

text by Carola Allemandi



OPENING

May 4th, 2024
7—11 pm

EXHIBITION

05.05—22.06.2024

OPENING HOURS

thur—sat
3—7 pm
(morning by appointment)

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THE ERA OF THE TRAVELER

We are faced with a panorama: ruins from the classical age, portions of different natural places, completely uninhabited. On closer scrutiny, we realize that we are walking in a fragmented and recomposed landscape, and suddenly see, in front of us, the course of time.

Artists Botto&Bruno's most recent investigation has stemmed from a crisis of the gaze, which they felt non longer adequate to describe the contemporary world: the elements that form it alone may prove insufficient, thus forcing them to turn elsewhere, even back in time.

Hence the urge to interrogate the artists of the tradition, almost as familiar ancestors, to understand the message lurking in today's landscape: the wallpaper that encloses Botto&Bruno's *Lost Horizon* (the title is taken from Frank Capra's 1937 film of the same name), shows a view resulting from the collage of landscapes that have now disappeared, having themselves been seen and interpreted by other gazes before. The details in the background of the works of the European masters of vision - from the paintings of Nicolas Poussin, Andrea del Sarto, Giovanni Bellini, and Piero di Cosimo, to the engravings of Piranesi - now feature in the foreground to tell of a world that still speaks to us. With the filter of their own contemporary gaze, through a collage technique, Botto&Bruno compose a new *today* in which they have to orient themselves, finally far from the legacies of a civilization reduced to infinitesimal details. The contrast-dialogue between the center and the urban periphery, the pivotal theme of the investigation of the Turin-based artistic duo, gives way to a narrative in which urbanity as a whole turns out to be deprived of an effective role, while the natural hardness of the rock and the undomesticated landscape take over almost the entire landscape, leaving man with no orientation, nor fixed points in which he can find the acceptance of the world he has left behind.

The journey is a backward one, then: if in the foreground we find ourselves amidst the legacies of vanished places. Only in the distance can we glimpse the trace of the present, rendered faint by the graphite stroke from which it was born. The background alone, indeed, results from a contemporary gesture, drawn in pencil by the artists themselves. By so doing, it is the *now* that becomes to all intents and purposes a place still distant to be reached, a horizon that will dissolve because of its own precarious consistency.

But the journey can start earlier, still treading barefoot on the grass, on an uphill rise. In the work series *Eternal Returns I - II - III - IV*, Botto&Bruno assemble collages from their archival photographs, thus working with the symbols of their own imagination. Then, a pictorial intervention follows to provide that light and sharpness that the camera was unable to record. Man, though lost in a world that seems incomprehensible, still has a task: to restore the truth of his own gaze on things; to make the necessary gesture of reinventing a colour that has remained blurred.

The vocabulary, as well as the message, of Botto&Bruno's works is composed of only a few terms, sharp and symbolic like the formula of a ritual: the rock, the grass, the watercolour sky, the remnants of the city's products, the same single path traced on the ground. In numerous instances, indeed, we are set on a deserted, seemingly aimless road. We can hear the echo of H. D. Thoreau's words: *Not many there be / Who enter therein, [...] What is it, what is it / But a direction out there, / And the bare possibility / Of going somewhere?*¹

The landscape no longer offers multiple directions to safe places; instead, it forces us to take only one route, to pass through stone portals that no longer lead anywhere, to find our own prophecy engraved on the boulders. - *Great guide-boards of stone, / But travelers none;*² - as in *Crumble, Blank slate*³.

The urge is to wander into the inhospitable landscape of mountain rock, and there find a new home. Like today's Desert Fathers, hermits in a place that preserves almost

nothing of what had previously inhabited it - in the works *Wind of the East I - II* we can glimpse hovels, wrecked cars, tiny apartment buildings, now anything but invasive in a landscape that has regained dominion over itself - Botto&Bruno trace the road to authentic perdition, here seen as a necessary stage to found a different reality once again. In these places without a single vanishing point (and full, therefore, of potential perspectives), distant even from the vision with which space and architecture have traditionally been deciphered, man must lose himself in order to regain the freedom he had already sacrificed for too long within the confines of a now decayed system. The city, then, also loses all meaning, becoming only an appendage for the new traveller, little more than an insubstantial memory.

The *will to power*, which has guided human action in the last centuries, now gives way to its opposite, to man once again feeling powerless in the face of a world that can no longer be tamed, in which no known law applies. The disappearance of human presence in Botto&Bruno's latest cycle of works signifies that it is from time to time the viewers who must take firsthand responsibility for what they see, immersing themselves in a world of which they may be the only witnesses. Everything speaks of the inherent insubstantiality of the human: even the edges of the works have managed to break free from the unnatural squaring with which we are accustomed to framing the contemplation of art, thus approaching the random conformation that dominates every element born and raised spontaneously.

The journey can be approached either way, thus taking on a double meaning, of desolation or reconstruction - toward the still green high ground, or toward a horizon destined to fade. *It is worth going to see/ Where you might be.*⁴

It is but a step to take on a path that leads us to look at the face of the present as a destiny already fulfilled; to foreshadow the end, to feel the unknown as a familiar place.

Carola Allemandi

¹ Henry David Thoreau, lines from the poem *The Old Marlborough Road*.

² Ibidem.

³ Titles of music tracks from US rock band "The National". Every Botto&Bruno cycle of works is inspired in its creative stage by a specific sound track that encloses the message of their oeuvre.

⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Op. cit.*

