

PAOLO GRASSINO

T30

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THE ENIGMA OF EPISODIC UNCERTAINTY

Reflections on the work of Paolo Grassino

For many years artist Paolo Grassino's commitment has been highlighting, deepening and propagating, without compromise, the poetic message that is intrinsic in the layers of imaginary, evocative, connotative meaning in his plastic expression of art. The perception of his sculptural achievements with their dramaturgical arrangement also suggests an enigmatic, extremely dense, often gloomy imaginative narrative, which profoundly touches the viewer. This magical, enchanted, enigmatic, pathetic-dramatic and at the same time intriguing and disconcerting narrative, with almost fairy-tale tones, opens up to our eyes in a sudden and surprising, vehement, irresistible, natural, yet equally disturbing, inexplicable, mysterious way. This sensual and concrete coming into being is immediately perceptible, preserving an enigmatic secret, since the internal forces, which move the figures by connecting them or creating a conflict between them, continue to be hidden and invisible.

The observer thus relates to a mysterious, enigmatic, bizarre, external and inexplicable episode, which, however, contains an intricate tangle with such emotional connotations and so rich in associations that the entire plastic arrangement, with its strong, almost monumental, physicality and its marked materiality, dynamism, sensuality and overwhelming expressiveness, seems to be something identifiable, almost natural, something that comes from our innermost self. The set of these sculptural groups conveys an excessive, psychedelic atmosphere, and at the same time a magical, enchanted, unlikely reality, which nevertheless proposes itself as an existing, tangible, immediate one. This ambiguity fills the work of Paolo Grassino with a poetic indeterminacy, an uncertainty which in turn provokes a destabilizing insecurity and evokes something invisible, elusive, mystical, which we cannot distance ourselves from, because it lives in our depths.

This magical, enchanted, inexplicable and equally apparent scene, perceptible to the senses, so physical, undoubtedly vital, which manifests itself in sculptural reality, recalls another broad

level of meaning, an enigmatic, hidden, not immediately perceptible, but fundamentally present level, one with an almost decisive impact, one of meaning that includes essential, deeper connections expressing themselves precisely in the representation of uncertainties and improbabilities. The spectator experiences the feeling that this level of different, alternative, broader meaning, with its unlimited, unleashed and untethered imagination, its horizon of inconceivable breadth, its fabrics and connections that never existed heretofore, proposes a deeper, more authentic vision of the enigmatic events of the world. Figures and scenes, which carry a destabilizing, upsetting and provocative uncertainty, finally lead us to a new awareness, in which presentiments, anxieties, experience and imagination blend together, thus giving life to a new form of intense experience.

In this perspective, Paolo Grassino's sculptures and installations, with their strong impact and connotative richness, are intended as a dramatic survey of the Other, of the essence, of the core of what mystery is. The Other represents at the same time the alternative, the imaginary, the unspeakable, which materializes in the bizarre, unusual, provocative, disconcerting and puzzling representations of improbability. All the creatures, figures, human and animal bodies, all the objects, every organic and natural form, all the fragments and architectural artifacts seem to obey a latent, invisible force, or rather an intangible yet evident, omnipresent internal logic in this poetic microcosm. Behind dynamic scenes that are intensely bodily, sensual and eccentric, revealing uncertainties and improbabilities, a mysterious and secret logic operates. Thus radical improbability takes on the meaning of essence and authenticity and uncertainty is reinterpreted to become authentic knowledge.

Paolo Grassino tries to indicate an alternative to the seemingly picturesque, chaotic and irrational representations of the improbabilities and uncertainties in the form of a different, broader, freer, open, radical, independent perspective. It is a perspective that metaphorically projects links and antagonisms, the connections and conflicts between the figures, or even between the organic and inorganic formations, between the physical-vital, animated elements and the architectural and concrete ones, artificially crafted, to thus create new meanings and new potentials bonds between the different dimensions of experience.

