

The Tree of Drawing

Paolo Belardi

“Among Chuang-Tzu’s many skills, he was an expert draftsman. The king asked him to draw a crab. Chuang-Tzu replied that he needed five years, a country house, and twelve servants. Five years later the drawing was still not begun. ‘I need another five years’, said Chuang-Tzu. The king granted them. At the end of these ten years, Chuang-Tzu took up his brush and, in an instant, with a single stroke, he drew a crab, the most perfect crab ever seen”. [Calvino 1988, p. 53]

Initially, when we thought up the program of side events with the members of the organising committee at the 41st International Conference of the Performance Disciplines/Congress of the Italian Drawing Union, hosted in 2019 by the University of Perugia and dedicated to the two-way relationship established between art and draw-

ing, we thought of organising a sculpture exhibition. And, in particular, we imagined exhibiting *en plein air*, in the University gardens, replicas of three famous contemporary sculptures made with a 3D printer and characterised by provocative chromatic finishes. Sculptures like *Dibuixar l’Espai* by Pepe Diaz Azorin, *The Man Who Measures the Clouds* by Jan Fabre and *Study of Perspective* by Ai Weiwei. These are three apparently very different works, because while the work of Pepe Diaz Azorin is firmly planted in the heart of Alicante’s university campus, Jan Fabre’s work travels between the most important museum facilities on the planet and Ai Weiwei’s work is the three-dimensional translation of a photography series. Yet they are also three similar works, since they all embody a hymn to the ability to transcend time and space by virtue of the imaginative power of the drawing-gaze (imaginative in the first case,

Articolo a invito a commento dell’immagine di Oscar Piattella, non sottoposto a revisione anonima, pubblicato con responsabilità della direzione.

cognitive in the second and revelatory in the third). This offers observers a host of questions meant to remain unanswered: why draw in the sky if there's no trace of it? Why measure the clouds if they are constantly changing? And, above all, why pretend not to see what is before our eyes? It would have been an unusual exhibition, but the difficulties encountered in obtaining the necessary authorisations for the creation of the replicas stopped the project in its tracks. So much so that I feared having to disassemble the classic exhibition of author sketches. But then I was lucky enough to attend an exciting lecture by Oscar Piattella, held in the historical "Pietro Vannucci" Library in Perugia's Academy of Fine Arts, where the master from the Marches evoked Yves Bonnefoy's name several times and recited the most poetic passages of his famous essay, *Le dessin et la voix*, published in 2005 in the collection *Lumière et nuit des images*. Above all, I was struck by what seemed like a genuine sentence: "To draw, to designate. To break the seal, to open the envelope – which remains closed" [Bonnefoy 2010, p. 15]. A sentence that, claiming that drawing can be used like a lockpick to unhinge appearance and reveal what would otherwise be forgotten, summed up in itself the deepest sense of the bond that would have tied together all the replicas of Pepe Diaz Azorin's, Jan Fabre's and Ai Weiwei's sculptures. So, I decided to organise the *On Colour Drawing* exhibition, then curated with critical wisdom by art historian Aldo Iori and

set up with minimalist grace by designer Fabrizio Milesi in the Paolina fortress' twilight spaces. An exhibition marked by sophisticated geometric figures (starting with the infinite variations of the *mazzocchio*) and by pasty chromatic textures (mostly done in watercolour or with acrylic colours), but on closer inspection also marked above all by walls. Nor could it have been otherwise, because "the wall – as Alberto Mazzacchera sharply pointed out in the opening words of his introductory essay to the catalogue – through its different forms, directly expresses the many, successive phases of research that almost uninterruptedly mark Oscar Piattella's entire artistic production, especially if the surface is probed and we go to its core". [Mazzacchera 2019, p. 15]. Perhaps the trees were missing: those trees that, with their own architectural clarity, have always fuelled the poetic vein of Oscar Piattella. So, partly emulating Giotto's virtuosistic gesture, when he gives Pope Bonifacio VIII's messenger a "simple" circle, and partly Chuang Tzu's gesture, when he draws "the most perfect crab ever seen", Oscar Piattella grabbed the charcoal pencil and drew a large circle (surrounded by a large tree whose luxuriance recalls that of the tree drawn by Colombo, aka Maurizio Nichetti, in the initial sequence of the film *Ratataplan*), sealing it with a dedication as evocative as invocative: "TO THE UID THE SIGN FOR THE 'DRAWING' OF THE TREE". By entrusting us with the task of guarding and cultivating the tree of drawing.

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