

That thou canst not stir a flower...

*Il y a déjà du bonheur à connaître le désir comme désir*<sup>1</sup>  
Montaigne

The path Beatrice Pediconi has been following now for over twenty years with unceasing desire to investigate, test, and combine techniques and materials of different linguistic nature is emblazoned with an idea of study – a study, which in itself, as Agamben observes, is an “interminable” act of its own<sup>2</sup> – that conveys the will to respond to an aesthetic imperative and engage the viewer’s gaze by knowingly stretching it over her own experience and *modus operandi*. Pediconi establishes close contact with her viewers, who are invited to read a subtle and carefully-composed *fabula de affectibus* in which to find a thing’s barely-hinted seduction or some slight and dizzying parenthesis remaining in a magnetic *nicht gesagt* on which depends the determination of the immediate visual availability of figures, morphemes, graphemes, and *chromemes*<sup>3</sup>, the minimal elements so useful in building a story.

Ascribable to a performative act in which the artist “dances around and within a body of water, until becoming nothing but brush”<sup>4</sup>, at least since the exhibition in Rome, between the rule and the exceptions, Pediconi has been experimenting with the circularity of her glorious *Corpi Sottili*<sup>5</sup> (2006) to go beyond the iconic and set forth on an unparalleled aniconic path adopting processes in which to discern underlying *power in action*, a fast-moving thought to control and predict, to indulge, to shape and even to release brilliant traces of time that (as if to show as blossoms the fruits that come later) deposit on surfaces as history.

What may at first glance seem an argument traceable to the special *tradition innovante* of Schad, Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, Luigi Veronesi, or an unforgettable Bruno Munari (all the way up to the elegant Wolfgang Tillmans) on closer inspection is actually *речь*<sup>6</sup>, which Pediconi develops further through an exceptional intersection of grammatical planes in order to go beyond merely questioning photographic practice and incorporate within it purely painterly and plastic procedures (even sonorous textures, when considering that the work’s perfect screen appears to preserve the iridescent sonority of water – the memory of water – lapping, dripping, seeping into the paper pulp or canvas, gliding swiftly over the wooden panel), thus giving rise to a veritable linguistic cross-pollination that leads to the dawn of an entirely new methodology. Henceforth, painting on water (then photographing it) definitively – causally – gives way to painting with photographic fragments used as pictorial palette to destabilize meanings and shift the work from the area of metaphor to that of metonymy, or more precisely, into autonomy, since the work is but exclusively, and marvelously, itself.

In 2019, just as she was working on *Anamnesis* (or perhaps only preliminary investigations), already foreshadowing a departure from the past, in a large series titled *Untitled* on paper, Beatrice Pediconi began digging into the

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<sup>1</sup> M. de Montaigne, *Essais*, in *Œuvres complètes*, II, VI (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), éd. M. Rat, A. Thibaudet, introd. et notes M. Rat, Gallimard, Paris 1962, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> G. Agamben, *Idea della prosa*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2020 («Nuova edizione illuminata e accresciuta»), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> In regard to these questions, see at least the indispensable and rarely appreciated J. Prieto, *Principi di noologia. Fondamenti della teoria funzionale del significato*, Italian translation, Ubaldini, Rome 1967.

<sup>4</sup> A. Tolve, *Oggetto di Studio*, in Id., *Studi d'artista. Un'avventura culturale*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan 2024, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. almeno *Beatrice Pediconi. Corpi Sottili / Subtle Bodies*, with texts by P. Marino and N. D. Angerame, De Luca Editori d'Arte, Rome 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “speech”.

elementary parts of the photographic corpus in order to field a new technique – of which she holds not only the primacy but also the maternity – consisting of the detachment of photographic shreds by means of hot water (from which to derive impalpable, utterly fluid trails of emulsion, photographic skin) and in their *upcycle*<sup>7</sup> on immaculate structures, cast suspended times, pour sinusoidal forms, and redraw elusive but poignant geometries<sup>8</sup> “*Untitled* bears witness to a process of which only an imprint remains, testimony to a loss: a gesture that reflects on the absence of historical memory and personal detachment”, the artist remarks. “The drawing is the result of a migration, and its volatile and minimal trace remains blank, as the last and only witness to a story. *Untitled* becomes the means of leaving a mark as evidence of our existence”<sup>9</sup>.

