

The Face and the Mask.

Pier Paolo Scelsi

To Jack Jano Art and Life correspond, they are part of a single flow, a continuum where it is impossible to feel or perceive any barrier, any division, both of places and times; in a daily fusion of elements, in a rhythm ticked by common objects, everyday life, living, which for Jano become sources of artistic production.

The matter, art materials are the same with which Jano builds his house, the space for his family, the walls of his office, his works.

Strong materials, unrefined, of rough tactility.

Iron, glass, sand, earth, are often joined together by the element of fire in a perception of creative act in symbiosis with the ground, with belonging to a place, not to a border, with or without which it would not be possible for the artist to create his artistic creation.

The studio and the house are closely related, almost a single structure, rising on a hill in the vicinity of Klil, separated only by a small path and the chicken-coop, becoming in this way the living space of the artist and the man.

I got to know Jano for the first time in December 2016 during the preparatory visit for this exhibition. The surrounding environment and the warmth by which this writer was welcomed left him completely astonished, and the question that Jack asked me without actually knowing me was equally surprising:

“What is art for you?”

This apparently simple question which is actually extremely difficult was asked while looking directly into the eyes.

This question, asked elsewhere and in other circumstances would have brought out an answer mediated by superstructures based on the staging of roles such as “curator” and “artist”, or a search for a series of quotes to bear in support of a thesis that would eventually result in a mere exercise of displaying one’s own cultural background, or in other words, to put on a mask.

With Jano it was not so, in a dimension so true, so far away from the antiquated stereotype of the “world of art”, with so little “scenography” and such overwhelmingly tale of a life, the writer was absolutely deprived of any “mask” and found himself answering such a personal, visceral response, so true to be left surprised.

The following question was:

“What would you like to do? How do you imagine the exhibition in Venice?”

Another wrong-footing question, as they would say on the football field, another forceful intervention once again mediated by roles and by the formality of roles.

The answer was that my purpose was to bring everything I see around me, the whole hill, to Venice.

And, in the following days I kept on thinking that my intent was to “reveal” art, narrating a dimension of it where the rather “religious” rituality, through which the work of art is so usually approached and as a consequence becomes grotesque in its assimilation to sacredness, is “violated”, and almost mocked.

I wanted the exhibition to have a strong tactility, to dig and show the matter's roughness, to carry the acrid earth smell; I wanted to tell something completely different from art grazed in white surgeon's gloves, from the “relic” approach that most frequently and quite justly is being adapted in relation to the object-art.

I immediately found interesting Jano's *modus operandi*, the fact that he superimposed and retracted his face over images retrieved from advertising pages, billboards, magazines, art books, and I saw in that approach the core of the message that the Venetian exhibition in my view should carry.

The recovery of the face, the loss of the mask through a big installation that starts from the almost infinite iteration of stamping the face on the mask, goes on to create a whole where the multiplication of this practice invade space.

This mask, as states Luigi Chiarelli,¹ “is the complex of external attitudes that men undertake under the stimulation of social reality that surrounds them”.

The mask is the social patina of the costume, of fashion, which participate in all the reactions between the individual and the collective path, between the life of the individual and that of a specific social category where the roots of the existence of that same individual finally lay.

While the basic idea was to answer to Antonio Gramsci's aside who asked, “Who can snatch this mask out of the face, who can live not according to the violence of social convention but according to the dictates of his own deeper Ego, of sincerity that surly exists at the bottom of every individual's conscience ?”²

When Jano was young, he wanted to be an actor, then he told me that there was no way of following that career but I feel I can argue that a part of that world was not lost, it merged with the man and the artist, once again unveiling the mask and showing the face, in its aesthetics and beauty.

To Carmelo Bene³ the face is the “narcissist enchantment in art”, “aesthetics of face”

The same face constitutes the “scene”, “imagine” of art.

And it's the same in the faces that Jano reproduces and creates.

Resuming the words of the great Italian actor, we think about Narcissus research that “dissolves the image in the attempt to appropriate and decipher his own identity”.

In this attempt he dismantles and dissolves the identity that from an obsessive presence becomes paradoxically an absence, a question, who is the artist?

The work becomes a map of multiple identities, first the masks and then faces, projection of our essence into a multifaceted, identifiable, cartographical world; a fragmented border in a constant progress, able to nibble silently but at the same time to absorb the space that surrounds it in its slow but inexorable expanding which is an obvious cross reference to the work of Alighiero Boetti who sketches, in the words of Calvino, “paths of crossed destinies”.

1 Luigi Chiarelli, *La Maschera e il Volto*, Atto I, 1913

2 Antonio Gramsci, *Cronache Teatrali*, tratto da “L'Avanti”, 1920

3 Carmelo Bene, *Le voci di Narciso*, Saggiatore Milano, 1982

As Jano cuts, he as well superposes, effectuates doublings. He never presents a single form, but he multiplies that same form, in a series of different repetitions. He abandons himself to the proliferations of unique matrices: to variations on the subjects.

“True me is never me, the greatest madness is not to be without an ego, but to believe myself as an Ego in a “Egocracy””⁴.

The reference to the Narcissus myth is strong and present.

In his coaction to repeat Narcissus obsessively coming back again and again to look himself at the mirror, and he sees himself every time so different because the face never cease to be transformed.

In the repetition, in the iteration of himself, he finds only difference, plurality of being.

In *wooden portraits* Narcissus mirror shatters and crushes the Pirandellian⁵ multiplicity of “characters”, imprinting the seriality of an echo of a single artistic personality, setting himself as a constant in an overlap of colours, codes, ages, artistic and cultural dimensions.

It is not a work oriented to chronicle, so far from the reiteration and the chronicle narrative of the self which the character of the artist in “The Great Beauty”⁶ indulge in, but it is a symbolic projection of the human role within the society with evident positive intents and breaking barriers and borders, both material and social ones.

Indeed, the narrative continues when the artist plays to unveil, to uncover also the space of coexistence, playing with borders even in the place where all the personalities meet and combine: the city.

In *Upside-Down City* the world is overturned, in its Cartesian being as in its scale of values, burdened and crushed by the weight of a mountain that cannot fully fulfil the role of a negative exception, constrained by its real and true physical essence leads the work to become an almost archaeological process, study and tale of a root and a base that disappears and dissolves in *floating white city* in front of which we now stand, a city locked and closed between walls, oppressive for its whiteness and purity, which is able to detach itself from any foundation and obligation, in an upwards projection that becomes the solution and overcoming of any social, political and geographic limit.

4 Massimo Recalcati, *Tempi di iocrazia*, Festival Filosofia, Modena Settembre 2016

5 Luigi Pirandello, *Uno Nessuno e Centomila*, Mondadori Milano, 1932

6 Paolo Sorrentino e Umberto Contarello, *La Grande Bellezza*, 2013