

Vasco Bendini. Time and Light

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Already in his *Segni segreti* (*Secret Signs*) series in the early 1950s, Vasco Bendini revealed the very particular stance he was adopting in the new-found awareness that there was to be discussion, reasoning and debate not about figures but about images.

An unrelated, though not irrational image that was emerging from a flow of admonishments and an awareness - of self, of time, and of history too - that was at once physiological and affective. An image that collapses, unconventional, pre-alphabetical (whether polysemic or non-polysemic is beside the point) and which comes together as an agglomeration that is "other" with respect to an indefinite, non-preordained space.

What he traces out in these works is the drama of giving himself a sign, energetic and impure, blinded both at the outset and in its destiny. A sign that is also its own sumptuous epiphany, in a sort of analytical sentiment of a time for action which identifies with the artist's own time of thinking and knowing himself. It constitutes a sort of solo, capable of negotiating the rocks of rhetoric as well as the shallows of intimacy. It is playful, even ferocious when necessary and, right from the outset, closer to Jean-José Marchand's "abstractionisme lyrique" than to Archangeli's "ultimate naturalism".

Then came the highly industrious decades of lofty enlightenment and unwavering experiences in which Bendini disgorged his rigorous ethical expression. It had nothing to proclaim or preach but everything to wonder and ask, at all times. And the inspirational reason of his expressive approach very gradually became quite clear.

He always sensed that the essence of the image is in its vital substance, both ineffable and dazzled, and in the way it manifests itself to history within the painting, maintaining uncorrupted its own value as an other light and an other time. A place which is not even one of artifice or of erudite action, but simply the mere admission of a formative destiny that the artist, accomplice, and - one might say through evocation - consort, seconds it and ensures that it comes about. This can be seen when he worked in the disorderly heart of the matter, in the midst of its obscure regurgitating mass. But it is also apparent when he advanced so far that he could sound out the "other" substantiality of the image in a competitive exchange with the physical corporeality of both man and object, outside the protocols of form and painting. And he sensed it

when skirting around the luminous ethereality of dry, transparent materials with their sensuousness and sharp asperities.

Over the years Bendini has proceeded by selecting, eliminating, and distilling. In practical terms, this means by tapering down gestures to short, sharp shocks, blind in their intentions but certain of their own wish not to assert.

His materials have doubting colours and their sensuous substance lingers as a result not of heteronymous relations but of its own flagrant epiphany - the substance itself and in itself - and the reality of perception. Appearing, not appearance. But conceptually, he has decanted yet more, forcing the process of creating the image beyond the threshold of all discerning, turning a time for action into a sort of spasmodic concentration (of a "white, silent orgasm" as Calvesi put it) in which the subjectivity of the artist loses its memory and is lost - as Bendini himself writes - in a "state of manifest grace".

While Emilio Villa was able to write for him in 1980 about an "other nature invented through painterly initiative", in more recent times Bendini has placed himself in a condition that is extreme, and to a certain extent definitive. The sovereignty of the founding elements of the pictorial, and their ability to become the potential of meaning, has in turn become not an objective but a premise, without which painting, and the very idea of painting, would be devoid of meaning.

Day after day, in the monastic solitude of his Parma studio, Bendini remains listening and waiting. He decides on an intonation, a black that is opulent or irritated, a white that is calcined or of supreme, distant light, a pink with the fragrance of body, or yellows and blues and browns as though introverted, shot through by a sort of sensual malaise. He lets the colour wash over the canvas, choosing the course and consistency of its flow, congealing in layers that suggest chance and destiny combined. In the short time that is also the lenticular rhythm of consciousness, he watches as relationships, features, dispositions, and physiologies all take shape before him. He takes in their ambitions and tendencies, until the space becomes the total space of the image. and light is expressed and defined by countless possibilities of tone, through the exceptional pathways of relationships.

Bendini's is a sort of wonderment that discovers itself anew each time, as he recognises himself in the painting, in the ability of this scrutinising automatism to convey potential meaning all the way to the supreme otherness of the image.

An image that is as perfectly transparent as it is autonomously physical. Never has Bendini wished to be a painter *en philosophe*. Always *en poète*.

Certainly. Never has he felt himself to be the master of his work, but always the interpreter of an erotic struggle between himself and the work, in an exchange of identity and influences in which both sides provoke the other to reveal themselves, while withdrawing. Never has he devised images, for he has always waited - and often found.

But now, today, in his extreme, dazzling maturity, he has become cognisant of the fact that it is with the final threshold - Gaddi's "tacit, ultimate combination of thought" - that our way of thinking about the world and of ourselves in the world always has to reckon. And that the question of the sense or lack of sense of the image concerned is not the worldly destiny of the work, but our own ultimate necessity.

"I find myself obliged to coexist in a state of insensateness. A state that appears to me to be like waiting for the ultimate Night", writes Bendini: "and the threshold appears to me as an intimate burrow, where I am blinded by light."

In his solitary, silent, concentrated dawns as a painter, Bendini senses he is visionary in another way: the creation of the image is a sweet but never assuaged obsession, turning between a light and darkness that no longer entail physicality and experience of the world, but that turn into extreme questions, into the ultimate substance and truth of light and darkness.

Now each painting, each and every painting becomes a definitive query: not a doubt, but a query. Not faith, but a question. Meditation. Poetry. And painting.

(English Translation, Simon Turner)