Presented in the solo exhibition *Nude* and created during what may be defined as Carl Schmitt’s *Ausnahmezustand* (the state of exception that preceded the state of emergency and thus the vicious and paralyzing effect of pandemic), these early works were followed a few months later by a series of large papers presented at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome, *Presenze*, in which in addition to refining her technique the artist displayed a more mature and intimate experience of a void, a rupture between past and future, loss that turns to subtle trace, the gentle voice of the wind, pain without color. “I developed the *Presenze* project with the loss of my father”, the artist notes, and it is, specifically, a reflection “on the theme of the passage of time, the recovery of memory, and transformation as a processing of grief. Drawing is the result of a migration; its volatile and minimal trace remains blank, as a witness to a story. The *Nude* series, of which *Presenze* is the natural consequence “becomes” now “the way to leave a mark that proves our existence”<sup>10</sup>.

This silent and precious research (in which one reads the full force of gestural enunciation) that expands beyond its disciplinary limits to involve the very fate of photography yields today works through which we inevitably come into contact with a practice that aims – here, the words of Barthes come to mind – “to transform matter in accordance with the full scale of its consistencies, by multiple operations such as wilting, thickening, fluidifying, granulating, and lubricating that produce what is known in gastronomy the glazed, the bound, the velvety, the creamy, the crunchy, etc.”<sup>11</sup>.

The slender, sharp, sometimes angular, streamlined forms of the abstracts that appear to dance over the paper in colors that “come through the window with the sun”<sup>12</sup> are joined in this new experience by more sophisticated compositions that in the Milky Way of addition give birth to appearances of the iconic whose *matière subtile* is charged with attractive and inclusive organic energies, atmospheres recalling secluded garden corners or stretches of grassland in which the artist can metaphorically and lyrically capture the fleetingness of a poppy.

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<sup>7</sup> On the concept of upcycle, see at least R. Pils, *Thinking About a Green Future*, interview by T. Kay, in “Salvo. A Monthly Look at Architectural Antiques, Reclaimed Building Materials & Allied Topics”, n. 23 (special), October 11, 1994, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> I reproduce here in part some reflections I wrote on the occasion of Beatrice Pediconi’s solo exhibition, *Nude*, curated by C. Canciani, held at Z2o Sara Zanin Gallery (Rome 2021) from February 5 to April 15, 2021, see A. Tolve, *Ritagli di tempo / Cutting Out Free Time*, in “arshake.com,” March 17, 2021, linked on June 13, 2024, 7:16 pm.

<sup>9</sup> The artist’s statement is included in the press release of the solo exhibition *Nude*, curated by C. Canciani held at z2o Sara Zanin (Rome 2021) from February 5 to April 15, 2021

<sup>10</sup> The artist’s statement is included in the press release of the solo exhibition *Presenze*, curated by A. Polveroni, held at The National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rome, from May 10 to June 18, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> R. Barthes, *L’Obvie et l’Obtus. Essais critiques III*, Édition du Seuil, Paris 1982; Italian translation, *L’ovvio e l’ottuso. Saggi critici III*, Einaudi, Turin 1985, p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> C. Pavese, *La bella estate* (1966), with introduction by F. Jesi, Einaudi, Turin 1997, p. 30.

In controlling the reaction of the materials, waiting for long pauses to pass between applying a first, a second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, or even seventh part required to define the composition (a procedure of inconceivable complexity requiring utmost patience), Beatrice Pediconi keeps us privy to the noise of her thoughts sifting, shaking, choosing gelatinous fragments of images snipped from a set of cuttings to be then deposited (and meticulously released), one at a time, no less, on a mute area, on a score that gradually becomes a corollary of chromatic notes and signs, and even before that, of gestures that once fixed become – by means of refined alchemical, even pataphysical procedures, I dare say – a brilliant narrative, erotically pierced at times by the sun in quivering, excited balance

Understood as epistruature, every laceration the artist applies to the surface treated previously with Kremer's purest pigments (Prussian Blue, Gray from Mels, Venetian Red, Anthraquinone Blue, Spanish Red Ochre, Agate Peach or Côte d'Azur Violet are carefully blended and mixed together to create velvety and creamy greens, violets, celestials, oranges, turquoises) lives – and this is worth noting – a life of its own, while at the same time taking part in the whole to enable vocative atmospheres, epiphanies, and apparitions in which *the whole*, as Kurt Koffka reminds us, *is other than the sum of its parts*<sup>13</sup> because it bears a new accomplished meaning, as if to seek a natural (suggestive) complicity with the viewer's gaze, which is wounded by lightness and levity announced (pronounced) with sonorous brilliance.

Linked again to the gestures of the hand, which sometimes scratches, sometimes smooths, sometimes flattens, here with a finger, there with the palm, elsewhere with a fingernail, until it brings us back under the skin of painting, which throughout its history has been made mainly of tools and materials, not to mention another essential aspect: the movement of the artist and her body inevitably projected towards the vacuity of a flower garden, a surface, the works Beatrice Pediconi proposes are rarefied atmospheres in which an intense, complete silence can be felt to vibrate, loud and sharp, and *lineis et (poeticis) coloribus* can be recognized that return to our memory wonderfully wild meadows where mallow stalks and flowers grow wild amidst white daisy, sage, ladies bedstraw, gentian, goat's beard, globed bellflower, betony, coronilla, pincushions, spiked veronica, and even blue vetch and amaranth.

