

## **Memory and narration.**

### **Prologue of the book “Ojos”**

#### **By Eleonora Fiorani**

The image, in its polyvalence, holds conceptual thinking in check, captures our gaze and speaks through body and emotions. How are we supposed to read *Ojos* by José María Sánchez, that appears at first as an object, a book that through its images tells us about a path of research and visual experimentation. There occurs indeed the invention of images and painting itself is a depository of pluralistic images, adopting the features of what is today referred to as “new mannerism” (Bonito Oliva). But Molina’s mannerism is suave, with no excess of eccentricity or oddness: his aesthetic sensibility does not want to relinquish beauty and formal refinedness. We can try and read it as a story of life, an initiatory journey, a Bildungsroman in its several connotations and hidden recesses, following the traces of the narrator that speaks through images, or rather, wraps itself in them. The first images are the photographic self-portraits of the artist as a child, of childhood, the first drawings of his parents, first the mother and then the father, of the ancestors and of the world of belonging: as one is not a man, a person, if he/she does not belong in a territory, a community. So we encounter the nude of the Greek sculpture of his academic years and the chiaroscuro drawings and portraits in a touching sixteenth-century style, namely the culture that still nourishes us. A family portrait, an exemplary portrait in which the individual and the collective merge: this is an icon, an illusory memory, not very dissimilar from the one crafted in the portraits for Ridley Scott’s movie, although here the portraits are real, but they do not belong to the memory of the subject, but to the construction of the image of the self, of the person, of the mask. In the portrait, not the self-portrait...the self shrouds himself in the “skin” of the other, reveals himself through the gaze of the other. After all, the self is always polyphonic; and here polyphony brings into play the collective iconographic imagery of an age. A thick series of portraits consisting of fragments, foreshortenings, profiles, mouths, eyes, fleeting flash-backs, fluctuating in the space of the “image-mind”, running before our gaze with the flipping of

the pages. The portraits do not reveal the soul of the subject or of the age; they merely show the enigma of the face and the enigma of the mask. Memory itself is not merely the ability to collect and store, it also activates, reconstructs, re-activates, selects, interprets and recomposes. It does not merely recall the past, but it imbues time with meaning. It is *Nachträglichkeit*, "posteriority that activates and reassembles" (Freud). It re-categorizes and reorganizes and therefore it is "active reconstruction of the sense" (Carmagnola). And, in the contemporaneity, the time distance is wiped out. There is no more antecedence, rather, the crowding of all images, fragments, memories and styles in the present. In José María Sánchez the imaginary colonizes the memory and plays with disguises. Molina experiments with techniques and means of expression. Inebriated, he plays. Past and present, private and public entwine and contaminate each other.

After all, as Ricoeur said, our alleged memories are borrowed from stories drawn from others. Likewise in *Ojosthings* are not presented as they were; imagination reinvents and recounts them, allowing us to see what we could have been or would have liked to be. Contemporaneity is here and now, it is the "presentification" of all the memories and stories of the planet. Exactly because the image is the place where all things happen, the coexistence of techniques and styles, derived from the most diverse cultural contexts and ages, elicits a sort of disorientation before the images that are thus generated. Familiar and at the same time outlandish, they border on eeriness, sometimes even grotesque. There is a series of drawings, partly resulting from his psychology studies, recalling the medieval crickets and the grotesque images of surrealism and physiognomy. In their caricatured features, in the stripped skulls and brains, the ghosts and monsters of reason become manifest. They recall Goya's hellish images, or Lombroso's pathological obsessions. Irony on art? On the romantic vision of its folly?

In the crowding of images and styles, we feel we are facing a sort of presentification of the different icons of the modern time, manipulated and evoked in fragments: Warhol's portrait of Marilyn goes from icon, in which Eros and Thanatos unite, to joyful and many-hued image, achieved by gluing punctiform paper fragments ironically alluding to the pixels of digital images. The techniques are not mere tools, they are rather intrinsic part

of the expression, and can become the expression itself. In José Molina the technical experimentation is imbued with meaning and expression, in a sort of short-circuit. So the cartoon and illustration techniques coexist with refined visitations of the twentieth century painting: fauvism, art deco, pop art and, above all, surrealism.

If, as stated above, the image is the place where all things happen or can happen, it is also the language that voices it all, with fertility that opens up to the most diverse iconographic territories, from art history to custom and page news. Today these territories are no longer separated; they contaminate each other in the mediascape flows. The image originates from the collision between the various reference fields that are hybridized in the collective imagination. If we open up to new style references with a taste for the experimentation of the different techniques and forms of expression, what in Ojos is considered to be a reference and a filter to look at the world are indeed the very interlacement of the flows and the huge archive of the collective imagination. Here Kafka and Disneyland or Freud and Stephen King coexist and contaminate each other. That is why it is possible to trigger unexpected collisions, and fruitful encounters between distant and alternative languages. What is really surprising about José Molina's work is indeed a sort of abundance of meaning in the splendour of the images, what the Greeks called *àgalma*. A sort of *dépençe*, as Bataille said, reigns in his works. The artist moves according to the principle of pleasure, and therefore in a logic of superabundance, where the celebration sets in, enchanting and bewitching us, giving us another eye.

But where does what we see occur, in our imagination or in the world? Who does that visionary eye belong to? Whose dream is this? Ours or others?