This is why in his works we find absolutely no narrative stories nor anecdotes structured in a linear manner, according to a logic based on causality; no intelligible stories appear, presenting curious, picturesque, exotic facts, but only powerful, monumental, compact, extremely concentrated plastic forms that impose themselves on space and express themselves as a metaphorical revelation of the entire narrative of uncertainties. Paolo Grassino's representative mode leaves no room for anecdotes and

secondary plot threads; in his theater every figure has the role of protagonist, since there are no secondary roles which would distract from the central events. A dramatic tension, an extreme concentration, a radical accumulation of all the possible expressive tools, through which moving messages are conveyed, emotional, effective and at the same time full of intellectual stimuli, make room for a very intense radical fantasy, free from constraints and full of emotions, which allows the identification of a fundamental coming into being, within the enigmatic events. The plastic forms created by Paolo Grassino, the human and animal bones and bodies, the plants, the trees, the architectural fragments, the industrial components which recall machines, carts and weapons, all generate an authentic, dense, anarchic perceptive confusion, which, however, also elicits a liberating effect. Nevertheless, it is immediately clear that a contemplative, meditative approach to his works of art is necessary. The perception of these metaphorical allusions allows us to access further levels of meaning which are harbingers of associations, connotations and references. The entire plastic manifestation is intended as an embodiment of metaphorical evocations, where this substantial and destabilizing state of uncertainty has an effect that is both freeing and disconcerting. Liberating because the observer is not offered a clear, unilateral, limited, exclusive interpretative key. Destabilizing because there is no explanation or rational motivation aimed at legitimizing the different movements, the different thoughts, the comparisons and the relationships between the figures, there is no revelation of the inner conditions within a plastic scene that articulates itself on the basis of dramaturgical criteria.

Although the work of Paolo Grassino is permeated by an unusual, persuasive and fascinating intellectual coherence, he consciously and with great acumen chooses to leverage on contradictions and antagonisms, which dynamize his narratives, deepen his emotional and mental complexity, and widen its connotative areas. In his dramaturgy Grassino plays with opposing effects: on the one hand he creates a solemn, ceremonial, ritual immobility, in which the different figures are positioned in a hierarchical way and in which a timeless dimension detaches them from daily actions, while a hieratic and apparent silence dominates the plastic scene. On the other hand he releases devastating, wild, violent, even brutal energies, to occupy the entire scene and to dominate the movements and gestures of its figures. The violent clashes between the individual bodies, the figures or objects, the permanent tension and the hints at possible bursts of violence fill his scenes with a passionate dynamism and a dramatic pathos that is relativized by the absolutization of uncertainties and improbabilities, an absolutization which discredits rational explanations and casts doubt on the transparency of the narrative. Irony and pathos, a subversive questioning of the transparency of narrative and a mysterious, solemn revelation of the enigmatic sphere are the

elements that act in parallel, inextricably intertwined, in the works of Paolo Grassino.

Although Paolo Grassino consistently renounces any form of direct citation from literary or mythological contexts and absolutely does not make use of easy to impress allegories, his works contain motifs from the archetypal collective memory, which hold latent references to great narratives and mythological episodes. Paradoxically, this gives his sculptures and his ensembles a dramatization that on the one hand is full of the pathos of events and actions, while on the other presents an almost mythical, archaic timelessness, where subtle hints of myths remain in the domain of eccentric uncertainties, without evoking any form of ancient harmony. Rather, it is the heavy and oppressive silence and the dark, extraneous, solemnity that awakens associations with mythical dimensions, without thereby relying on the pathos of heroism.

This darkness and this irrationality of uncertainties is revealed in the various forms of occurrence, in extremely complex relationships and clashes, in conflicts and struggles, and also in disconcerting, disturbing, even frightening metamorphoses of the different figures, metamorphoses which, in the perception of the sculptural scenes, draw on mystical dimensions or even on psychological, pathological, gloomy, magical, irrational representations. This is how a dense, emotionally heavy, disturbing aura is born, which forges the imaginative narration. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Paolo Grassino, in his sculptures, accentuates the dramatic intensity of the connotations, and emphasizes disconcerting and disturbing thematic evocations, which all allude to the unstoppable and at the same time unintelligible action of dark, dangerous, violent, irrational, devastating energies.

