

Jan Meissner and Richard Nonas

crosstalk still now

This exhibition was supposed to open last April. The talks between myself, Hanne Tierney, Jan Meissner and Richard Nonas had started much earlier in the previous fall. By January of this year we had already selected a number of Jan's photographs and chosen with Richard which of his floor pieces would join. The dialogue was naturally there. There was no need on my part to do much. The two artists have been living together long enough to affect each other intimately, even in their very distinct works; a couple of strong characters holding their eloquent position. More than a favorable juncture of familiar circumstances, far from the useless speculations of the market in guise of "*Ut pictura poesis*". The ideal ground for a curator. A dialogue between two creators with unlike points of view and yet explosively interfused. Both of them working in an environment in which all spaces tend to be connected, in a world of logic and action. No doubt it would have been a seductive show.

By mid February everything was framed and ready to go. The Art-Clan was still journeying the world through galleries, museums and fairs when the pandemic transformed all that existed before. Our show was suppressed by the events with no date in mind, while the meaning of our actions and the perception of our lives were about to change forever. Everyone separated from one another, in space and time, was experiencing the same universal calamity. All with enough time to think about the human condition. The need for others made us feel that we were all in this together. Then time went by.

Jan started taking pictures of the lives of others from the rooftop of her building "in mid-March, when this virus closed doors and emptied sidewalks, like thousands of the world's photographers, I made plans to get through what I believed would be no more than a brief and solitary lockdown in my New York City home. Time stopped. Time passed. A planned exhibition of my work was canceled. Days dragged on, my roof at night became a place of hidden worlds to watch, became a place of small moments to record and keep, became a way to keep the story going. Here are a few of those moments. Life interrupted. But life continued."

Richard was in his studio turning his space and time into books "This is what I see: I see black marks moving. I see them move in and on to my pen. I see them fight their way toward me. I feel my muscles tense to pull them back. I see my elbows dance to push them off. I hear the scratching of pens. I feel the ink stains spread. I fight the pencil's jump. --I'm writing books ".

I went upstate and started working on another project. The Pandemic spread and suboptimal politics did too. The circus of the election had already started and we are

now close to the date. So everything was changed when Hanne called, a few weeks ago, to say that we had a new date for the show and it will be shortly after the elections, in November Because of the short notice we thought it would be easiest to put on the show as had been planned in April. But the circumstances had changed, as had our resolve.

Thus what you will see here are works “made during the Pandemic”. They are not just artifacts, objects, or relicts of some premeditated act well disposed in a space. To the casual visitor it might seem that the only real space is based on sight, as sight creates the illusion of uniform and connected spaces. The space would simply be a container for objects. Instead, as artists well know, space is created and elicited by an infinite series of layers; an orchestration of tones, colors, smells, compositions, architectures, and sounds, with their rhythms and intervals. The space and the “objects” contained in it are not mute. They think and speak, evoking and generating thoughts, doubts, and questions. Of course Jan and Richard do very disparate works. Jan is an unconventional photographer who captures visions from the world, then transposes them with painterly intelligence into sophisticated images. Richard is an idiosyncratic sculptor who lives in a rigorously philosophical and artistic world, and could be characterized by a primitive sharp simplicity. The point of view of photography and sculpture is clearly conflicting. One is flat, the other has volume and its perspective is hard to grasp. Even the materials they use are dissimilar, and often diverge the ways they move and see the world. Yet both their “trades” are about exclusion and inclusion, adding and removing, about perception and perspective with all the gaps in between.

There are all the interesting discrepancies of two practices and two proposals, one more mental and allegorical against the other more physical and literal. Despite the differences, by looking at what they do, one may discover that they have more in common than the illusion of enduring ambiguity. Both Jan and Richard are engaged in a dialogue with space and time. They both reject the traditional terms that define them, wedged in a space in which the work lives for a moment. They refuse the accepted customs by which the relationship between the artist and his/her own material depends. Their work challenges actions of sensory completion as an accompaniment to every perception. It demands a sensory “closure” that provides a “meaningful form” with respect to the ordinary incomplete experience of forms. It seems to me that their work is now climbing the course of time, as Italo Calvino writes in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*: “I would like to cancel the consequences of certain events and restore an initial condition. But every moment of my life brings with it an accumulation of new facts and each of these new facts brings with it its consequences, so that the more I try to go back to the zero moment from which I started, the more I move away from it: even though they are all mine acts intended to cancel the consequences of previous acts and also managing to obtain appreciable results in this cancellation, such as to open my heart to hopes of immediate relief, but I must take into account that my every move to cancel previous events causes a rain of new events that complicate the situation

worse than before and that I will have to try to cancel in turn .”

In turn the stillness of the artworks creates a cerebral and sensorial motion. Stasis is that memorable aesthetic moment, the necessary mean by which one could stop the world and get off. Our only constant is change.

-Filippo Fossati