

Valentina Bruschi, *Aqua Micans – Hotel delle Palme*

Text for the solo exhibition *Aqua Micans – Hotel delle Palme* (2013, G.O.C.A. Foundation, Ex oratorio della Madonna del Rifugio dei Peccatori Pentiti, Palermo)

The *Aqua Micans* project consists of a photograph and a series of drawings - mixed media on paper, titled *Hotel delle Palme* – realized by Marzia Migliora following her trip to Gibellina and Palermo, where, through suggestions and free associations, she expanded the theme of art and culture as vital essences. This issue has been at the centre of the artist's research in recent years, expressed through different works of art, from video to performance, such as in *Viaggio intorno alla mia camera* (Castello di Rivoli, 2011), *Capienza massima meno uno* (Maxxi, 2012), *Io in testa* (with Luigi Coppola, Teatro Valle Occupato, Nomas Foundation and Nuovo Cinema Palazzo), *Con la cultura non si mangia* (Lungomare Bozen - Bolzano, 2013).

The photograph, which gives the title to the exhibition, portrays five women in a row carrying amphorae filled with water and supporting them on their heads or shoulders, repeating an old gesture - still relevant today – typical of the South of the world, where water bearers carry between forty and sixty gallons of water per day, covering up to fifteen kilometres on foot. A daily ritual against the backdrop of a barren and desolate landscape that Marzia Migliora has deliberately chosen to re-enact on the *Grande Cretto* by Alberto Burri, in Gibellina.

In the photograph, the shade of blue chosen for the women's dresses, recalls the dust of “azolo”. The artist picked this particular colour, during a visit to the ruins of Poggioreale, from amongst remains of plaster of the walls in the houses that survived the earthquake of 1968. “Azolo”, which has the colour of the sea and references water, is a powder that was used by Sicilian women to obtain a bleaching effect on linen. It is reminiscent of the image of the house - a female symbol - and its destruction, like in the ruins of the earthquake. Its architectural form and brick facades are referenced in some of the elements represented in the series of drawings.

In the *Hotel delle Palme* series of drawings - integral and complementary part of the project - the intent is to compare and create a dialogue between the contrasts combined by the artist during her trip to Sicily: ancient ruins crossed by complex irrigation systems (similar to a lymphatic system), amphorae and capitals are compared with models of modern architecture. This is the rigorous research method followed by Marzia Migliora, in which past and recent history alternate with each other in layers of different times and places, creating a landscape to cross, to experience and exploit, in order to offer a new outlook on the surrounding environment. After having spread wide expanses of black ink on paper, evoking the tunnels of Burri's *Grande Cretto*, the artist has drawn the minute details of cultivated fields and landscapes views which have then been dissected, showing sections that lead underground and evolve in dotted plants of agave and palm trees.

In some of the works on paper, along with the water element intended as regenerator, feminine, liquid and salvific, its opposite nature also appears: fire, inevitable as a volcanic eruption, but also as a spark, capable of illuminating. Here, in fact, the work references back to *aqua micans*, the one described in the novel by Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*, a water that subverts and outwits the cliché of its incompatibility with fire, re-directing our attention to the fact that these are two inseparable elements and ancestral well-springs of life on earth. The *aqua micans* described by Roussel is capable of reviving the lifeless brain of Georges Danton, famous for his revolutionary oratory, and making it speak. It is flickering, pulsing, bouncing and bolting water - from the Latin *mico*; but also water which darts, shines, brightens, sparkles, flashes, gleams and glares. Igneous water and aqueous fire (one might say) that arise and ignite from and on the head, according to Marzia.

Thus, in the collages, the use of illustrations from the *Encyclopédie* by Diderot and D'Alembert, symbol of the Age of Enlightenment, from which the artist has cut out busts of women-muses and

has transformed their heads, using ink, into volcanic craters erupting fragments of gold, material chosen to acknowledge the value of human thought.

The image of the "protuberance" on the head, in a continuous cross-reference between the pitcher full of water and the erupting volcano, is reminiscent of Marzia Migliora's performative work, carried out in May 2013, coinciding with the production of the *Aqua Micans* project. It is *Io in testa*, the performance made in Rome in collaboration with Luigi Coppola. Here, the urgency was to "put culture on one's head (mind, ed.)" in terms of commitment, priority, re-appropriation and will. With the title of *Cantiere comune di immaginario politico* (shared construction site for political imaginary, ed.) the two artists have set up an open workshop to discuss the current issue of common goods as concrete utopia and effective possibility of commitment for citizens in a time of social and culture crisis. During the workshop, each participant was invited to build his own headgear made in papier-mache, using sheets of newspaper, taking a cue from paper hats used by masons. The hats became symbolic objects to "put on one's head" to manifest on the street personal messages of resistance and desire for culture.

Desire, power and freedom of imagination is the creed of the Surrealist Revolution, always relevant and influential in contemporary art. In fact, André Breton, was one of the first to discover the genius of Roussel, especially admiring his ability to creatively rework images and words from the unconscious, anticipating automatic writing. The suicide of Roussel in Palermo, in room 224 at the Grand Hôtel et des Palmes, in circumstances not entirely clear, establishes an indissoluble bond between the author and the city. Investigated by Mauro De Mauro, the story was later told by Leonardo Sciascia in his book, published in 1977, *Atti relativi alla morte di Raymond Roussel* (proceedings related to Raymond Roussel's death, ed.). Referenced in the title of this project by Marzia Migliora, Raymond Roussel is capable of emphasizing the syncretism between life and death, and his influence has been acknowledged by the artist as a continuous underlying theme of this project, revealing surprising connections and analogies.

All these elements have been chosen to trace the path of the artist's research in Sicily, enabling her to offer complex interpretations of reality. With determination, Marzia Migliora doesn't hold back from her purpose of revealing the wonder of artistic creation in the relationship between water-fire, life and culture.