

Francesca Comisso, *Forever Overhead*

Text written for the solo show *Forever overhead* (2010, Lia Rumma Gallery, Naples)

A body dives and, as it leaves the ground, it is transformed into something else.

From this gesture Marzia Migliora distils words, signs and images that allude to a change of state. *Forever overhead* sounds like a formula that suspends the action in this airy void in the interval between the moment before and after the dive when it is no longer possible to go back and what lies ahead is unknown. It is a moment which is dilated to embrace thoughts and possibilities, in which fear and desire, life and death, the ordinary and the transcendental prove to be inseparable units of being. The installation *Scomparire in un pozzo di tempo* (Disappearing into a well of time) makes it possible to inhabit this instant, inviting observers to place themselves where the dive has left its mark in the concentric ripples of the water, where the fall and the resurfacing are just different directions of the observer's gaze and what really counts is the depth, the route and finding the central point.

This installation, like her other works, resonates and communicates with various sources and influences ranging from literature to physics, from history of art to daily life, moving between the depths of existence in areas which surface from repressed experiences, as occurs almost literally in the image that lies at the origin of the exhibition. The image in question is the fresco of the Tomb of the Diver from Paestum painted in the internal part of the sarcophagus to accompany the deceased in his journey into the afterworld; it depicts a young man suspended between the column-diving board from which he has just leapt and the water. From this symbol of the transition between life and death, the artist maintains the sense of a transformation triggered by the volatile and vital dimension of awareness, of the courage to change and start again. The leaping body traces a path through the air that hints, through the slight curve between arms and legs, at a perpetual circular movement, and accompanies a story by David Foster Wallace – which lends its name to the exhibition – in which the initiation ritual of an adolescent on the path towards adulthood is consumed: "... You have decided being scared is caused mainly by thinking".

The silent yet eloquent landscape with which the film *Forever overhead* opens is the face of a man. It is a story substantialised by slow movements, looks, sighs and gestures that are repeated: the arms are raised, held together and then opened like majestic wings to intercept the imprint of other leaps. A vibrant blue rectangle lies in wait for him, gathers itself for his arrival, and dilates to reflect his passing. The diver re-emerges. In this circularity, marked not just by the fall and the rise but also, and more significantly, between thought and action, between the before and after in which diachronic timescales intertwine, the emotional pregnancy of the instant opens up to the duration of everyday life. Action becomes a test, the exercise of obstinate resistance to surrender, to escape mechanisms, to a tacit consensus, and to an immobility which still produces consequences. In this work, like other recent works of hers, Migliora takes themes such as memory, desire, loss, relationships with others and fear to create symbols of an everyday epic, of a heroism that originates from undeclared battles, which are sometimes lost, indescribable and shared. At the entrance to the exhibition is the work *Blocco di partenza* (Starting block), a term which oddly keeps two opposing forces together: hesitation, the block, and the necessary impetus to leap. The artist has made the work by using her own weight as the unit of measurement for a platform similar to the starting blocks in swimming pools, although in this case it is made of lead. Lead is a material which, due to its physical characteristics – the high specific weight, its malleable consistency and the opaque reflections –, has spread saturnine values linked to melancholy and the sense of loss since antiquity. "Its weight is the desire to fall", wrote Primo Levi. Migliora makes lead the instrument and subject of a fall which, however, frees it from its weight, enabling it to conquer the immaterial lightness that any free falling body may experience. *Siamo fatti di questo d'aria e acqua come le comete* (We are made of this air and water like comets). Using the capacious rhythm of opera, the words of the

writer Erri De Luca are lit up on a wall, dissolving the substance into its basic elements, just as the formula inscribed on *Blocco di partenza* cancels the dense weight of matter due to the absence of gravity.

Once more, it is an image that has surfaced from history which underlies the installation *Migratori senz'ali* (Wingless migrants): six pieces of material hand-woven onto the loom which reproduce the phases of transformation of a falling body as they appear in the collage *Tuffatore linee sintetiche del movimento verticale* (Diver: synthetic lines of vertical movement), made in 1931 by Thayaht, the name used by the futurist artist Ernesto Michahelles. Over the speed of fall that redesigns the stylised profiles of the body, Migliora applies the slow movement of weaving, a gesture whose every stitch leaves an imprint. In the vertical extension of the pieces of material, the silhouette of the diver, made to human scale, is duplicated symmetrically as in the case of shrouds; in these fabrics, steeped in the effects of time and designed to receive the ebbing away of the life force, homage is also paid to the many different migrations that we are called on to undertake, those of an entire life, like those moved by need and desire.