

WILD WINDOW

Di Walter Guadagnini

"Wild Window" is built on stratification, constantly recalling elements. It requires not only attention and openness, but also - perhaps even primarily - complicity on the part of the viewer. It can be no accident that such a visually and conceptually compact corpus of images will be displayed in its entirety for the first time ever at Reggio Emilia's Galleria Parmeggiani, a place founded on stratification and ambiguity. The very images that make up "Wild Window" originated in museums, but then develop using a model that is neither the encyclopaedia nor the archive, but the art collection. Ferrari's underlying logic is fundamentally selective, rejecting cataloguing and embracing ostentation. For him, the subjectivity of the gaze lies at the very beginnings and the essence of photography. Such subjectivity is rendered explicit through the almost constant choice to select partial visions, privileging details ahead of the whole in all cases but the tiniest of subjects. Thus, the first salient element in this project comes from two specifically photographic aspects that influence the very essence of the language. First, the gazes of the animals are what guide the vision, providing an inescapable yet privileged interpretation and the initial source of the ambiguity the viewer must come to terms with.

The presence of such gazes questions the very nature of the images, sowing the fertile doubt of life within these figures. And there was life, but it is no more. The typical photographic mechanism of before and after is at play and the figure exists in a time between being and having been. As such, these animals are into their third lives, carrying with them their past lives and their existence now in other museums, in places from which they were taken by another gaze, aided by an appropriate tool, transferring their gaze and

surface to another place.

Surface is the second key element of these images. I am referring not so much to what covers the animals - fascinating in its own right, with plumages, carapaces and striped coats - but to that of our body. Ferrari's choice of pink to move from the individual image to the series is a deliberate and explicit reference to our skin. That human skin is used to unify a collection of animal images is certainly a principle touched by the bizarre, but it drives us to look deeper at the centrality of the author and viewer in the overall meaning of "Wild Window". Ferrari once again deliberately reverts to ambiguity and evokes what is not present in the image to recall the experience of vision and its consequences for knowledge and interpreting the world. He does so to such an extent that, from an initial series of animals where the gaze is central, he delves into other animal forms - fossils, insects - where the gaze is completely absent (or at least not perceivable). This throws the cycle into a new dimension, that of cosmogony, of being able to re-create a world from its images and figures.

This explains why the exhibition now in Galleria Parmeggiani is akin to a series of Chinese boxes, in which a museum exists in a museum. Plus, one cannot help stressing that these images are like a music score with an upbeat tempo that isolates the subject from its context and makes it an absolute before referring it back to the museum where the image was taken. It is a collection within a collection, the appearance of appearances (as Duchamp wanted an artwork to be), around which it is possible to construct not so much a narrative, but rather a discourse on the way each viewer comes to own the images.

At a time when the debate in the photographic community centres around archiving and circulating images, and the very nature of the photograph, it is extremely interesting that Ferrari decides to go down a parallel but less

topical road that nonetheless engages with the core issues determined by the new settings which those who have chosen photography as an expressive medium have to come to terms with. Along this parallel road, inspiration is not really drawn from the language per se (that was more so for Ferrari's other series, "The pictures included in this envelope"), but from nature itself and from observing it, even though in some instances this nature is tamed for the purpose of exhibition and study. Nature is seen as a place where one can read existence in its entirety, where once again events and shapes take on a value linked to a more human pace than what we have become used to in the contemporary world. In such a context, this consideration might seem to be of secondary importance, but on closer examination it is actually key and central, like a veiled poetic manifesto. Coming to terms with this imaginary means coming to terms with a history - including that of the gaze - that is somehow pre-modern and pre-photographic in a postmodern and post-photographic era. It is as though Ferrari somehow tried to return primitive purity to the practice of photography (it is what Meatyard used to say about himself "I feel like a primitive photographer"), thus rediscovering the somewhat necromantic, magic essence of photography. This facet of photography runs parallel to the scientific and industrial side that is the other crucial aspect of the discourse on photography since its origins.

So, if there is a defining trait in this series, regardless of its specific iconographic features, it is the reference to the original relationship with the world, that state of mind where one is open to be amazed, to be part of a 'fascination mechanism' that has no rational grounds (however, there are no fantasy animals here, no trace of inspiration leading to Borges' bestiary in this series).

This is the extreme and fertile paradox of "Wild Window": using subjects typical of scientific inventories to extol the visionary qualities of

photography. The staging highlights these characteristics. It plays with analogies, hidden references and the alchemic, unexplainable visual and mental perception of observing these shapes. This unexplainable, alchemic element is part of these shapes, yet it never seeks to provide a rationale other than Baudelaire's '*Correspondences*'. Ferrari's work runs the risk of being beautiful and enchanting, a way to penetrate images and their meaning through the senses.