

# The skin of the deer

Marco Meneguzzo (2013)

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Galleria Progettoarte-elm, Milano

Sometimes, in archaeological research or in the proof of a theorem, in the hypothesis on the formation of galaxies or in the investigation of a crime, a little hint out of place may be enough to invalidate the whole theory built upon it. It is a small clue that shakes our conscience and does not let us sleep ... luckily, in art criticism, it is neither to ensure a murderer to justice nor to make a mathematical programme work better, not even to discover where we come from and where we are heading to. And those big queries in this more restricted field of knowledge become simple piques, yet conscience is conscience, and clues are clues!

So, once we have discovered – it is appropriate to say: not even the artist himself used to remember it! – that one of the first “out of the picture” works, that are so typical of his production, was a small dyptich in which one of the two sections had differentiated sizes, and that was not made of a painted surface like the other one, but of a skin of a deer stretched on the frame, the critical conscience – or if you like, more maliciously, the intuition of a possible and gratifying “stylistic exercise” in Raymond Queneau’s style... - has woken up and has tried to question the whole exegetical apparatus that conscience itself – in this case mine – has contributed to create over the years. We are talking about Pino Pinelli, Analytical Painting and the skin of a deer.

When we talk about Analytical Painting, both supporters and detractors agree in underlining the conceptual aspect of the trend, that then translates into painting, and that, due to its mental matrix, does not just treat painting almost as a pretext, but it is used to considering the surface, be it painted or not, as the investigation ground of a single sense, the view, that later on transfers its own data, that are further purified from any sensitiveness – we are referring to pure analytics of course - to the brain receptors of the brain’s rational half. In a sentence, the critical thought on Analytical Painting further dematerialises the artist’s work. This hasn’t been a mistake, from a strategic point of view, if you consider the suspect with which the word ‘painting’ was welcomed in

Italy in the Seventies of XX century. It is still suspiciously received today: before being considered contemporary and present-day, painters had to do a sort of self-criticism and justify the use of colours, canvas and brushes “sub specie cogitationis”, according to a conceptual outlook. Anyhow today history has paved the way also to less Manichean and partisan interpretations, and we have started speaking again about painting, even about pictorial qualities. Yet here we would be in the presence of something bolder, a sort of hidden secret reading: instead of ‘under the surface’, ‘on’ the surface, just like that “stolen letter” of Sherlock Holmes’s tale, that on the contrary had always been under everyone’s nose, simply in its place, but in an envelope – i.e. in a different container. Thus simile and allegory here prevail: while the letter was in plain sight and if we replace our work literally, i.e. our works, then they become the envelope, - i.e. allegorically, the interpretation we have always considered to be true and that fixes it in a place, in a critical container – and it is actually the container that prevents us from discovering the truth. That is why, forcing interpretation a little since, to be successful, the discovery of a small novelty must be supported as if it was a big novelty, we can try to consider Pinelli’s work, since that fateful moment of half decade, from that small skin of the deer, even under the category of “tactile value”. Of course, that skin of deer compared with the pictorial surface can be also the last residue of reality transferred and turned into language, but the skin of the deer, unlike Alberto Burri’s bag, does not own the immediate physicality that makes it remain a bag also when it has been put on the canvas and framed, and its transformation into a coloured surface is much easier, almost mimetic. Only the tactile sensation of suede keeps the memory of reality and the surface is metaphorically “caressed by our look”. That is why in Pinelli’s work a sort of ‘virus’ that needs a completely different look, almost as if we are admiring a painting of Chardin’s or the detail of a bottle in a still life of Morandi’s, goes side by side with the renowned “out of the picture” features and methodical overlaps of the same colour in a number of different and pre-arranged steps on single identical elements, that represent strongly theoretical and conceptual characteristics. I actually remember – and Pinelli also reminds it to me – that on his first show I had the opportunity to admire, I lingered for a long time to see if on each three-unit elements – maybe exactly the one that was on the cover of one of the issues of “Modern Art”, a real ‘Bible’ in

the Seventies – I could perceive the difference in the number of coats of paint – respectively five, ten and fifteen – that the artist declared he had spread: I was young and I still used to see the naked king, I mean that instead of “thinking” about the operational method, I also wished to see the result (a small detail: my friendship with Pino dates back to that episode). Today, now, I think that – thanks to that small skin of deer – maybe I was not wrong at all and that also staring intently at the surface, instead of just passing by thinking about it, was rightful. I still remember the sensation of a porous surface, that was full of colour until it was consumptive, emergence of lint and dirt, as if it were a weakened skin and in considering again Pinelli’s whole following production, it seems to me that this care for surface’s imperfection represents another clue that may suggest a tactile, not just visual reading of his work, and visually mental. You know, from cop shows that populate TV networks that “three clues are a test”: I have not found the third yet, but I can wait... Instead, what I know, and that is strictly linked to what has been said up to now, is that Pinelli has a special skill in making art and that therefore he is also able to disseminate little conceptual pitfalls within the larger conceptual system that he has built around his work, that is rightly and widely renowned and since this text, in spite of himself, has embarked on the road of detail analysis, about the extraordinary works of the Seventies analysed in this volume, we’ll talk about ‘gesture’.

Therefore nothing about the climate of the so called “Painting Painting” or the struggles with the Conceptuals or Arte Povera representatives, nothing about the big ideological systems that are so typical and exclusive of the Seventies and even nothing about the already mentioned “out of the picture” that, at least in Italy, Pinelli has applied with dramatic easiness practically alone: much has already been said, while – as for the skin of the deer – almost nothing has been analysed in detail, confident, as we have said before that the reading of the ideological system was enough to define the work integrally and wholly. So, after materially seeing on the gallery’s walls the works that have been mounted, all of a sudden we have realised they are the path of a gesture, the extension of a huge arm that however does not mark, but “imitates” the gesture.

Like a flash we have thought about Roy Lichtenstein’s “brushstrokes”, that represent very fast brushstrokes but that are the opposite of brush and speed, since they are the “drawing of a brushstroke”.

In the same way these wide works of Pinelli's are a gesture and its opposite at the same time (I dare not say its parody because I think there is neither irony nor derision, in none of his works), because if you see them, they might remind it, whereas if you think about their development and their installation (the template to reconstruct their precise position on the wall, the sign that instead is a 3D piece and so on), they are as far as they may be. I don't know whether this is a kind of nostalgia or rather an unconscious instinct, or even a meditated project secretly put in place, but maybe this is a third clue for a more 'pictorial' reading, at the same time, not less conceptual – but just richer – of Pinelli's work.