

The Praise of Rat

The word art and the word rat do have something in common. Besides the fact that they consist of three identical characters, it is a matter of their shared referential field marked by the notion of experiment. Both words could be metaphors, but not necessarily. From the one hand, an imperative of experimentation became one of the basic principles of modern art, from the other, the living being called rat is regularly subjected to experiments performed by modern science. While talking about scientific purposes we use to be silent on the pertaining torture. While talking about experiments in modern art we use to be silent on the violence of rhetoric that shapes and conditions our perception and knowledge. Contemporary critical discourse on art often manifests itself as a kind of hereditary disease. I am deliberately using a word disease here, for a rat in Western cultures becomes a metaphor of disease, a metaphor of an enemy. Since rats have been associated with the European 14th century plague - the Black Death, they are considered as vicious, unclean parasitic animals that steal food and spread disease.

It could be possible to associate the blackness that exists as one of the fundamental figures in Lucia Nazzaro's discursive space with a historically produced metaphor of the Black Death and to consider her works in a context of various rhetorical practices performed within Western culture that aim to produce a fear as a mighty normative tool. Nazzaro's specific representational procedure that intentionally utilizes worn-out symbols and non-heroic materials allows a reading of her works with regard to the legacy of Italian Arte Povera, but there is a figure of the rat that resists to such historicizations.

In the work articulation procedure Lucia Nazzaro utilizes a rhetorical figure of citation in order to challenge the meanings of the basic cultural symbols. In such narrative practice an image of the rat functions as an agrammatical punctuation situated at unexpected place, the sign that blows out the common sense. But what is the common sense? Nazzaro's works pose that question by invocation and resemantization of Christian iconography. In her work entitled *Ecce Ancilla Domini* she replaces both figures, that of the Holly Virgin and the Angel by the image of one single female rat shaped of gauze and placed in the strait space of wooden rectangular container that evokes the portable altar used in the practices of personal devotion. The appropriated words applied as a title of her work are traditionally the Virgin Mary's answer to the Archangel Gabriel in the Annunciation. How do they sound today? Few days after media announced that the American scientist created in his lab the first artificial live organism - synthetic bacteria named Synthia. Is that being related with a rat? And can one be sure that her gender is female as the personal name indicates, or the sexing is arbitrary? Is that artificial live organism, along with Nazzaro's rat, *Ancilla Domini*? And finally, what does it mean to be handmaid of the Lord?

In 2009 Lucia Nazzaro sculpted the crucifixion scene where the rat's gauze body has been crucified on the wooden cross. The ambiguous title *The Last Act* opens the wide spectrum of cultural connotations, but all of them point to the notion of language. What is the last act? The crucifying? The famous Seven sayings of Jesus on the cross? The final act of some theatre performance? It seems that the artist is staging a performance where the gauze representing the living body of

tortured animal connotes the wound - the one that has never been mythologized. The one that is not intelligible for it exists beyond words and images, beyond the language.

There is a text entitled *In the Absence of the Word* written by Lucia Nazzaro that begins with the following question and answer: "What is there left to say (by the use of painting) about human Knowledge? Nothing. Maybe the silence can realize that Time has gone by and make some noise on the Rest...that little that the greats left!" In the absence of the word Nazzaro concluded: "Where are the artists, the poets? Where are the men? Where do they hide? They want to slip out of control (as a mouse, indeed). They don't copulate very often and they are always looking for some leftovers of uneaten meals. On the threshold, Maria was waiting for the Spirit announced her by the story, but the snake had seduced her before her time arrived. The doubt of not being a woman didn't touch her, so she didn't give birth to the son of God. She gave birth to the mouse, that gave birth to other mice...Escaped to the Divine Creation, she was a mouse (female). Helpless, puzzled, she was raped, under the same astonishment she had for a long time..."

At the beginning of the third millennium Lucia Nazzaro hasn't invented new artistic technology or the new language of art, rather she brought into question the very technology of meaning production. Among others the meaning of word art.

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