

Martina Corgnati

If I were to choose among all the possible elements, actions or attributes a single one to characterize the body of work by Lucia Nazzaro, I would undoubtedly identify it in the fold. At first glance it becomes apparent that most of the Turinese artist's practice is based on folding, crumpling or crimping surfaces and various materials, reliefs and sculptures or assemblages, as if she wanted to find in them a shape (a meaning) that each time might become explicit in them. A procedure that, with Deleuze, I like to track back to the origins of modernity (the fold corresponds to the

Baroque opening as opposed to the Renaissance unfolding, final and supreme attainment of a previously existing world that, at the beginning of the XVII century, was about to become extinct). This procedure then became the distinctive trait of hermeneutics with Volli : by folding one can juxtapose passages, excerpts and texts not contiguous in space and time, making it possible the comparison, i.e. the unfolding (interpretation) which can be found on unexpected ridges - that is, folds.

Therefore, the operation by Lucia Nazzaro would coincide with an exegetical act, a freeing of the meanings potentially enclosed inside the things and the objects which appear to have condensed and precipitated in her studio. They unfold not in the logical and rational dissolution of the accidents, but in its very opposite, i.e. the participated, emotional and sensitive investiture (that is, exploration and acceptance) of all gathers, imperfections, wrinkles.

Starting many years ago, Lucia has made of this aesthetic program not only a life-style, but a way of being an artist and a woman as well.

Our duty is then venturing along the thin edge of her metaphor which brings opposites to coincide against every etymologic evidence (unfold-fold): we will realize that we are not the first ones to attempt this though, since this is, on the contrary, a usual and traditional practice, for example, in Jewish biblical exegesis:<< This folding operation is not opposed to the operation of unfolding or smoothing but, on the contrary, integrates itself with them. If we were to continue with this metaphor of interpretation, we could say that the set of these two hermeneutic movements ensures the sacred text its peculiar resilience and adaptability: like a spring that stretches and adapts to the obstacles that it encounters, but then goes back to its original initial state >>.

It is interesting to note a sort of coincidence in reference to this sacred text which Volli discusses : Lucia Nazzaro preferably (and perhaps even obsessively) works with this kind of objects, i.e. sacred. Her last work is a Massacre of the Innocents inspired by Giovanni Pisano and in the near past we have seen a flourishing of Annunciations, Last Suppers, Nativities and, above all, Crucifixions. It can be said that, in a way, her body of work is a giant, insatiable cosmology, humble and solemn, in which nativity, life and death take the characteristic forms of the Christian tradition, i.e. Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion, Deposition or Pietas and so forth. They are thoughts, great thoughts or reference forms, finely interwoven with recollections, passages and needs coming from art history and innervating it: from the restless, edgy interpretations of sacred history and her protagonists sculpted by Giovanni Pisano to the use of the illumination typical of the most

disdainful, dramatic and even theatrical Caravaggio (I think of Alessandro Magnasco, for example) and through other paths and routes down to the metaphysics of the silent and almost solemn Last Supper.

Let's go back to the fold nonetheless, because it is there that we can expect to find a meaning or at least some meaning - certainly not in the plain evidence of the surface (I am talking in general terms here, since a plain surface is rare and very little appreciated by Lucia Nazzaro)

On the other hand, however, we should not expect that truth, sacred or profane as it may be, will emerge from a fold. The work of this Turinese artist resides more in this caress, in this loving and harrowing picking of a fruit which is always partial, temporary, carnal, and not simply carnal, but dripping with carnality. The fold, therefore, is not meant - or at least not only meant - for keeping things together, but it is itself the subject of this emersion, metaphor of a palpating presence and, in that, truly baroque and, at the same time, a creation of a tiny possible world that Lucia Nazzaro's imagery patiently and irresistibly creates.

The fold is, at the same time, instrument and character, aesthetics and form: first of all, instrument of a very theatrical and complex staging to which the artist dedicates herself without improvisations, falls and caprices, one day after the other. Her work is made of cycles and programs, of progressive series, which are sometimes interrupted and soft, and other times monumental. Certainly it could seem blasphemous or at least irreverent that many of these scenes (paintings of sacred representations) end up played, in her work, by unexpected and almost creeping actors: rats. However, in my view, this choice feels overrated in the critical essays dedicated to Lucia Nazzaro. Macabre fantasy if you wish, this degraded fantasy of rodents is just a fantasy, the focusing of a long period of the in the artist's research: to label her after this iconography would be forcing on her an interpretation well beyond her intentions and needs.

A subject, no matter how shocking or exciting, is just a subject, it is not the work which goes through it, which is around, above, below and on top since it does not exactly coincide with it. And why rats after all? or even better: would it have been possible to have a sacred representation without them from 2006 until today? The answer to this question is: probably not. They have offered Lucia Nazzaro a useful way out from the rhetoric of the subject, a kind of risky but possible Northwest Passage between form and the lack of it, the organic and the inorganic, coherence and incoherence; and as a consequence also between folding and smoothing.

