

Conversation between Ester Coen and Alberto Di Fabio

from

ALBERTO DI FABIO | *Il profilo insonne della terra*

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The thing I liked best about America: my impressions of it are associated most of all with the energy that breathes in the whole environment. And what fascinates me most of all is that there are artists only a few years older than me who possess so much working, energy and such enormous productivity. Here in Italy, we lead a more leisurely life - more poetical and lyrical, yes, but there, in the US. interest in art is tremendous. on the. part of everyone - or almost everyone. Even children from the elementary schools are taken to see all kinds of different exhibitions, from traditional ones to the more conceptual kind. This creates a deep love of art, which in the end is translated into a great general interest. Going to America didn't produce a great change in my work itself, but rather in the organization of my time and my working rhythm. The dynamism existing in New York helped me to do a vast amount of work. There you find the possibility of creating something, and it doesn't remain forever in the realms of Utopia. There's also an ideological feeling: you breathe in universal ideas and there is such powerful energy that it can even be translated on to paper. For some years my love of mountains and natural landscapes had been entering my creative work. I began by drawing almost all the most majestic and highest mountains in the world: some of them I drew from life, while others I took from books. I'm really fond of the idea of representing mountains; I see them as a symbol, an elevation of the terrestrial world, an image of purity for our planet. A purity which is virtually untouched - a mountain seems like a heart, or a lung which is clear, clean and pure. Then I began studying mountains at closer range. From the macrocosm, I entered the microcosm. I studied chemistry and physics and began realising that this material substance that delights me so much is wakeful, is thinking; it is material which has been formed over millions of years by the arcane ordering of nature - an order which is almost incredible. There is a part of my work which is more poetic and reflects the emotion felt at the mere sight of a mountain. Then later came the works which were more geometrical, more clear-cut, more abstract. They originated with the thought of an internal DNA which these material objects possess. There are gases and minerals, for instance, which never mingle with each other: they come close, they confront each other, they study one another and if they don't like the look of each other they don't merge. Others decide that they will merge. unite, and then we have iron, for example, or coal or tungsten. When I analysed all this with closer attention. I realised that each of these responds to quite rigid and specific codes. It's as if I was seeking to explain, through my paintings, that the order in the natural system must be used and worshipped. not only exploited and consumed, it's as if I'm trying to create a new language to say something which people have already been saying for thousands of years. When I worked in Italy, in places closer to nature, my own works themselves were more closely linked to the land. This last winter in New York, when I was bottled up for months in my studio, and then emerged into that environment

where there are no plants, no earth, I began to choose rather acid, strong colours quite a long way away from the natural ones of the magma, the earth's crust. There is a great difference from my works of three or four years ago. I want both to retrace my earlier path and go forward at the same time. In Rome, I have finally been able to set up something of my own at Stelania Miscetti's studio. I call it an "installation", because I'm exhibiting a work which I still think of as a Single opus even though in fact it consists of eight different works.

Another is made up of twenty-four small paintings. I was seeking to involve the space with these really strong colours; with this multiplicity of works. Now I would like to create installations with the real base materials: it would be good to bring various minerals to the gallery, and have them merge with each other here. I would like to modify the sense of time in my work, because I am talking about processes which took place over millions of years. I feel that a more drawn-out form of time is needed, and this a real dream for me. I'm very conscious that many energetic impulses today, from the satellites and from TV images...lead us to be too anxious; they help to multiply anxieties which are far away from our own biological cycle.

I adore Bach and Shakespeare. just because I find in them the same fantastic melody which I sense when the leaves fall or when it rains: a harmony in the natural system that also exists in the creative system of these great geniuses, I feel we've been driven away from a constant truth. which must be brought back to flowering in all of us.

At least at mental level, we need to seek to recover the values which can help us to build something pleasing, something which possesses truth without artificiality. The mountain is a goddess to me; a kind of divinity. It fills me with sensations of purity. of life. of the joy of existence of naturalness. These emotions transcend the problems of the earth, and allow me to expand freely in the universe. I paint mainly on paper because the flow of the brush gives me great sense of freedom. And this colour, which becomes stratified on the paper and moves it. gives me the impression of "sedimented time". It's like seeing the different levels of stratified turf, or the various stratifications of cliffs and mountains: a geological sense which makes me feel as though I were creating a part of the earth's crust, of a lithosphere.

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