

Towards an “aestheticism” of recycling

Barbara Meneghel

The term “recycling” is used in various contexts always bringing with it an understated negative vein. If it is paralleled to the connotation tied to the recycling of waste products in which the action itself becomes a useful and auspicious alternative to the disposal often associated to illegal behavioural choices, or otherwise thought of as scarcely innovative. This is also true in artistic contexts. To recycle means more often than not, to borrow ideas already used in the past: results of research which tend to be offered on the market as new. It means to play with your cards on the table, mix the ingredients already used and propose confrontations already analysed. All in a world that requires an always greater dose of originality so as to emerge from behind the shadows and face the confrontation with others. For these reasons, speaking of recycling with reference to the series of works by a new artist in her real debut in drawing, could be dangerous: there could be the risk of misinterpretation (with negative connotations) that which is a precise choice. Actually, two choices.

For Sonia Ceccotti (born in Tuscany in 1974) recycling means, immediately and simply, to refer to something already used: the subjects chosen for their intense and minimal portrait paintings have in fact already been inserted in previous paintings. At that time, the artist herself was featured on the canvases (the subject through which, maybe due to natural motives of confidence Ceccotti is able to express herself better); the inevitable familiar affections; but also female images taken from the internet based on aimed aesthetic choices. Moreover, these are still the protagonists of carbon drawings: the new technical choice of the artist for her production. The supports of various dimensions are interpreted by intense faces and expressive looks, from smiles and melancholies of a humanity that often is more personal than intimate captured in various moments of its own expressivity. Now, it is actually the artist herself to be featured and read with a mixture of aesthetic sincerity and analytical self-distance. At times it is the wit of a stranger, at times childish laughter, at other times the already known face that reassures the viewer. Characters which are still not able to take away from us the net sensation that they are only a pretext. Something which is not far from an excuse for an exercise of style which is not superficial. Ceccotti borrows this to confront herself with a true and proper choice of field in a technically aesthetic sense. The concept of recycling in fact does not simply regard the reuse of the figurative protagonists: remains of their own pictorial paths. At the same time – and we should say, above all – it also goes back to the choice to insert in the drawing scraps of poor “elements”. It deals with materials taken from everyday life, in particular from the packaging materials: corrugated cardboard (that acts as a support to the drawing), adhesive tape, isolation tape, barcodes. The artist became aware of this innovation almost accidentally. Leading off from her almost daily action, of packaging her canvases prior to their dispatch, and so the need of having the action itself become a work of art comes about naturally. Or more precisely to have it, literally, enter into the work of art.

From here, the artist has evolved in her research which has taken her from delicate traditional figurative oil painting, towards a confrontation with carbon drawing supported by corrugated cardboard. It is not an overtaking nor a form of refusal of the previous direction: but rather a true and legitimate desire to experiment a more "concrete" dimension: material of the everyday. More than "recycling" then, it would be correct to speak of "regaining": a subtle semantic difference that is sufficient to connote the operation with a more "constructive" sense. In this case, it is obvious how the getting back of the material entertains a dialogue with life itself, moving in a precise direction: that of the rehabilitation of the "low" in a Nietzschean sense of something which would otherwise be physically rejected and devalued. Art is not only nor necessarily made with the materials of art but also with Man's actual lived terrain. The "dirtiest" is the "lowest" if necessary.

The going back to the Italian "poverista" season and all that which follows would be so expected and so out of place. Its application to figurative portraits and to the interpretation of faces, figures and people undresses it of its immediate ideological sense and transfers it on an intimate, personal (auto)biographical plane. If it moves maybe away from the same initial intent (the retrieval of a certain aesthetic archetypical dimension tied to the subject, above all the "humble" one), the results are evidently diverging due to their form and matter. The faces (now captured in extreme close-up excluding the rest of the body; now enlarged to include the neck, the shoulders, the bust of the subject) are "invaded" and disturbed by interventions of recycled material, which at the same time underlines the beams of light /shadow and hide the body parts. There where the female neck slides into the shoulder, a web of adhesive tape intervenes to block the continuity of the line, creating a certain contrast between roughness and gentleness. Now, instead the look is unbalanced in an almost unnerving way due to the disappearance of an eye behind a piece of adhesive tape.

The symmetrical harmony of the face is suddenly interrupted by continuous short circuits. Here, then there is a game of hide and seek, which hides and reveals parts of the body and of the face. The artist loves to play on the ambiguity of a piloted casualness by inserting the subject in a way that certain body parts are literally eaten up, transported away by that "disturbance" that is arriving. What is created then is a dialogue between presence and absence, between revealing and hiding internally the painting itself which calls upon, not only the handcrafted aspect of the "making", but also the artist's own certain intimate necessity to convey her experience, her life. The two distinct perceptive moments – absence and presence – interweave and parallel each other for an effect which is visual and interpretative and much more "active" than that of traditional paintings offered so far.

It is not only about confronting itself with a new technique, different respect to the pictorial one regarding its visual and material point of view. For Sonia Ceccotti, there is a new aesthetic challenge which leads her to render her subjects in some way more complex. Whilst for the viewer, the result becomes less unilateral and more of a continual invitation to converse with the actual work of art.