Atypical produce of a spontaneous creation from her imagery, these are mass-creatures, silent and evasive with respect to the strict constraints of identity and sight. On their racked bodies which may also become objects of no-limits martyrdom just for the sake of pleasure, it's possible to build a narrative about fall and pain, about an act of grounding that coincides with Lucia Nazzaro's operative practice: while bending, sitting, kneeling, the artist picks up and organizes what can be described as a magma that she has previously slammed all over the floor, and she brings it back to some sort of vertical standing, giving it a meaning determined by an openly noble afflatus, stretching towards an unattainable symbolic order and at the same time wrapped inside a terrible, decayed condition of loss of form.

This is an important and ambitious operation: one of the close relatives of the monumental and sinister generatrix which, from the majesty of her immense horror gives birth to an uncountable

number of children, is Olympia by Jean Dufuffet (1950) << flattened like a flat-cake, passed through a compressing roller>> says Yve Alain Bois, i.e. degraded to a humor in a planned manner, a concretion capable <<of counterattacking modernism and to do this without opposing its formal certainties>> .

The ignoble casting of impure matter by Anti-form artists and even Warhol (e.g. Oxidation Painting in 1978, when the artist pissed on an immense canvas strewn with copper powder) , Eva Hesse limp totems, the impure, dirty and carnal materic style of many informal artists, of which Alberto Burri is an example, short-circuit the magnificent and progressive fate of modernism, polluting the evidence and aim at lowering the level of the listening and the aesthetic perception up to the most extreme and irreversible contamination, the body of waste and secretions, and the more enthralling and less high-sounding catastrophe of Idealism. Rats appear even less adequate than human beings for the role that this immense tragedy brings upon them; nonetheless Lucia Nazzaro might get angry with me if she heard me talking this way since she has in mind the great , compelling tragedy which renews itself in the mortality of any vital act, she has in mind art, with capital A, the finesse and the detail of the interpretation of the great masters, the minimum difference between a masterpiece and a failure, in contrast to the artists of the fifties and the sixties, to the women who, with their plastic forms without structure (Hesse), their images without subject (Sherman), their blood without metaphor have searched more consonant ways to make their sensitivity, their disdained and abused being-within-history visible. In her work there is no chance, but a patient, constant, painstaking forcing of materials up to the consistence and the transparency desired. Physically Lucia Nazzaro has to bend, glue, choose, compress, incise: her way of making sculpture is in itself an invention of gestures and techniques which have been little explored so far and have not been codified by artists yet. The last act of which consists in rising, putting the work of art up on its feet, barely kept inside its frame, like an actor in its role. Only then it is possible to see it, to confront with it from the point of view of that straight position that the ancestors of the human species have conquered more or less six millions of years ago . And only at this point the judging intelligence comes into play, i.e. some sort of distance component and therefore of comprehensive sight, that may lead to realize that the work of art may have a destiny different from its own, and therefore recognize the work of art as a conquered integrity, possibly provided with a future and in any case self-sufficient, something separated from the self. And at this point a most important thing is left to say, in fact the first thing one notices upon setting foot inside the artist's studio: this thing, which is nothing more than a swinging choice, a transitory, reversible - and yet absolute in that very moment - way of seeing the world which is linked to what color the fold and the surface , with their spirit and alchemy, have.

Lucia Nazzaro proceeds on parallel tracks: white and black, two modalities that drastically characterize and divide the choice of field and mood, of spirit and destiny. Her black - her blacks - in which the single bodies of the artworks heavily sink is not the color of mourning or death but of decay and contamination. It is not just a symbol: it is spongy, fat, redundant, involving, it is a state in which things are still imploded, in a certain sense, still part of the whole and of all things. Chaos before the Big Bang, black is the condition of the wound that continues to produce itself (and to produce and being reproduced) because monstrously forgetful of all the wounds of the past, unable of redemption or evolution. White, on the contrary is the color, or better, the condition of luminosity, optimism, the radiant separation of a thought and a form which is self-sufficient. All superfluous things have been left behind, all the turbulent and unnecessary things which accompany our negative feelings and touch our anguishes have finally detached from this white. And with

white Lucia Nazzaro is preparing her ensign of the future, a subject capable of positive feelings, serenely wrapped in its cocoon of light.

In any case, black and white in the work by Lucia Nazzaro, as in the work of Louise Nevelson, are indissolubly interwoven and one cannot exist without the other, like two dialectic parts, or even better two lovers in an embrace. <<White and black welcome different forms>> writes the American artist, <<the tones, the weights are different. See, when I used to create work with these colors, I thought they were permeated with a mood. And this is sufficient because this is fundamentally what happens... forms need to speak out>> .

Indeed, this is what originates, from shade and from light, from different moods, from misty awakenings before dawn and from the tireless patience of the artist who, every day, honestly, summons all the little antagonist miracles of existence, made of white and black, made with white and black, in the myth and in the accumulated leftovers on street sides and sidewalks. Thus, a little miracle of a dialectic that completely confesses itself, unable of ensuring redemption, a final parousia, but it is stubborn and humble in moving forward, time after time, to meet a meaning.

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U Volli, *Lezioni di filosofi della comunicazione*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2008, p.166

Y. A. Bois, *Il valore d'uso dell'informe*, in Y. A. Bois, R.Krauss, *L'informe*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2003, pp.3-4.

Louise Nevelson. *Dawn + Dusk*, *Taped Conversation with Diana Mac Kown*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976, p.144 e G.Celant (curated by), *Nevelson*, exhibition cat., Roma, 1994, Charta, Milano, 1994, p.120.