

"Architecture of Venus"

(by Alessandra Maria Sette)

(from the catalog of "Architectures of Venus", personal exhibition, Rome, 2003)

Young Roman artist, Francesca Bonanni is part of that unofficial group of painters generically - but not mistakenly - called "new Roman school". Entering the line of the great Italian pictorial tradition, which, going backwards, reaches the fifteenth century, Bonanni affirms and reaffirms its cultural heritage, renewing its contents and compositional spirit. Instead of bulky terms of comparison, the Italian cultural roots are for the artist a fertile ground in which to cultivate their pictorial research. "Architecture of Venus" was born as a unitary project, developed around the reflection on the relationship between nature and architecture. All the works, in fact, move around the comparison between natural elements and artistic expressions created by man. Nature is seen here, but above all felt, as a great architect of the "things" of the world. In this sense, the shells, complex, very ancient, fascinating presences that enclose life in their imaginative forms, are an emblematic example. Despite their size, almost always extremely small, the shells immediately refer to the idea of construction, of elaboration, of creation. In past centuries, the fascination exerted by shells was such that real collections were created around them. Their rarity, also due to the difficulty of traveling and therefore to go to the places where they could be found, transformed them into "mirabilia", "objects" of prestige, evocative of exotic and mythical places. They were the sign of the existence of an unusual and unexpected nature, of other worlds and other cultures. In the Baroque period, which left splendid signs in Rome, the great architects looked at the forms created by nature, and in particular at shells, as a source of inspiration to give life to elaborate and complex volumes and geometries. Francesca Bonanni's research began from this basic idea, which led to the creation of the works featured in this exhibition. "Architectures of Venus" proposes itself, despite its richness, as a synthesis of the narrative fabric that characterized the previous pictorial production.

In these paintings, as in others in this series exhibited in the personal exhibition at the Anticoli Corrado Museum (May 2003), the artist tells a story. Each element represented refers to a meaning, to an experience - no matter if actually lived or only imagined. The story of children's games on the beach (see the newly built castle, the ball, the bucket, and the shovel, or the path traced in the sand and glass marbles), combined with the idea of artistic creation (see the traditional tools of paint: brushes and spatulas soiled with color), it also becomes impetus towards infinity, pictorially realized through the view of the horizon and the line of conjunction between sea and land, as well as the slight breath of the wind. And, wishing to continue, the transience of the sand castle and the path traced on the sandy shore, which the wind and the waves will soon destroy, relates to the transience of the physical force (represented by the miniature knight) and, consequently, to the

transience of the life. What remains, here represented in a sort of "picture in the picture" and gathered in a box, are some shells that time will respect. Shells that, from a marginal element, become the protagonists in this new series of works. The elaborate, eccentric and imaginative shapes of the shells, refer to the idea of nature as an architect. Bonanni sees nature as "architect to the female" and therefore, in the wake of this subtle intellectual game, nature becomes Venus, the goddess who more than any other represents femininity. Botticelli, in portraying Venus, refers to the mythical birth of the goddess and places it at the center of a shell. The game of cross-references and multicultural exchanges continues in all the works of this series. The domes, spirals and baroque scrolls are accompanied by architectural elements characteristic of oriental culture: minarets, mosques, palaces and towers. The red of Pozzuoli and the land of Mars, characteristic colors of Roman historic buildings, are contrasted by the precious backgrounds of gold and silver, splendours of oriental lights. To the figure of Venus, which never appears directly in these works but which seems to govern all the works together with the idea of creative force and with the idea of beauty that it brings with it, the figure of Mars (present in red, which in addition to being dedicated to him, represents strength, power, passion). The formal rigor, the extremely refined mark, the cleanliness of the painting, the chromatic refinement (see, for example, Perspective of shells), for which the Bonanni looked to the masters of the fifteenth century, is opposed to the organization of the compositional space, a "staging" of Baroque artifices, whims that allude to play and irony, to reach unexpected results (see, for example, Architettura prospettiva, in which the shadow of the shell continues unnaturally, or The baldachin of Venus or, also, Hippopus hippopus, where the elephant, conceived by Bernini to support the Egyptian obelisk of Piazza della Minerva in Rome, is replaced by a hippopotamus). To these formal and substantial pictorial elements, there is also a metaphysical atmosphere obviously derived from the study of de Chirico's works. Silences, absences, mysterious shadows characterize some of the paintings in this series (see, for example, Loggia of the shells and Perspective of shells), and transform them into dense spaces more than atmospheres and thoughts than real presences. The narrative on which Bonanni constructs each painting (of which we have given some examples), and which in this series of works often translates into metaphors, into "suggestions" of something else with respect to the image we see represented, is also it is a characterizing element. Not only because it constitutes the very substance of the works, but also because it differentiates this way of painting from many other painter-expressions that are offered to us today. The narration involves a study on the subject to be treated, a personal reflection and then an elaboration of the acquired notions, finally a synthesis of everything translated into images. This compositional process is slow. It takes time to assimilate, process and then build. And during construction it can happen to have second thoughts, it can happen to make changes, variations, and so on. All this, as already mentioned, places Bonanni's painting on plans

and ways that deviate from the current ones. Today painting is strongly influenced by the myriad of images that come to us from the most diverse sources (television, internet, advertising, cinema, and so on). This means that the elaboration of the painting somehow suffers not only from the speed with which these images reach us, but also from the type of images, mostly photographic, elaborate and glossy or, on the contrary, taken quickly from everyday life, like of snapshots. Images built on the lights, on the chromatic tones, on the effect. The painting of these works, on the other hand, seems to take another path: it is slow, rich in details, meticulous, studied in detail. The gesture disappears, to leave room only for Painting and Narration. The many reading plans offered by these works have the effect of attracting the viewer's gaze into an intriguing game of discoveries, keeping them alive.

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