

At the end of a text about Nina Carini's drawings that I wrote some months ago, I stated that her work leaves many open questions which rarely find an answer, and that it requires a comprehension and participation effort towards what we have been offered to live day by day. Here, with *J'ai Peur*, a visual and conceptual loop, the viewer's involvement is required more than ever.

Carini focuses on the concept of identity. To look at ourselves in the face, to get to know ourselves, maybe we need a mask, a costume.

The artist is eager to find footholds, moments shared with the past art history. In her search we can often feel the presence, more or less traceable, of Louise Bourgeois. More than once Nina focused on Robert Mapplethorpe's portrait of Louise Bourgeois: a little laid-back woman with an irresistible gaze, with a monkey fur and a huge phallus under her arm. An icon of certain feminism.

For Carini, which at first thought that Bourgeois was an extremely private and shut down person, that image is a problem. Is the great artist acting, maybe? Is she using a mask? To solve her doubt Carini wrote to Louise's carer and she found out that theatricality was a key aspect of the artist's personality.

Here starts a consideration that today is at the centre of the work presented at the Verdi. What is theatricality? The one we see on the stage or the one we act everyday? The one we see on the street, on tv? Is it politics? Is it the art system?

"My performative works are experiments, I never base myself on things that have already happened. I chose to dress up as a mannequin, to wear a mask. *J'ai Peur* is a work on the concept of representation itself."

We are helped here by the prophetic Guy Debord, with his *The Society of Spectacle* of 1967, which today, more than ever, is a lucid explanation of what we happen to live day by day. Relationships exist if there is theatricality, everyone plays a part. We live in a sort of huge drama which in contemporary theatre is mostly absent.

What is presented at the Teatro Verdi in Milan is a meta-artistic and meta-theatrical work, theatre which reflects upon theatre. It is a projection divided into two parts: reality and theatre. In the first there is the artist, forced into a coercive dress, tied on a couch in front of the Palazzo della Permanente, in Via Turati in Milan. She is filmed by a static camera. A fashion show is about to take place. People pass

by but they don't care so much about the "mannequin" on the couch, the *Femme en chemise assise dans un fauteuil*, to quote Picasso's famous painting of 1913. Her position reminds of Felice Casorati's Portrait of Silvana Cenni of 1922, manifest of the "return to order" of "Neo-quattrocentism."

Hers is a study about the relationship between reality and fiction. What is more real: reality or theatre's fiction? Contemporary theatre, such as the so called public art, don't represent; they propose experiences, they call the viewer to live them. Nothing is completely predictable.

So it is in the work of the polish director, artist and contradictory man Tadeusz Kantor, which was able to dramatise everything, to create provocations and at whom Carini looked with passion. In Kantor, drama is to be considered in the classical sense of the word: drama as action. All this happens after having metabolized and condensed art history. His work is son of his time, of who lived the Shoah and, because of this, have become men od doubt, of the cold war, of the new art and thatre avantgarde. It is "theatre of death" and death occupies a leading role also in Nina Carini's work. In "The Dead Class" of 1975 there is the degradation of objects and characters. The ephemeral is the object of representation of his messengers, which become people, mannequins, puppets. The mannequin of metaphysic is man's alter ego, and so is the mannequin in Nina Carini's *Je ai Peur*. In Kantor's piece, speech is not the transposition of written text, but the sound of people's bodies: regurgitation, cries, screams. Her theatre is in fieri. It is the unpredictability of life, of existence.

On the one side of the Teatro Verdi's stage there is the projection of the street performance, where we see the artist immersed in life; on the other side of the stage, after about a minute, the theatrical remake of the scene appears. Here Nina Carini is director of what is happening. At this point, in the first picture reality is accelerated, as if in the films of the early 20th century, and Nina is always sitting on the white couch, she is always a still mannequin. She is wearing her mask to relate to the world.

Everything goes by, just as Eric Satie's music which, peaceful, accompanies the scenes and replaces the noise of the world. The same rope with which the artist is tied up, ties the mannequin's hands and arms and rises upwards. The music, the sound's harmony breaks. The rope lifts the actor/mannequin hands, things move on the scene, the doll becomes a child which frees the puppet from the strings to

give her life, while on the other side everything keeps on going. Are we maybe all puppets, as in an Edoardo Bennato's forty-year-old album, when Nina wasn't born yet?

The theatrical mannequin becomes reality and reality is theatre because it must be so, because it is more convenient. We speak through art and theatre, and we lie in life. These are the rules to go on.

Only those who are outside the system manage to be real, it is Pirandello's crazy rope: stop the world, I want to get off! It's not possible, we have to march like puppets in Stromboli's hands. Our puppet masters don't allow us to step out of line. Right you are, if you think so.

*Puppets, what a passion! There's no harm in quoting.*

Angela Madesani