

## ***“Through the eyes of an angel”***

Gianfranco Foschino

Text included in the catalogue for his exhibition “Hidden Stories”  
Stadtgalerie Museum. Saarbrücken, Germany, 2015

*„Aber noch ist uns das Dasein verzaubert; an hundert  
Stellen ist es noch Ursprung. Ein Spielen von reinen  
Kräften, die keiner berührt, der nicht kniet und bewundert.“*

RAINER MARIA RILKE  
DIE SONETTE AN ORPHEUS, X

On December 28, 1895, the first cinematographic projection took place as a public event in Paris. For the films shown, the Lumiere brothers used simple everyday subjects: some workers in a factory of their own, and the arrival of a train into Le Ciotat station. It is said that this last sequence generated fearful reactions in the public, some of whom even tried to flee the projection hall. The stable and clear distinction between reality and fiction, a stability that had not been challenged in such radical way by any of the known mediums of visual representation until that time, had been definitely subverted.

Almost 120 years have passed since then, and we are surely not afraid of movies depicting trains anymore. The representation of movement, in all its possible forms, has been somehow exhausted, and has become a "naturalized" dimension of our existence. This naturalization of movement, in the privileged forms of velocity and hyper-dynamism, has led to an apparent paradox: we can't recognize it anymore in its original "miraculous" dimension. Our eyes seem to be tired, numbed and a bit overwhelmed. How can we recover the fascination for movement that those simple films generated one century ago? Is it possible just by means of an ever-increasing process of technical innovation, expanding the notion of aesthetic experience far away from its primary optic-visual boundaries? Or is it rather a matter of learning again how-to-look, thus recognizing the basic distinction between seeing and contemplating? This seems to be the way chosen by Gianfranco Foschino.

For this purpose, he proposes an "inversion of perspective", flirting with photography and painting, those mediums in which the act of contemplation has a particular connotation. More than once, the "pictorial" character of Foschino's videos has been recognized as a distinctive feature of his artistic proposal. What does it mean pictorial, in this context? In terms of aesthetic experience, painting establishes an immersive relationship with the observer based on its pure "presence", while video provides an experience based on "expectation". Foschino's work is situated in the ambiguous frontier that separates these two realms. It can be understood as an alchemical synthesis between presence and expectation, and in a deeper, almost metaphysical sense, between *being* and *time*, as the two fundamental dimensions that configure our experience as conscious beings in the world.

The reference to metaphysics is pertinent, both in formal and conceptual terms. Watching the sequences exhibited by Foschino in “Hidden Stories” (Stadtgalerie Museum, Saarbrücken, 2015), the work of a painter like Giorgio de Chirico comes to mind. Urban settings with a certain theatrical mood, in which solitary characters appear to perform their roles as actors of an unknown script – hidden stories from which we just recognize fragmented, ephemeral signs-, are shared features in the work of both artists, each one making use of the resources inherent to their respective mediums of representation. Chirico depicts still lifes made up of silent buildings and lonely mannequins. Apparently, these scenarios are completely fixed and static. But then, the footprint of time materializes itself in the form of subtle signs of movement: a flag in the top of a tower, the sails of a distant ship in the horizon, the long shadow of a statue at dusk. All of them, signs of the expectation proper of things to come, of mutability and change. *Being* turns into *becoming* by means of the irruption of *time*, as the spectral shadow of the *sinister* (*Das Unheimliche*), which paradoxically brings “life” into play. And this is precisely the visual strategy proposed by Foschino: the subtle irruption of movement, into an apparently fixed composition. In *Espiritu Santo*, it acquires the form of mist, entering the scene like a gentle, ephemeral ghost, leaving no traces behind it...just an infinite sense of delicateness. In *1065591*, a woman under a bridge intentionally performs the role of an inanimate corpse...an abandoned mannequin? Subtle signs of life surround her: a wandering pigeon, a plastic bag moved by the wind. The levels of expectation are raised to a peak...something “must happen”, for our minds modelled into the linear narrative scheme of traditional cinema. Indeed, something happens, but it is neither a hollywood-esque happy end, nor a dramatic “finale”, just an everyday situation. Like in Antonioni’s masterpiece, ironically titled “The adventure” (1960), this is just an intentionally “endless-pointless” plot in which time and expectation are the real characters.

But Foschino also plays a role himself in his compositions, akin to that of the angel in Wim Wender’s “Der Himmel über Berlin” (1985). A panoptical, silent voyeur, who seems to be fascinated with our apparently insignificant lives. Before his eyes, the world unfolds simultaneously in all its inherent richness and complexity, but perhaps in a different *tempo*: that of the true essence of things, an essence in which movement is still a miracle. Through his work, Gianfranco Foschino invites us to contemplate the world through the eyes of an angel, his own eyes, thus recovering the same pure and pristine fascination.

Juan Almarza Anwandter

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