

Lucia Nazzaro
Work in Black

Francesco Poli

For far too long have Lucia Nazzaro's artistic works disregarded both colours and light, victims of an unrelenting implosive drift in the intense and tragic darkness of the deepest hollows of existence soaking in melancholic moods.

In those lands of nowhere black reigns sovereign, having reabsorbed all the glares of the rainbow and cancelled in a cruel introversion the line of the horizon.

“The *impasto* of basic colours is a blackish mash: black as the only colour of a possible painting”.

But this very black, which shamelessly displays itself as an aggressive metaphor of whatever our cultural memory sees as mournful and deadly, distressing and dejected, negative and sick, and possibly even demonic; this very black, I mean, is surprisingly loaded with an unpredictable expressive energy and a hopeless vitality, which rises from the over-saturated symbolic layers resounding in the background only as a prolonged echo.

This expressive energy, which is born out of a deep black, an “extreme black”, is the clear sign of a will to give shape and aesthetic sense to a dimension with no apparent escape.

It is, in its way, a tension to the absolute, the result of an artistic search appearing as a utopian cathartic process both on the emotional and mental level, finally even hinting at a religious overtone, however indefinite may be all suggestions to a hope in the hereafter.

Pictorial matter is the primeval soul of Nazzaro's works, which always, or mostly, start from a two-dimensional space (the idea of painting), but grow and thicken through tangible materials and open up into real space with a desperate and warped extroversion, unfolding through unstable joints and thread-like, metal and textile, issuing elements which, like geometric cobwebs, seem to offer a possible opening to life as well as damn to a cruel hopeless imprisonment.

On this threshold, both terrifying and fascinating, all of Lucia's figurative and plastic narration is acted. The artist on one hand totally identifies with all the ghosts of her creation, while on the other tries to find an escape by giving life to formal frameworks and figures allowing a liberating detachment of reason and emotions (the two dimensions are by no means contradictory for her).

It must be said that in this refined and apparently contradictory way of performing authentic coherence can be found, which is born out of a dramatic short circuit between will to express herself and thus break free of her own nightmares and impossibility, due to an irrepressible need of truth, to do so without leaving behind essential parts of her experience.

But in the end the works are there, even if for years they have been confined in her study, left unfinished because it seemed impossible to bring them to an end, because the choice to finish them appeared to the artist an unbearable betrayal of her own self. But when a real opportunity to make them public came (that is, when the artist had to make a real choice, perhaps with a degree of compromise to the relative) the virtuous and wicked circle of identity between the author and her work must of necessity crack, making room for an inevitable split, a sign of surrender of the neurotic ego, but also a willingness to life. And Lucia Nazzaro chose to cope with external reality, finally giving birth to her creatures. Desire was strong, as strong as internal resistance.

It is by no chance that I used the word “give birth”, as the search of Lucia Nazzaro, an artist whose reasoning on her work always implies an attitude of exasperated self-criticism, clearly contains an explicit and prominent feminist significance. Here lies her fascinating uniqueness, triggering a complex relationship with the feminist culture of her generation.

For Lucia as an artist, childbirth is a question to be solved not exclusively at a personal existential level but also in her artistic production. And this precisely occurred, in an extremely passionate and provocative way, portraying (after an incubation of several years), a group of works having no doubt an essential value for her, as they burst the banks of self-destructive enclosure to give birth to new aesthetic perspectives.

In these works in black, which seem to have roots coming out of sewers and gutters, rats are the only protagonists, and more precisely female rats, dark and powerful ghosts of our collective unconscious, disquieting symbols of human condition. The most committed work, entitled *Child labour (The Great Mother Rat)*, is a monumental iron frame, a loom crossed in all directions by taut iron wires, giving shape to a disjointed texture striving to weave a tale of primeval strength. In the inside of this metal framework, lurks amid bandages of black tight-woven fabric the big black body of the female rat who, from under her long tail, has brought to an end her gestation expelling her breed, as cursed as she is.

This is the apocalyptic comment of the artist: “The iron wire is meant to weave the new image of historical time. Why? It’s frightening to think that man can no longer be a reference point. It’s puzzling to think that what was your disease of living is now shown as the man of today: a rat. Breeding rats. Why? Why rats and not frogs? Forever have they been man’s undesired companions....unless they could be used! Cavies are uprising. They become protagonists and create a new Species. Where is the *Übermensch*? Who or what has deprived him of his specificity of being also spirit?...”

In a smaller and yet as intense work, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, the same theme acquires a provocative but also passionately religious overtone. In a wooden case (which happened to be found among garbage cans), a perverted repeat performance of Annunciation occurs. A female rat takes the place of the Virgin Mary. Her long tail hints at the Serpent and penetrates her womb. The rat here becomes at the same time

Mary and Eve, the “Mother of Mankind”. Threads of bright brass feign the pathos of the rays of divine light but are in fact a weave that traps the rat in her own cavity. The tortured rat, the cavy, in another work is crucified, further (and perhaps a bit too dramatically) loaded with symbolic meanings. But definitely for the rat no Resurrection will ever occur.