

Maurizio Calvesi, 'Bendini '65-'68. Objects and processes' in *Bendini*, catalogue of the exhibition at Galleria Senior, Rome, November 11th, 1968

Bendini's latest works should not surprise those already familiar with his past production. There is a coherent continuity, although in his works from 1965 onwards a drastic renewal of his means is evident to us all.

Rauschenberg, Johns, Dine undoubtedly opened new expressive horizons to Bendini; they paved the way to him as well as to every even younger artist in Europe or the USA who followed the New-Dada line and went further, to achieve original results, thus giving life to new questions which still have a great effect on the present situation.

In his exploration beyond limits, Bendini was second to nobody. In the summer of 1966 he exhibited two works, 'Come è' and 'Senso operante', in Venice at Cà Giustinian, in which the very concept of representation was abolished: they consisted of some chairs, a mirror and other objects. G. Scardovi in the catalogue comments: "taking a comfortable seat on one of Bendini's works has the effect of almost making us forget that the work is there [...]. I sit on the chair and undergo a sort of purification."

At that time, Bendini's research was running parallel to the experimentations of younger emerging artists, but undoubtedly with a right to priority. In fact, fifteen years earlier Bendini was already one of the forerunners of informal art. The gesture experiences of his tempera paintings developed into works charged with matter and signs. The early 60s were a period of crisis which was overcome only in 1965 when he used the canvas as an object in itself.

In Bendini's case, Argan wrote -while presenting the artist's production of the previous year in March 1966- 'the white canvas is an achievement recovered afterwards, beyond its disintegrated, dissolved matter. The canvas is actually no longer fundamental [...] its extension goes well beyond the coloured veils and stripes applied on it. It can be considered a screen or a diaphragm and this is evident in the artist's need to shift and exhibit it inclining it according to his intentions.' Radicalising this research, in 1966 Bendini simply used intersecting bare frameworks propped against the wall (A Johnson) or, with a really "poor" gesture, hanging tins or boxes, as in *La scatola U*, on them.

Another principle was contained in the 1965 paintings: the work was to be read in progress, as if following the development of a speech, and required a physical displacement, not simply of the eyes. The new work, belonging to the series *Senso operante*, exhibited in 1966 at the above mentioned group exhibition at Cà Giustinian, retraces the scheme of the 1965 polyptychs, but it is now "accessible": the spectator is invited to step inside it, to take a seat on a real chair, which is no longer a painted object, but placed opposite a reversed canvas, set in the framework. The

other panels are covered with a large cellophane sheet behind which it is possible to enter the work.

In this process lies an important intuition of Bendini's, contained in his latest works which are, in some cases, the realisation of projects already conceived at that time. More often these projects, however interesting, were not carried out and the reason why Bendini more easily gave life to "poverist" works (I am referring to the ones contained in his 1967 solo exhibition in Bologna and introduced by Arcangeli who understood their value and importance and interpreted them as extreme "self-portraits") lies simply in his poverty. Bendini's "poverty" is not a metaphor, but a real condition against which he has to struggle, like many young artists.

In *Come è*, the other work exhibited at Cà Giustinian in the latest Biennale, it is possible to find his final refusal of any aesthetic aim, at least considered from a traditional point of view. The chair is an ordinary one, just as the mirror or the mat. The difference with the New Dada models is simply that Rauschenberg's common objects, when set in a work of art, acquire an aesthetic value. As a matter of fact they always need to be placed in a specific, fixed background, in a plastic and pictorial context. Bendini's objects instead do not represent an idea, they are neither elements of a plastic composition nor do they form a co-ordinated image; they are not parts of an image the spectator can create at his will, but are mere instruments of an operation the spectator has to make sense of. The "directions" are provided by the descriptions Bendini himself gives of this work as well as of others in the present catalogue.

We take a seat, the mirror on the floor reflects our image, the tape-recorder (eliminated in the installation) reproduces our voice. This work aims at creating a break in the stream of our lives and of the activity of our perception, making it flow in the direction it always avoids: towards ourselves. Presenting this work, along with *Napoletano* and *Scàrdovi*, I wrote: In this philosophy of objects and appearances, a complex, but synthetic mental process is enacted with the usual ineffable concentration", which is typical of Bendini. It had already seemed to me in the past that Bendini's informal experience had both "a philosophical and poetical foundation" and I had therefore suggested a possible correlation between his early tempera works and Zen philosophy, rather than with action painting.

Each gesture in Zen painting has basically a cognitive purpose which is more important than the aesthetic one. Its value depends on its rapidity because "to grasp the truth implies rapidity and, consequently, to paint rapidly means training to grasp the truth", the essential truth. Barilli had actually recognised a cognitive interest in Bendini's treatment of the theme of the human face and in his quest for an "essential structure": "but the presence of this aspect in his works – Barilli concluded – does not imply his adhering to essentialism." In *Come è*, as well as in his later works, the Zen root of Bendini's poetics is traceable in his refusal of an aesthetic end, at least

considered in the traditional way, and in his condition of isolation and mental concentration in which he was alone with himself.

Once again, Bendini's research for the essence is not a metaphysical abstraction, but an investigation into "matter". His poetics has always insisted on (as others and myself have underlined referring to his painting) "the mutual incidence" or rather the absolutely identical nature not only of spirit and matter, which appears obvious, but of thought and the senses. The essence he investigates is not to be found abstractly, but in the infinite capillarity of our perceptive circuits which his latest works aim at stimulating. This essence may be reached in the "simultaneousness" of mental and sensible stimuli or better in our awareness of such condition since the essence depends on awareness.

If *Come è* confirms Bendini's ontological vocation, we may refer it to a "new ontology" which gathers many contemporary researches. We may consider it Deweyan in the sense that it is a reflection on human reflection and the experiences giving life to it. I do not deny it is the existential attitude of a tout-court ontological vocation. *Come è*, a very interesting work considering its date of composition, represents an extreme example of "poeverist" research which later works of the same trend will ignore in order to recover a richer and more explicit aesthetic dimension.

In the 'Solar Cabin', the progressive visual perception of light, is reinforced by warmth and smelling sensations. It is a closed space, but can remind us of the open air, the beach and the nature we can enjoy through the senses; at the same time it is a closed space intended for spiritual growth, a place where time has a purely organic rhythm, or it might represent a cranium, the seat of our thoughts and sensations, where perception originates. It is a place of a deeper suggestive level, in which the archetypal depth of research is enhanced, and where events are analysed almost with scientific fanaticism, but where we also become aware of the abyssal echoes which their perception can excite within us.

The inside and the outside, the two polarities which have always been part of Bendini's dialectical investigation reappear also in the theme of the human face as we can see in *Pad*: lying on it we receive an a-gravitational perception of our own body. Whatever emotions these works evoke, their aim however is mainly and uniquely cognitive. The condition of the event as well as its fruition are ends in themselves. Above all, the involved process of "transfert" is aesthetic. By executing the action suggested by the artist, the spectator is involved in an experience the artist wants him share. The values are no longer expressed in a formal "language", which communicates the work's values, but through the revival of an experience.

(Translation by M.C. Lapetina)