

The archeological theater of Vittorio Messina

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Metamorphoses of dwelling. Dwelling in metamorphoses. A paradox in the works of Vittorio Messina, and more so in the artistic paths that he has followed, well represented in the exhibition *Natural Theater, evidence of archeology to come*.

His archeology invokes a different idea of time, of space, of history, but most of all, a new idea of the future, a way to examine not our linear history, of facts and documents, but that which renders history possible and the motives for which those facts and those documents exist. Vittorio Messina has us reflect on these principals in his exhibition at Scaramouche Loves Aline.

But here the notion of “archeology” is also a pretext, the metaphor for a journey that projects us into a space connecting different temporal dimensions: the past that re-becomes present in the artist’s historical works exhibited for the first time, and the future, already underway for its urgency, in a new site-specific installation that continues the artist’s work with the use of auditory materials, opening for us a perspective on the relationship with new technology and reflection on the compelling themes of our era. Like great literature that inspires us, Messina’s work is based on the rigor of a dialectic distance from any preconceived model.

This is the sensation of a meticulous exhibition itinerary that speaks to the viewer confronting the centrality of the “Habitat.” The dwelling, therefore, in its most profound and stratified significance, that which the German philosopher Martin Heidegger synthesizes with the phrase: “Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth.”

And it is exactly this manner that we feel we are touching in Messina’s work: a manner that is characterized as a border space, a fragment of connection between two or more worlds where the physicality of the place lives in a time that is almost suspended, like tension on the possibilities of our uncertain dwelling (the house, the ground, the world...). A new “Theater” of the boundary between history and the archeology of an immediate, dramatic future.

To sum up Messina’s work is an almost impossible undertaking. A rigorous artist, also for those who know him personally, who chose complexity as his operative method. Such as, for example, the grill of the exhibition’s central installation (which Messina frequently utilizes) that assumes particular significance as parameter of segregation, it also opens the possibility to structure a new meaning every time, thanks to the work’s mirrors that project the image of the world. A grill intended therefore as theatrical scenery, principle connection between different worlds. It is a mental and conceptual link that also structures the relationship activated between the elements of consumer construction making up the work; The force of these elements, on the one hand, is in their purpose as the loss of functional value, and on the other, in their re-purposing inside the work itself. For this reason, the

objects used by Messina are always “found” even when they are constructed ad hoc: an archeology of providence and its precariousness. And it is precisely here where the revolutionary force of Messina’s work lies. A force in close proximity to what Walter Benjamin asserts about the Surrealists: “[Surrealism] – he writes – was the first to stumble upon the revolutionary energies that manifest in the 'out of date', in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photographs, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable locales when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution—no one can have a more exact concept of that than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social but as much architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism.”¹

And perhaps no one realized how unstable our dwelling is in an era of confident technological development, of control of our bodies and our genes, of the calculation and mathematization of existing. A simple vision, in appearance, that becomes a true revolutionary energy if it succeeds in touching the depth of our perceptions. With their disruptive appearance, such works place us in front of border spaces, on that fine line that delineates dwelling as a rational construct, civil, and the unformed, the pre-rational state, the animal state. A journey’s end that makes us feel the trauma of every one of our social orders: the concrete possibility, or not, of our stay in this world.

Messina tells us therefore, that dwelling uncertainly on this earth is our inescapable condition, even today, as yesterday, as always.

(Translation by Lorin Prince)

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Surrealism*, in Id., *Avant-garde and revolution. Essays on literature*, Einaudi, Turin 1973, p. 15. Cfr. also, Clément Chéroux, *The image as question mark or the rapturous value of the surrealist document*, Johan & Levi, Milan 2012.