The encounter with these sculptural expressions, structured according to a precise dramaturgy and theatricality, is often full of pathos, accentuated by the conscious and effective use of the element of surprise. The observation of, and subsequent approach to, the sculpture arouse strong emotional reactions in the viewer. From this point of view we can therefore say that Paolo Grassino seems to work with pathos-heavy effects that are typical of Baroque sculpture. He employs fiercely expressive elements that evoke emotions and that involve the observer psychologically, such as, for example, faces. Grassino, to activate and intensify certain memories, spheres, experiences and imaginary fears, relies on the mysterious richness of associations awakened by very personal moments such as gaze, facial expressions, energetic and expressive body movements. A very intense, touching, emotional effect is generated, especially with animal bodies, in the representation of dogs, horses and deer, thanks to which the whole

sculptural complex of the different figures and objects appears as a coherent, fatal, ineluctable event.

This is what distinguishes Paolo Grassino's entire work: his sculptural technique makes use of cathartic, disconcerting, exciting, dramatic effects, in which the perception of enigmatic, imaginary, poetic, extremely complex narratives opens up in broader and deeper layers of evocative meaning. This recapture of the narrative, this continuous search for an authentic, essential, fundamental narrative is at the core of Grassino's works, in which inexhaustible emotional energies weld together the different elements and components, references and associations of his narration, turning it into a coherent, evocative, enigmatic and highly suggestive reality. Although Grassino is still part of the young middle generation of Italian artists, it can be said that his poetic vision, his dramatic flair and his stormy, painful, self-destructive, gloomy directness, which sometimes scuffs brutality, create around his figures a sublime aura that is intriguing, intellectual and at the same time heroic, violent, archaic, which curiously refers to a conflictual, tormented emotionality, full of the same pathos the artists and intellectuals of romanticism and existentialism were imbued with.

In this sense it could be said that the work of Paolo Grassino is distinguished by the broad horizon of its narrative, which can be defined as contemporary par excellence, destabilizing, disconcerting, sceptical-critical, alternative-imaginary, new, a narrative that is at the same time liberating and bearer of doubts, in which dimensions able to reveal unusual connections live, a narrative substantially determined and legitimized by uncertainties and improbabilities. This radicality, the eccentric tension, the articulation and the movements of the bodies, the dramatic contrast between different figures, bodies, formations, generate a permanent suspense and intensity in his works, which refers to the most hidden reality of our life, of our mental orientation, of our instincts and anxieties. The artist Paolo Grassino has the ability and commitment necessary to break through to the observer, to touch them, to tear down the walls of their indifference, to bring them back to their true selves.

The unsettling and frightening gloominess of Paolo Grassino, his intellectual radicality, his mysterious and shocking irrationality have an even stronger effect, since the figures of this bizarre, dreamlike, often wild and violent, ruthless, brutal theater in an archaic sense, are represented in such a way as to appear absolutely natural, somewhat concrete and objective, devoid of pathos and without any distancing or stylization: immediate and indifferent, so to speak. Grassino has artistic tools that allow him to represent extremely complex psychological and mental constellations with a simple technique. The radical indifference, the brutal and violent objectivity, the pathos-free

uninhibitedness of this intensely bodily presentation, the archaic narration, in no uncertain terms, of impetuous, drastic scenes full of tension have something scandalous, implacable, but above all touching, alluring and inevitable about them. Paolo Grassino does not allow anyone to escape this sudden, surprising, disconcerting encounter. He forces the user to relate to these dark figures immersed in disturbing, violent scenes, permeated by conflict.

The work of Paolo Grassino is characterized by the penetrating radicality of a fantasy that is both a source of freedom and of anguish, the intense sensuality linked to the dramatic effect of its forms. At the same time, however, to relativize the drastic, violent, corporeal interventions, the destruction or deformation of the body, which awaken associations with violence, devastation, and cruelty, with psychic suffering, fear, the feeling of loss, with the power of magic and witchcraft, is a poetic and dreamlike melancholy. This perceptible, latent, hidden, unexpected melancholy creates a poetic aura of reflection, a lyrical, subtle atmosphere, made of memories of lost experiences and moments, where personal mnemonic images come together, in the whole narrative of uncertainties, with an unconscious collective memory, a memory that acts as an anthropological, archetypal, mythical base. This is how new, broader, liberating perspectives and opportunities are revealed, bonding the skills of the work of art to new connections and references. Paolo Grassino's relativized pathos coincides with the relevance of the uncertainties, themselves relativized, which materialize in his work with great intensity and suggestion, with a naturalness that is ultimately a harbinger of confusion, destabilization, insecurity and amazement.

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