

CHIARA BERTOLA
*CHROMATIC DIARY**

... There are lots of different ways of writing a diary, and every diary, like a person's life, finds its own way of expressing itself. Nevertheless, in order for a diary to be considered such it must have certain definite traits: the writing progresses over time, day-to-day notes are repeated monotonously, its intimate and confessional nature embraces a moment of utmost interiority. In this respect Maria's notes are an authentic "diary": because they, too, are regularly repeated within a certain segment of time (summer 2006 - winter 2008) and talk about the artist's own private and deep relationship with the material from which her work is formed. It is written in the first person and the words used are repeated almost incessantly like a refrain.. but the writing does not tell us anything about the artist's private everyday life and that makes it different from ordinary diaries or any other kind of autobiographical writing; what emerges from its pages is, if anything, an inner dialogue between herself and colour, a dialogue which is revealed to the reader to get them involved in the creative process.

So this diary is essentially tied to a work of art, as words coincide with layers of colour building up over time; a text more like a herbal - which, like an onlooker, conserves a memory of vibrant green fields - or like a shell, which contains the noise of the sea where it was collected. Maria Morganti's diary is also stained by the colour with which the picture is painted; it may even be said that it was created uniquely in relation to the latter, so much so that it is reminiscent of the intimacy forming with the object of desire in an amorous relationship. In this case the truthfulness of the information it contains or the verifying of its credibility are not an issue; the facts and figures noted down by the artist coincide with those required for developing the work, as the work itself testifies. I have already written elsewhere that the layers of colour in her painting are like deletions, mistakes correcting other errors without ever copying them exactly. Now I can see that that strip at the top in which the colours of the levels below can be seen is an authentic chromatic diary. The strip contains a memory of the work; it condenses the variations, suspensions, rethinking, mistakes, outbursts and joys of a lifetime's experience: "The time I take to compose the colour and actually spread it across the canvas gradually changes my idea about that colour. Everything I carry with me as regards my way of thinking and performing my work comes into play in its creation". Emotions which have affected the quest for different shades, tones and intensities and which take time to settle on the canvas, where they find traces of their own progression.

From Chiara's diary entry of 1st April 2008
Meeting with Maria Morganti in her studio at Santi Apostoli in Venice

I ask Maria to update my bibliography on monochrome and contemporary painting, which I feel is rather fragile: Batchelor, "Cromofobia", Mondadori; Michel Pastoureau, "Il piccolo libro dei colori", Ponte alle Grazie, and, again, by Pastoureau, "Blu. Storia di un colore"; Philip Ball, "Colore una biografia", Rizzoli. Maria's knowledge of painting is endless... her bibliography is up-to-date but she is always curious and keen to discover any books that might have escaped her attention! It is a tricky, far-reaching and never-ending issue. I would describe it as "alive", growing like a human being, and that is why it is tricky to take on. Whenever colour is talked about in scientific and theoretical terms I feel as if I am touching on something indefinable. Suddenly I know nothing about colour. For me the "perception" of colour is all too satisfying and revealing, so I leave theory behind me... Once again I prefer the experience of things and of the senses.

Anyway, I decide to include some study conferences at the "Invito al contemporaneo" being held in May to accompany this exhibition and Meri Sartori's.

Maria agrees. She would like to invite Barry Schwabsky to speak and also Mel Gooding and I also suggest she invite Giorgio Verzotti, who has written about monochrome in Italy.

Maria is working on paintings for the Querini project. A project which has been ongoing for two-and-a-half years. Six months for each painting. In total there will be five and each one will require lots of time to be worked on and completed. There will be five separate monochrome paintings, which, in the end, will meld into one single work.

She shows me a painting which will be placed in the room for paintings in the museum. It is magenta-orange coloured. I would never have thought that interaction with the paintings in that room could have produced such a strong bright colour! Both Maria and I know that we will never really see how the works interrelate until we take the paintings over to the museum. Maria has confidence in colour. You need only see how she works on this project painting from memory anything that strikes her eyes as she leaves the museum. The colour's resonance remains inside her and she follows it, as if it were a road, some definite guideline. A road which only she can see and feel. I realise that for her colour is like words.

It is the first time she has used an external palette because the project has forced her to embrace another word/colour. "I'm going to Querini with a paint brush and then I'll leave, but it will not be a copy or even a translation. Just a crossing...". Once she has achieved the right sensation of colour in the room, Maria goes back to her studio and "forms" it in a bowl, she marks it down in her notebook to create a sort of chromatic diary. She then makes more notes every time she goes to the museum. Each time they are encounters. For her it is vitally important to find a method for this project, to channel the flow she's getting from the museum...

From Chiara's diary, February 2005
Meeting in Maria's studio in Venice at Santi Apostoli.

...opposite a big painting in which she wanted to push the possibilities of space to the limit (a painting as big as the wall), a series of smaller works resonate. They are the papers (at least 20) painted over a period of a week while I was preparing an exhibition in Germany. Its diary-like appearance is interesting. Like fragments and traces of the past. They are parts of a process and the first drafts are displayed here. The colour is thick and vibrates through the works because it is layered. The entire process of overlapping of the colours she has used in the painting emerges in the papers. Like archaeological layers (a palimpsest).

I was struck by the fact that certain paintings are left half finished and then taken up again after a long period of time. Two months work in 2000, another two in 2004. Refrains and changes which take place within the painting itself. To-ing and fro-ing through time. Sea waves, time which is more spiral than circular. Everything appears to be still but in actual fact it is in motion and the motion is very slow, and the first layer of colour is different from the last.

As we look at the paintings Maria moves confidently around them, of course she knows every time, date and level of the different layers. And she says to me "no, I cannot display these because they still have to be finished"... as if to say they are still young and need to grow. Once again she shows me one dated 2000-2005 - in other words begun in 2000, left and then taken up again in 2005. Her paintings are living paintings. But when is a work actually finished? Perhaps never and everything can be set in motion again, called into question and restarted.....

There is a wonderful idea of error, a mistakes you need to envisage remaining inside the work, which you need to hold inside, embrace...

We talk about monochrome, of the thousands of different ways of working with colour, the vibration of thousands of colours inside one; of the way in which she spreads colour, which depends on how far she manages to stay with that colour. It is not a formal or technical issue, I would say it was almost psychological. In the sense that for Maria colour must be able to speak (so she tells me) and achieve its own autonomy. She tells me that "it is as if different identities had to be created.... they are never pure colours and no colour is exactly the same as any other... I once rejected a painting because it did not have its own definite identity, and so I drastically reworked it! Whereas on other occasions it is a transformation which requires time and happens slowly within the creative process...."

There will basically be two colours on display: Violet and green. Her work needs to be approached slowly, in order to see all the different greens and violets which actually exist between one painting and another. Maria has gradually moved on from reds to violet-greens; from pigments to industrial colours. Two

different periods in time and two different techniques. Industrial colour is faster, it dries more quickly and allows her to apply at least one layer a day. She usually works on five paintings at the same time. In the studio there are other works with parallel lives; walls of papers which have been growing for five years like notes in a diary....

*Excerpt take from the article written for the exhibition catalogue, *Diario Cromatico* by Maria Morganti, at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice, Ori Editori, 2007.

Translation by Martyn John Andreson