

Emanuela De Cecco, *Exercises of discretion with reserve*

Text written for the solo show *In punta di piedi* (2001, Artopia Gallery, Milan)

Prologue: crossing the threshold

Entering the theater when the show has already begun, entering the home of a stranger, enter the lives of others: *sst!!* Try not to disturb, get ready to listen. A discipline of presence, acknowledging the importance of the threshold, the passage, the things that regulate the life of a place. The path of Marzia Migliora starts here and takes form around the possible developments that spring from this attitude. An instinctive reaction to an exhibition space that borders on domestic space, with natural ease, intertwining the supposed modern neutrality demanded of artspaces with traces of life. The two environments almost mingle, almost non-existent walls separate family life – incredibly orderly and presentable – from the life of work and relation to the outside world which, in turn, appears in a familiar guise. At the entrance we are greeted by an exhortation, an immediately recognizable request for silence or at least for us to adapt our behaviour to the circumstances of a place where someone is concentrating.

On tiptoe. Inner vigilance. This isn't about courtesy or good breeding, it's a much deeper issue if we consider it separately from the sphere of form.

Act I: exercises on tiptoe

Marzia Migliora invites us to pass on tiptoe, to stand on our toes on an uncomfortable, slippery surface, glass marbles, perhaps even worse than gravel, and to make apparently useless gestures to accentuate a condition. *59 steps*, introverted exercises, to count and start over each time you err, exercises you can repeat at home, and to take into serious consideration every time you see something that attracts you but is not familiar. Let's try to understand the rules behind the games already in progress, maybe this is the indispensable premise for relation with either someone or something. On tiptoe, to know the other, to accept the gradual unveiling of what we do not know, respecting the timing, the needs, the necessities, the silences and indecision as clues of a language we know all too little about as yet. The main effort we can make is that of applying the discipline to ourselves. There is no more complex challenge, we can tell everyone and everything whatever we want to, we can alter our goals or conceal our objectives, we can choose to camouflage our sentiments and desires, but this game isn't permitted in the inner dialogue with/of the self.

Act II: stories stripped naked

With a musical background and a theatrical vocal intonation, the artist reads the stories of different people, which actually compose a picture of psychic suffering developed around the domestic dimension. *Listen to me please*, stories that offer too much or too little. The obsession of the home, of not having a home, not being able to leave it, not knowing where to go home to. Stories of real lives that seem like fables, intense details recited in the gentle tones of an ancient narrative. In a set that evidently concentrates the particular characteristics of the exhibition space – the bathroom, closer to an art installation than to the private space of the home par excellence, is entirely covered with mirrors and separated from the exterior by a glossed door that was transparent until a short time ago – we listen to the unfolding of different life plots. In this work a short circuit is caused between what can be licitly displayed and that which belongs to the shadow zone of experience and emerges only in the intimacy of a relationship, in psychoanalysis, or in the confessional.

Stripping visibly naked is precisely the operation Marzia Migliora effects as she recites the voices of people who narrate their personal lives as Jung reports it, introducing the analysis of the individual cases. Unveiling one's own biography, fragility, pathology, denuding the obsession without losing sight of the possibility of safeguarding the context. Fables, as in the previous works of the artist, lead to anything but out of this world. In this case the references to real facts and persons are absolutely not coincidental.

The home as a trap and a refuge, a burrow and a prison of sentiments, of the deepest emotions, the territory in which we play out much of what we are then able to take with us into the world. The

order reveals the profound desire to control what we feel it is opportune to reveal, and to conceal all the rest. Sometimes a virus alters the rules of the game.

Act III: obsession as the dark side of discretion

Intrusion, repetition, obsessive noise that penetrates and pervades an environment. Nothing pleasant. Maybe it's a mouse, certainly it's a *presence*, disturbing in itself, but above all for the images it evokes. Virus, epidemic, deadly ailments, nothing clean, something that transforms the apparently comfortable domestic space into something else.

The discretion of the mouse becomes obsession, it isn't so much its *presence* that generates bad feelings, it is the fact that it can't be seen. The trap, the perverse side of discretion, not being seen doesn't mean not being there, a banal observation that gainsays a popular proverb. In fact being out of sight amplifies the importance of the hidden presence. It is on this plane, along diverging paths, that fear and desire grow.

Epilogue

Returning to certain central themes around which she has developed her work until today, this time Marzia Migliora shows us the possible modes of an encounter, everything that precedes the start of a relationship. The tools and the languages she uses – sound, contextual use of narration, recovery of the imagery of fables and children's games, the photographic image used in a non-descriptive form, as the attention is focused exclusively on the detail involved – are part of a vocabulary with which the artist has constructed other stages of her discourse. The series of works born as the result of explorations of museums (in an initial phase the Italian museums containing relics of scientific, naturalistic and anthropological character), their dust, the forgotten archives, time that seems to have reached a stopping point, then the passage to an investigation of the modes of representation, also of the present (including supermarkets, the epitome of orderly presentation of today's merchandise), the attitude of re-presenting a form of personal cataloguing of the extant through the critical confrontation with the discipline required by such a regulated procedure, as already evident in the series of videos and photos *Chi c'è c'è* (2000), have been temporarily suspended. In this work, in fact, Marzia Migliora has situated her images in the courtyard of the house where she spent her childhood, and the protagonists are the playthings of that time, narrated from a subjective viewpoint, like a sort of invitation to identify, to resume contact with that dimension, to still play or to play once again.

Starting with this passage the artist skews the viewpoint toward her own gaze. In *In punta di piedi* the re-reading of what has already happened, of her own story, her own biography or that of persons very close to her is transformed into a gaze at the present. Setting down her baggage for a moment, setting off again by working on the self, getting directly involved, accentuating the hand-to-hand combat with a space that is skewed, in its turn, more toward what it can contain in the future than toward its own history.

A passage that amplifies and further condenses those that came before it, giving them a possibility of further existence. In the attention fully concentrated on the present we can see a reconfirmation of the reasons behind a path in which memory, both personal and collective, plays a central role. A voyage on mobile ground in constant evolution, striving to recompose fragments of identity, aware that the difficulties, the detours and accidents are necessary passages to reinforce the path itself.

