

Maria Morganti in conversation with Giacomo Bazzani

Extracts taken from the meeting on 22 March 2013 on occasion of the exhibition *Fig. 1 : Paesaggio // Mac*, Museo d'arte contemporanea e del Novecento, Monsummano (PT)

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GIACOMO BAZZANI: The landscape is basically a way of seeing reality: the landscape represents the way in which we look at things. It is a way of standing before a work that transforms the very perception of the world.

MARIA MORGANTI: The works exhibited here at the museum are part of the series "Lateral Visions" and "Pellestrine". They are like crumbs of paint that I scatter in the space like Hansel and Gretel spreading crumbs while they walk.

When I paint I let things happen and then I take two steps back, I distance myself from the work and consider what I have done. Both moments are part of the same pictorial process. These two series of works come from two experiences I have had in the last few years: one positive and one negative. The first: I bought a house on a small island between Venice Lido and Chioggia, called Pellestrina. It is a long strip of land about eleven kilometres long that separates the sea from the lagoon. The last part of the island is only a few metres wide. Here you can walk along a wall that is about three metres high and about two kilometres long, which was built as a sea defence wall for Venice and which separates the lagoon from the sea. When you walk along this strip, called the "monton", you perceive two wide spaces from the corners of your eyes. What you see is not in front of you, but beside you. If they met they would become the same thing and would thus degenerate. One is the lagoon and the other is the sea; one has one colour, one smell, one movement, one marine life and the other has another. It is in their separateness that they maintain their specificity. The second experience concerns my mother's illness. It is called degenerative

maculopathy. Sufferers of this disease progressively lose their central vision and all that remains is their peripheral vision. You can no longer see what is in front of you, but can only perceive what lies to the side from the corners of your eyes. These paintings that I have been working on for a few years convey these two experiences of reality that derive from the perception of space through the movement of the body. In “Lateral Visions” the horizon, the strip that lies at the top of my “Sedimentations” and which maintains a trace of all the layers that make up the painting, is now placed vertically in these paintings and it cuts the canvas in half. The stratifications, in other words the traces of my painting, happen on two lateral levels. The two parts – the two stratifications – never meet. They try to get close but always remain separate. In the “Pellestrine” the painting is horizontal once more, but the space is always divided into two. The proportion is that of the island: eleven parts like its eleven kilometres.

M.M.: The question I first asked myself when I started to paint regarded understanding what relationship there was between me and the space I was in; the air around me and the two-dimensional space on which I was going to paint. It was almost as if the tactile nature was more important, that living through the experience of the body was more important than viewing it. The first works consisted of leaving traces of colour spread first on the body and then impressed on paper or on walls.

It was about experiencing the space through movement.

My perception of colour is not retinal. Instead I consider colour as a substance that is composed tactilely with its own depth and consistency.

Every morning, every day I go to my studio and head towards a bowl that contains colour, the place where the substance happens, the origin of everything.

I never throw away the colour and I never start from a pure colour. What remains in the bowl from the day before as a residue is maintained and kept for the next day. This colour that is created every day is spread onto different surfaces. I work to create “sedimentations”. I slowly stratify, always leaving aside a small portion of colour from the previous day. The painted surface is never completely cancelled out. After about a month (the time I devote to an individual work), I start again from scratch on another surface. The end does not come when I reach a specific point but when the substance is intensified: only then can I start on another surface.

My feeling is that things never finish. Sometimes I find myself taking up works from a while ago and layering them again.
The completion of a work is a temporary concept.

I paint on four different formats. It is as though I have found my four painting measurements: 18 x 16 cm: the fragment; 60 x 50 cm: the portrait; 110 x 90 cm: the half bust; 180 x 160 cm: the entire body.

The first layer is always red. It's like a memory I have to keep.

I work periodically on the *Infinite Painting* - a 50 x 40 cm canvas that I have never stopped painting on. It's been 6-7 years now. My idea of painting as a substance is concentrated in this work.

The painting that is layered over time creates sedimentations and grows in the space not only in depth but also laterally. Periodically, once a year I weigh and measure it, noting the variations. Perhaps at the end of all this, the painting will no longer be able to sustain it, the substance collapsing

and everything collapsing. Due to its weight, which continues to increase, I decided to take it down from the wall and put it on a structure that I can move around the studio.

The colour also ends up on what I call the *Diaries*. These are pieces of painted wood, one metre high and ten centimetres wide. The first colour goes from left to right across the entire surface and then progressively I paint the next colour two centimetres further down. The rhythm of the painting is linked to my daily rhythm. In this case the work ends when the available space finishes. A single stick takes up about three months of my time.

These works are then archived together in a steel structure that I call a *Diary Holder*.

Every day before I start work with the colour, I take a small camera and go onto the canal side outside the studio and take a photo. Every day I photograph the same place on the brick wall where the water rises and falls according to the tide.

It is as though I were collecting time, as though these photos were narrating a certain quantity of time. At the end of the year the photos of these *Acque* are all contained inside a box. I found a strong association with what I do with painting in this work.

I am not interested in doing something new or that does not exist yet...opening your eyes and looking around you and finding coincidences...feeling in harmony with things and with people! This is the meaning of my work – this is my way of viewing reality.

Another daily action is that of the *Paper-Diaries*. These are pieces of paper painted with three layers of colour. In this case I have a more direct, more physical relationship with the work because the paper is laid out horizontally and I use pastels that I spread with my fingers as though they were lipsticks. The first layer is red, the second crosses the paper horizontally and finally the third layer completes the work vertically. In this case the annual duration of the work occupies the walls of my studio like a spatial extension of my time.

The duration and the diary form of these works are like a repetitive obsession. This is my daily action in the space of my studio and when I am travelling away from my studio I continue to work on the *Travel Diaries*, which I paint with acrylics. I carry out this work for the duration of my journey.

G.B.: Maria's work recounts her doing and her being, and at the same time it has nothing personal about it. It is an intimate account but it has nothing intimate about it; it is a private account but there is nothing subjective about it, it simply recounts a substance that is layered as days go by. It is a paradox because it does not say anything but marks the passing of an existence; it is a substance that can only recount itself but it becomes the mark of a radical opening onto life...

And, if we think about it carefully, it is perhaps in this hiatus, in the astronomical distance between substance and life that the sublime meaning that these works represent can be seen.

M.M.: Yes! I find myself spreading this colour substance on a two-

dimensional surface and reiterating this gesture ad infinitum whilst knowing that other similar gestures to this have preceded it, that others will follow it or that there exist other parallel ones. For me, it is about making things happen naturally or creating conditions so that things can happen.

G.B.: Although the tools are the ones usually used in painting, with all the naturalness described, it is the artist's attitude towards using them that distances you from the historic role of painting. Although formally in your works we can see echoes of Newman and Rothko's reflexive painting of the 1950s, the intent and the attitude that characterise your work differentiate it enormously. The gesture and the passing of time on the canvas are not made concrete in your works in absolute forms but leave formally irrelevant traces. It is the process that defines the work and the work itself is witness to the process that it generated, as basically happens in a lot of contemporary art...

M.M.: Utilising the life substance can only influence the process, but it can't plan it. In this sense, I feel like a spectator of something happening right in front of my eyes, the result of which I see as a living organism; a biological sedimentation that relates to reality.

G.B.: Maria, you talk about proceeding with the work without imposing your vision of the world, you talk about things exactly as they happen in time. There is perhaps a paradox in this, in how to create a story without a subject...

M.M.: In reality I think the essence is that of giving a sense of being to the

process.