Alongside three vertical papers from 2023 given the titles of extremely rare flowers (*Naked man orchid*, *Black mamba*, and *Kadupul flower*) we see an entire series of works on paper, canvas, and panel bearing as captions the line of a poetic composition, the reflection of an artist, a shred of a story or an ancient proverb, such as *Life begins the day you start a garden* (2023), which aptly recalls the Chinese sayings 生命从你种植花园的那一天开始<sup>14</sup> and *The mastery of a craftsman springs from the heart* (出心匠之巧)<sup>15</sup>. From this new chapter *Trees are sanctuaries*

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<sup>13</sup> K. Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York 1935; italian translation, *Principi di psicologia della forma*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1970.

<sup>14</sup> *Life begins the day you start a garden*. Truth be told, there are a number of variations on the theme of this proverb: 1) *Life is a garden, tread slowly* (人生像花园, 要慢慢逛) o 2) *Life is like a garden: lovely when flowers bloom, lovely when flowers fall* (人生像花园, 花开的时候是美的 · 花落的时候也是美的).

<sup>15</sup> Zhou Mi, *Guixin zazhi* 癸辛雜識 (Miscellaneous news from Guixin), Zhonghua shuju, Beijing 1997, p. 14.

(2024) comes a title borrowed from Herman Hesse's *Bäume*<sup>16</sup>, according to which trees are symbols related to remembrance, transience and rebirth, and also “*alles Wachstums, alles triebhaften, naturhaften Lebens, aller Sorglosigkeit und geilen Fruchtbarkeit*”<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to a perfect and harmonious *ars combinatoria* that leads to an elusive procedure beyond categorization, the ulteriority of these new works comes from the titles the artist has chosen with meticulous care and extrapolated with precision from poems, short stories, novels, and even essays to provide support for happy reading and amplify the evocative level of the image.

We find phrases by Honoré de Balzac (*The smallest flower is a thought*, 2024), Albert Camus (*Autumn is a second spring when every leaf in a flower*, 2024), Heinrich Heine (*Perfumes are the feelings of flowers*, 2023), Maria Zambrano (*Roots must have faith in flowers*, 2024), Alice Walker (*In search of my mother's garden I found my own*, 2023), thoughts of artists like Georgia O' Keeffe (*I hate flowers – I paint them because they're cheaper than models and they don't move*, 2024), Henri Matisse (*There are always flowers for those who want to see them*, 2024), Robert Dash (*Gardening is an obsession*, 2023) and William Kent (*All gardening is landscape painting*, 2023), and even reflections from the worlds of quantum physics and relativity – *Pick a flower on earth and you move the farthest star* (2024), a phrase Paul Adrien Maurice Dirac once used.

... *Without troubling a star*: this title as well is naturally taken from poetry, a verse from *Mistress of Vision* by Francis Thompson who, wondering where “the land of Luthany” lay and where “the region Elenore” (XXI, p. 184) was, wrote...

*All things by immortal power,  
Near or far,  
Hiddenly  
To each other linkèd are,  
That thou canst not stir a flower  
Without troubling a star*<sup>18</sup>.

Antonello Tolve  
Translated by Craig Allen

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<sup>16</sup> H. Hesse, *Bäume. Betrachtungen und Gedichte*, zusammenstellung V. Michels, mit fotografien von P. J. van Limbergen, Insel, Frankfurt am M. 1984, p. 29: Bäume sind Heiligtümer. Wer mit ihnen zu sprechen, wer ihnen zuzuhören weiß, der erfährt die Wahrheit. Sie predigen nicht Lehren und Rezepte, sie predigen, um das Einzelne unbekümmert, das Urgesetz des Lebens (Gli alberi sono Santuari. Those who can talk to them, those who can listen to them, will know the truth. They do not preach doctrines and recipes, they preach the original law of life, without concern for the individual).

<sup>17</sup> Something related to growth, instinctive and natural life, carefreeness and fertility.

<sup>18</sup> F. Thompson, *The Mistress of Vision, Complete Poems*, The Modern Library (Bennett A. Cerf - Donald S. Klopfer - Robert K. Haas), New York 1918, XXII, p. 184: «Tutte le cose vicine e lontane, / da una forza immortale / segretamente / sono collegate le une alle altre, / tanto che non puoi cogliere un fiore / senza turbare una stella [...]». (The entire poem, preceded by *To Convery Patmore*, at the start of *Dedication of New Poem* (1897) and followed by *Contemplation*, is found on pages 177-186).