, which is not at the center, but is certainly a part of the whole, with a shadow that constitutes a sort of threshold, of limen, a reference to a dimension of ancient sacredness.

The works of the artists involved do not offer certainty around the theme of space. Rather doubtful. I therefore like to close the text with a further quote from Perec: «Space is a doubt: I have to continually identify it, draw it. It is never mine, it is never given to me, I must conquer it »¹³. The same goes for the artists on display, who each time conquer the space in the face of studies and researches that lead us to different possible interpretations of the surrounding.

¹² The small town, which is part of the Asiago 7 Comuni Plateau, where Marina Caneve made her artist residence, has lived over the years of marble extraction, an extraction that has given it a thriving economy. For ten years now, extraction has been in decline, as the demand has decreased exponentially.

¹³ G. Perec, op.cit.; p. 110.