

Breathless nature
Di Laura Gasparini

Wild Window focuses on the breathless nature of the numerous insect and animal species that were captured and displayed in the old glazed cabinets of the world's leading natural history museums and collections. Once again, Andrea Ferrari looks through his gentle and careful lens to show us the ancient desire running through the history of images - from the ancient Greeks to Talbot - to capture the beauty and secrets of nature. The author uses the language of traditional and digital photography to give life to an image that is nothing but a sequence of shadow and light of differing intensity, a light that reveals the mystery of nature itself. Part of Andrea Ferrari's exploration and subject matter is the shadow that, from the very beginning of human history, has played the role of replacing the body, the real object, and making it present despite its absence by becoming its double.

The shadow is the footprint of the body that enters into a dialogue, stressing the changing nature of form and the fluidity of life or – perhaps even more accurately - its recollection. The shadows gain their own power, roles and specific meanings in Andrea Ferrari's compositions. They recall a past life and play on the present becoming an element of visual deception and illusion. The shadow becomes a mirror for our gaze, a theatre for representation and thus an artifice. *Nature* and *artifice* meet in the shadow and become *amazement*.

For contemporary men and women of the digital era, where everything is the opposite of everything, everything is deceptively colourful, colours have to be loud and chiaroscuro, hence the shadows, plays second fiddle to the composition of the image because the latter has to be straightforward. There is no room left for surprise, amazement and, in particular, the world of nature. Conversely, in the past and thanks to photography, the shapes of animals, vegetables, ostrich eggs and unicorn horns looked like *prodigies* laden with meaning and bearers of miracles. The bodies of these embalmed animals have now become *objects*. They are kept in cabinets, protected by glass, crystal bowls and surely, in the past, they were carefully observed by scientists through lenses, prisms and other optical instruments to discern and record details and hidden meanings. For centuries, these animals were, for the most educated European classes, items for study and a source of identification, so much so that looking at these *wonders* one can go on a compelling, unusual journey through the culture that produced them.

At the same time, it is possible to retrace their boundaries, yet, as Andrea Ferrari does, it is also possible to imagine new directions that arise from a fresh perspective, in this case, his and his camera's perspective. Andrea Ferrari takes us on a journey that is not unlike that of Claudio Parmiggiani and Luigi Ghirri when they created *Alfabeto. Museo di Storia Naturale Lazzaro Spallanzani* in 1975. This artistic book has 21 colour tables, the same number as the letters in the Italian alphabet. To find the subjects and photograph them, the authors walked around the cabinets of this ancient naturalist collection and, as the poet Adriano Spatola wrote, "they touch things with their eyes... and open up new horizons for art". There is a clear analogy in the type of work, yet Andrea Ferrari is not in debt to them because, in processing the images Ferrari entrusts himself to a 'skin-like' single colour, instead of letting the colours relay the message as Parmiggiani and Ghirri did.

Ferrari uses strongly evocative - even symbolic - visual syntax. People gaze or look at the animals in the cabinets and, at the same time, the multitude of embalmed animals look out, deprived of life, but not shape. It is through this interaction that the author overturns the roles and, especially, the focus. We feel under observation, faced with the mystery and the beauty of nature, forcing us to shed our certainties and lose ourselves in the immensity of the world.