

Monday, 2 July 2012

One night long inside 'La Stanza degli Aquiloni di Piero'

.....The exhibition I went to see with Valeria is in Villafranca Piemonte (TO), a charming town perfectly restored to its past and less than an hour from Turin. Piero Lerda's collages are hosted until 22nd July in a beautiful piemontese baroque church: Chiesa della Beata Vergine, once an old monastery, bang in the middle of town and surrounded by cafes and by the old cattle exchange market. The curator of the show is Willy Darko <http://www.willydarko.org/>.

This time only two works out Piero's vast selection is on display. One of these has particularly touched me. It's from the series 'Chansons de toile'; an untitled composition of found sartorial materials laced together by colourful ribbons. The tangible tactility of this ensemble has almost brought me to tears. I think I responded to the balanced movement of two tender opposite forces: the 'female' and the 'male': the yin and yang. Each role perfectly represented in an equilibrium of tensions captured within the frame but ready to take off into the next phase.

Maybe that is the reason why this painting is so emotionally charged, because it anticipated Piero's 'Kites series' as well as my overnight stay in his studio. From a group show to a solo show, from Villafranca back to Piero and Valeria's home in Turin.

What an eventful evening it turned out to be! First an apocalyptic storm and then a black out!

Maybe Piero's welcome to his house and to his studio. Because that's exactly where I slept that night, 'nella stanza degli Aquiloni': the 'kite room', as I have baptized it now! A most poetic place to dream in. All night surrounded by Piero's rainbow of energy. Fragments of thoughts, impressions cut out of daily life blending into the paint like dreams in the night. Slowly drifting to the rim of our consciousness, like the paper tails of Piero's kites.

Jazzy kites dancing off circumstantial, carefully placed notes. Animated by hope but also by a severe critique to the modern world.

Hundreds of cuttings blasting off their paint. At times in a futurist like manner, morphing into ferocious warriors about to blow up into minacious bombshells. A vortex of colours drifting away from the centre to desert the vacuum of a negative space. Kites flying out high, only to touch their margins and bring our dreams back to reality. It is between the strain of hope and reality that I think Piero creates his poetry. Piero's kites sail as far out as his canvases but never further. Consistently monitored in a motherly protective act towards his creations and his hopes. Arguably a modernist and elitarian attitude, but a necessary one to keep his kites pure from real disillusionment. Rational decisions made to keep his artwork uncontaminated in order to keep fuelling his hopes, his passion: his art. A skillful mechanism, I say, that snobs the ego of all us artists!and after a night long flying with Piero's kites I also hit the edge: the morning after one, and woke up to the reality of yet another railway strike and to the sad italian political situation.

As for Piero's work check out his website to see his kites that are far too big for the world or the world is far too small for them! Have a safe Flight!

<http://www.pierolerda.it/>

Sunday, 1 July 2012

Back from Turin! Piero Lerda: a private artist

Wow, what a wonderful city Turin is! Full of cafes, full with culture, elegant and delicious. A millefeuille of culture(s) and of history(ies), framed by the Alps and signed by the river Po'. For moments I could not help but feel proud of my heritage from my grand mother side: illegitimate but acknowledged descendants of the Savoia Kingdom! Yes, of the King Vittorio Emanuele II himself!!

But "SHHH, don't say that too loud", would whisper in shame my religious grandma, all red from the glamorous sin; because such royal embarrassment its not worth mentioning, for catholic sake! ...And for the sake of a modest Fiat worker!

So my unrooted root has seeds in this part of the world that I rarely visit and don't really know, but understand. The french piemontese patois dialect brings back all sorts of loving memories, (because the bad and sad ones we forget), of my grandma: Omi Rose. Tender recollection of my childhood spent eating the most delicious foods. Ingredients jumping right in from the garden below and from the mountains around. Dainty dishes straight out from my Omi Rose' heart and from her cookbook - a precious gift inherited by her french aunt: the first woman to win the Cordon Bleu prize!

What fragrances and aromas! Lively with taste and scents that stoically survive time and death. Organic, vivid flavors that season my daily life and the gastronomical heritage of Turin!

Despite the usual italian midsummer rail strike in the Saharan heat, I walked from the train station of Torino Lingotto to the river. Not just any river but the longest in Italy. From there I lazed up along the Po', past il Valentino, i Murazzi, past all the bridges. Then all the way to Piazza Castello for a creamy ice cone at the scenery square, before hopping the first bus, to meet with my professor. That in fact was the main reason I went to Turin: to visit an inspirational woman who happen to also be my american history professor during my student years at Genoa University. Valeria Gennaro Lerda is an international renown historian that has inspired many, many students and with which I had the privilege to write my thesis and to graduate with. Quite recently I also discovered that all along we had another subject that links us together: ART!

Despite my nomadic life style, through out these years, we have been keeping in touch, especially since the death of her late husband: Piero Lerda. That is when I suddenly discovered that Valeria was married to an artist!

And what an artist! A philosopher, a poet: a painter. Let me tell you this quite unique tale of a true intellectual with a proud academic curriculum embossed with a variety of experiences: in television (RAI), teaching (French language and literature), as library director (American Embassy USIS: United States Information Service), as founder of cultural organizations (Club de Jeunes in Nice), as first lieutenant in the 'Alpini', as fine art apprentice (pupil of Vincenzo Alicandri), a piemontese man, I was saying, that has painted a hell of a storm of creations, quasi secretly, behind the back of the rest of the art world. Amazing!

Piero lived an active social life that contrasted or balanced out with a parallel private one,

dedicate to art. Or maybe a private passion cultivated in the solitude of long studio hours and running alongside his public social roles. Nevertheless each life informing the other, eventually colliding to explode into a myriad of paper shards, meticulously cut and pasted into colourful arrangements. Hundreds of collages blowing out of their edges, only to leave their centre empty like a hollow core with a deep message. Splinters fleeing their pages, flying away, only to be imprisoned again and to remind us that its on the periphery of life that we can still maybe imagine the remains of the illusion of freedom.

Piero's private art practice and the result of a lifelong consistent research have remained concealed to the most of us, only few close friends have savoured before his humorous and poetic compositions.

In fact, a part from a handful of succesful early shows, Piero's images and thoughts have climbed out reaching as far as paper and canvas but never directly confronting the art world. A conscious and controlled gist maybe to make a point? Maybe a position of protest against a superficial and unsatisfactory space?

Having said that, his prolific work has now finally been posthumously released to the public. Since Piero's death in 2007, his wife Valeria has been on a loving and frantic mission in the name of Piero and of art. A very touching story indeed. For the past years Valeria has devoted her days and nights in long hours of organizing, cataloguing, rediscovering, interpreting Piero's work in order to share it with a wider audience and with a public of keen viewers.

And this brings me back to the beginning of my story of why I went to Turin: To visit my professor Valeria and to see Piero Lerda's work exhibited in a new show.

That experience I will tell in my next post....

... in the meantime this is Piero Lerda's website: <http://www.pierolerda.it/>

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