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The Simplicity of Now
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My relationship with painting started in Albania during the communist regime. The only possible art, back then, was Socialist Realism. As an artist you needed to know the traditional art, which in the Western world had come to an end in the late 19th century, and you had to embrace the ideology of the communist party, whose main goal was the creation of the new man. Art was an instrument to convey ideology to the masses, in order to prompt them to participate in the regime enthusiastically. Surely every artistic expression, also if oppressed, is searching its own way of deviation, is looking for the nuances, if not to manifest open dissent. My father passed away when he was still very young, but through his experience I had learned to distinguish between the stiffness of the official art and the freshness of a glance less frontal and less contaminated by the heroic optimism of the regime art.

The school years coincided with the fall of the regime, and right afterwards started a race to make up for the "lost time" and to fill the gaps which separated us from everything that had happened in the art of the twentieth century. Retrieving a certain kind of "independence" compared to the figurative narration became, for a while, the new frontier of painting. So here we go - the liberated gesture, the sign, the material. Figuration disintegrates, becomes archaic, archetypical, childish...

In 1997 I returned to Italy. I had been there in 1992 with a grant but after three years I went back to Albania. This time the journey to Italy was painful: the country was in the hands of armed gangs and of the international task forces, who had intervened to maintain the order. The fall of the regime in 1991 had provoked a severe trauma but the feelings were positive; instead this new breakdown in 1997 was without hope, and escaping seemed to be the only way out. *Albanian Stories* (1997), my first video work, had its origin in this climate. On the one hand, it represents the experience of life, or lived experience, overwhelmed by a violent transformation, coinciding at the same time, coupled with the urgency to hold together intimate relations and affections. On the other hand, it represents an artistic practice that gets rid of what was known before - of the inertia of a pre-existing codification - and becomes instead the witness of a narration in

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which fiction and reality, game and trauma, fragility and the force of fantasy intertwine in four spontaneous stories told by a three year old girl. Before that, I had never touched a camera; but this video – which was produced with so little pretensions – has changed my way to do art in a radical way. Instead of the artwork generated by a thought which becomes language, and instead of the expressive code which ripens thanks to the familiarity with a practice, here what determines the work is an unexpected encounter, a wonder. The author gives way to the witness.

This spontaneous experience with the video has renewed and in a certain sense relaxed my relationship with painting. Painting didn't need to take on the burden of a weighty task, of a creative or discursive pretentiousness, of a stylistic positioning or of a technical virtuosity, but it could dissolve into the same attitude, that of being a witness in an encounter. And this encounter took place with the moving images. It is also true that it had already been a while that contemporary painting, through important and acclaimed representatives, had overcome the logic of the battle between figurative and abstract. For this reason the figure, the image and the narration are part of my practice not as a return to the past, but with the simplicity of a now that is captured by the awe towards the potential which these moving images represent as a whole.

The moving images which I work with in painting come from sources that I haven't filmed myself. That is to say that although they are my paintings, and although I do produce moving images, the still images depicted in the paintings do not actually come from my films or videos. On one side they are already framed and on the other their flow offers the possibility to intervene and to fixate them in a transient moment in which a suggestive balance emerges. This intervention produces the image which – conserving the memory of the context in which it was generated – opens itself to the painterly possibility, entering into a new context both of interpretation and of physical transformation through the pictorial material. The contexts that provide the chosen images are various; videos from weddings and rituals in Albania, film d'auteur, videos taken from the news, documentaries. The images are taken out of these contexts in order to enter a different territory where most certainly they lose something and they also gain something new and unexpected.

There are recurring elements: a continuous human presence, moments of daily life, bodies which become images, ghostly presences, and from these images they become works on paper, canvas, plaster or sometimes marble as pieces of a mosaic. What remains in these passages is the sense of a vibration, of a phase shift and of an enigma that doesn't need any mystifying veil, but whose presence is also confirmed through the luminous transparency of the images. The image determines the rules of the game but the gaze offers shelter, and while offering shelter it

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is nourished day after day, image after image, practicing in a visual gym which heightens the eye's sensibility towards the unexpected freshness of what happens to appear. This visual exercise allows to collect stratifications and to create memories that are re-activated, bestowing on the stolen moment, taken out of a flow of movement, to the possibility of another space and another time.

In this dialogue I am not trying to affirm and celebrate the image but to witness its otherness, its being simultaneously familiar and strange. The attention and the attraction stem from this mysterious mixture, and so the art work that is generated doesn't want to celebrate the image which it encountered but to elaborate its enigma, facing it inch by inch, through the body of painting itself. In this way transforming an existing image into a painting becomes like reading aloud an existing text. You do it through your timbre which is suggested by the images themselves but which is pronounced through the particularity of the pictorial voice. Obviously, there is always a subjective gaze in front of the images that capture this potentiality and there is a personal touch of the hand that leaves the traces, but the presence of the author tends to be light and delicate in order to keep the central space for the quality and the enigma of the images and not affirm the presence of the author.

Painting, like art in general, is not a question of good intentions; if anything it is a question of intensity. Good intentions can be explained, they may or may not convince you, they may be appreciated or not, but intensity excites you and sweeps you away. And it is this intensity, this Barthesian "punctum", that gives worth to any pictorial gesture. But touching this territory means entering into a zone that it is not only unsayable but also unthinkable. Achieving consciousness about your work coincides unfortunately with violating this zone, provoking the decrease of that intensity without which art remains mere decoration or pure discourse.

Actually, maybe the moment has come for me to respect this zone of silence and stop myself from adding more words that keep violating it.