

## "Giorgio Griffa: materia spirituale"

*Dunque quella prassi silenziosa, sacrale, direi quasi monastica, di fissare uno dopo l'altro i segni sulla tela senza dare a essi un significato, costituiva pur sempre un modo di raccontare il mondo, la memoria del rapporto dell'uomo col mondo, ciò che hanno raccontato le arti di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli, ogni volta secondo le loro conoscenze.*

Giorgio Griffa<sup>1</sup>

In the *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, 1124, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux criticized the excesses of the monastic order of Cluny and advocated a return to the foundations of the fifth century Rule of Saint Benedict, based on obedience, humility and the spirit of silence. Cistercian architecture, which expanded throughout Europe in the 12th century, brought together the principles promulgated by Saint Bernard in outstanding examples such as Santa María de Bujedo de Juarros.

The Cistercian abbey of Bujedo de Juarros, founded in the second half of the 12th century, was dedicated to monastic life for more than 650 years until the Confiscation of Méndizabal took place in 1835. After many years of abandonment, its ruins were faithfully restored, and in 1981 the project received the prestigious Europa Nostra award.

*Giorgio Griffa: materia spirituale* ("Giorgio Griffa: spiritual matter") is the third project that the Galería Rafael Pérez Hernando has carried out in its Bujedo programme. In it, we witness the magical encounter of the austerity, rhythm and silence - characteristic of monastic life - with the work of Giorgio Griffa (1939, Turin).

In 1968 Griffa left figurative painting behind to focus on the exploration of signs, as the ancestral and universal language of painting: "the ancient and primordial gesture means embracing at least the last ten thousand years of memory, contaminating the immense and priceless treasure of tradition, bringing it to the present"<sup>2</sup>. The rhythm is in the repetition of signs as the first instrument for knowledge, connecting us with space and time through their sequence. The signs, always the same and always different due to the human and imperfect condition of the vehicle that executes them - the hand - are a metaphor for the evolution of life and nature.

<sup>1</sup> Griffa *undici cicli di pittura*. 2021 Ed. Allemandi

<sup>2</sup> *Giorgio Griffa*. Galería Rafael Pérez Hernando 2010

In an act of resistance for his time, when conceptual art and *arte povera* represented the prevailing artistic trends, Griffa held to his conviction and defence of painting as an artistic vehicle to delve deeper into issues of a philosophical and humanist nature. The act of painting as a bridge between the past and the present, multifaceted, in communion and constant dialogue with the viewer, with figures such as Giotto as references.

The return to the ancestral and primordial sources of the language of symbols is developed organically on the canvas. The natural fabric, free from the limits of the stretcher frame, extends across the floor of the artist's studio like a celestial vault that holds constellations, myths, legends and millennial wisdom. In this ritual of dance on the canvas, Griffa reconnects with ancient wisdom and tradition, uniting east with west.

Silence, translated into his painting by containment and voids, coexists with a rhythm that seems to emerge from that same silence. It is a creative rhythm based on the rhythms of the earth and music, coexisting and juxtaposing with each other limitlessly, until infinity.

After wandering through the mystical simplicity of the main nave of Santa María de Bujedo de Juarros on a path of retreat and silence, we find *Dioniso due*, historical work by Giorgio Griffa, located in the transept. The twin of the piece created by the artist for the 1980 Venice Biennale, it belongs to the "Transparenze" series. *Dioniso due* takes us to a universe of fragments built with transparencies in which, as if it were a musical symphony, the signs become juxtaposed, connected, nourished and mixed up. This piece, like the sign - the vertebral element of Griffa's work - is always the same, but never identical, as it is presented differently in each of the places where it is shown.

The mutating and fluid universe of *Dioniso due* connects on the other side of the transept with the golden ratio in *Spirale*, 2023. The golden ratio is an important reference in Griffa's work as a symbol of perfection in the universe and nature, of an infinite condition, as Griffa's works are infinite, without limits, beginning or end. His canvases free from stretcher and frame continue developing endlessly. *Spirale*, in turn, leads the gaze towards a door in the transept that seems to take us to new paths. Paths that, like the golden ratio, continue forever revolving around the unknown until the end of time.

In the old cellar of the monastery, *Nurkoszop*, 2019, belonging to the *Shaman* series exhibited at the 34th Sao Paulo Biennial in 2021, magically connects with the repetition and rhythm of the signs of the Mozarabic door from the beginning of 16th century. The Shaman murmurs incomprehensible words. This series, begun around 2010, incorporates the word as a sign, words turning into signs, images of a universal language beyond linguistics. The folds of the canvas present its history, giving it a more sculptural character. The fabric hung on the wall, with its folds like imprints, marking the passage of time and the future of the work, connect in turn with the French and Belgian tapestries of the 16th and 17th centuries in this exhibition at the abbey of Santa María de Bujedo de Juarros.

In the 34th Sao Paulo Biennial's catalogue, the same double page connects two great masters of 20th century Italian art: Griffa, and Morandi (1890-1964). The two artists have a profound connection in their artistic and life practices. Morandi lived and developed his artistic career focused on the same theme: simple, domestic still lifes that nevertheless allowed him to evoke existential proposals. For fifty years, Giorgio Griffa has conducted

an artistic practice outside of all systems and trends, clinging to his impulses and convictions, and this represents his greatest work and legacy. The body of work produced since the 60s constitutes the paving stones of a path of integrity, consistent with himself and his work. A vital statement.

In his writings, Griffa repeatedly mentions the figure of the antihero, as an admired and contemporary counterpoint to the mythologized and exalted figure of the artist as creator. He considers himself a mere transmitter of the ancient and universal legacy of signs, which - through his body over the canvas, through his hands and colours - is brought to the fabric. However, the coherence of his principles, throughout the course of an artistic career outside the canons of his time and his contemporaries, establish him as a human and spiritual hero, freed from the conditions and ties inherent to hierarchy and power.

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