

The Time of a Meeting, the Vitality of a Drawing

What is the aim of art, if not primarily encouraging and strengthening the involvement of those who can experience it?

A bright evening, the air is warm. Among the buildings that constitute Cenni di Cambiamento, the residential social housing complex inaugurated in 2013 in the west of Milan, there is a small lawn.

Slowly, the sound of a playful song that alternates two refrains – ‘Come one, come all / Us, pyrotechnic rounds’ – accompanies people approaching and sitting down here and there on the lawn. Among those present, people of all ages. A voice interrupts the song and invites those on the lawn to get comfortable and find a flyer (the invitation to the event) that some passersby hand out or that can be found around.

The flyer, which is not so small, on one side depicts some coloured rounds that occupy the surface irregularly. From the centre to its ends. Disposed in this way on paper, the rounds visually transpose the sense of movement pervading all the performance, the continuous mutation of forms. On paper, the arrangement of the rounds is also a trace of the architectural geometries of Cenni’s complex. Around them is some information about the work: title and date of the event; the indication that it is a project Francesca Chiacchio has carried out in collaboration with the centre of artistic production Mare culturale of Milan. There is a map on the back.

The shrill voice enunciates every single word and invites to look at the map: you are here, on your right you can find the building A, that is connected through the terrace 1 to the building B; between buildings B and C then there is the bridge 2 and so on and so forth, allowing all those who are listening to explore the context in which the performance will soon begin, and at the same time find their bearings. And this is not a secondary detail. Listening to the instructions coming from the loudspeakers placed on the lawn means continually moving from the map to reality, from drawing to buildings and to people who quickly become familiar with what the voice presents as a fireworks show, but without fires.

For a few moments, whoever is present – not a simple observer but an active participant – performs a double exploration, decisive for his complete inclusion in the work. They look at the flyer by rolling it in their hands, and they look for the two-dimensional references of the map in their surroundings. People are in tune with what happens and with those who, like them, are involved in the exploration and who perform the show on the buildings’ balconies, terraces and windows.

Where does our sense of belonging to human activity originate? Probably from the very chance to participate, to share something with other people who like us can rejoice or suffer for what life reserves. Not only does it all start with a bond but also with its being actively involved, with its establishment through the projects and relational activities that make it possible. In this sense, art can

play a more decisive role today, just as Francesca Chiacchio's work confirms when it is accomplished in its changing shapes.

A living drawing. In this way Chiacchio calls the collective improvisation that she has designed in Cenni's complex. Its wealth is in the essential, in offering a lot through an accurate economy of means. Pool headphones, billboards unrolled on terraces and buildings. The pyrotechnic rounds, us. The strength of Chiacchio's living drawing lies, in fact, in relationships that can be re-established and built up precisely thanks to a collective improvisation of about a quarter of an hour. The time of a meeting, the vitality of a drawing. An improvisation that is cleverly carried out and which can achieve a 'relational harmony' based on the fleeting but intense encounter between its participants.

Carrying it out means being aware of its ephemeral nature – that is, knowing in which way to offer it as an experiment relegated to the very moment of its performance, although without neglecting anything that was previously designed. But, on the other hand, it is also a matter of giving it a rhythm. A continuous opening that allows its forms to change over time. In other words, improvising implies extending the project beyond the drawing from which it originates in order to emphasize its living features. From the traces on paper to the contact with people. Working in this way ultimately means revealing the design beyond the project and the nature of making art. With her living drawing, Chiacchio is able to achieve two results in particular.

The first is sharing a moment of joy for all the people involved. Some will immediately object that it is too trivial to argue that art has a value in that it makes happiness possible. However, for all practical purposes, any criticism of the eudemonistic function of art loses its mordant considering the success of this performance: its merit is to have aroused joy and appreciation in its participants - from children to Cenni's residents; from performers to passersby – as their gestures, faces and looks have expressed during and after the event.

The second is harmonizing the proposal of the performance artist and the participants of her living drawing. The voices of the rappers involved in Chiacchio's project replace the voice providing instructions and harmony is achieved. Music starts – which Diamante, SKOCK (Mattia Soffientini), FLO'W (Flavio Scotolati), Ander Zalem have worked on – and this is the moment when the two 'frequencies', of design and participation, overlap thus determining the triumph of the performance. In this moment, improvisation reaches the maximum degree of relational and participatory harmony. The singing tells of possible chromatic associations: blue like the sea, green like the leaves, and so on and so forth. On the terraces, windows and bridges, bodies and colourful pool headsets vigorously rotate. The pyrotechnic show is in the prime of its expression, the participants smile and dance. No fireworks, only the rounds animating Cenni's buildings, tinting them in the colours of life.

Davide Dal Sasso, June 2017