

The solid consistency of emptiness

Cristina Ferraro, 2011 (translated from Italian by Cristina Ferraro and Silvia Pettinicchio)

Sculpting ether with light to portray absence. Art is for Hogan Brown the construction of a peculiar architecture: the architecture of nostalgia, a maniacal and continuous analytical reference to the icons which made up his childhood imagination. In his previous solo show, *Close up*, Hogan had already introduced us to his personal poetics: a light which, as a chisel, gives depth to his subjects, be they human figures or inanimate objects. A meditated and weighted representation, that takes us to Piero della Francesca, far from the sensationalism, inscrutability and minimalism so common to recent art. A narrative style strongly influenced by British movies of the 50s and 60s is the key to Hogan's art: a documentary language bound to daily life and popular elements, from the earliest war movies to the new wave of the 70s.

In the jargon used by movie directors the "Establishing Shot" defines that particular frame usually found at the beginning of a set or more often at the beginning of a film, which allows us to understand where we are, where the narration takes place. It is a wide shot, in which a landscape, an interior, a certain light accompany us into the story.

Hogan Brown's figurative structuring uses the same trick: it contextualizes his characters' soul in a particular frame, in which a few minimal elements are the spatial coordinates of a state of mind. It is an oneiric dimension made up of metaphysical landscapes or interiors, unreal but still touchable, similar to those one may see in dreams, sometimes a little desolate, but in which emptiness is full of significance and participates in the rhythm of the composition with the same dignity of fullness. Hogan Brown, a perfect British gentleman, cuts light and shapes with a scalpel, with a thin detachment and we may say, analytically cool sarcasm. Back-lighted landscapes or interiors with their grazing light, colors belonging to a winter sun which does not warm our bones, whole figures, dramatic and suspended in unresolved thoughts, inhabit metaphysical shots thick with doubt.

His discreet and elegant dialogue with loneliness is a narration that can perfectly fit into Marc Augé's 'non-places'¹: impersonal contexts such as stations, airports, waiting rooms, where figures are frozen in a contemplative dimension, giving the moment portrayed by the painter an eternal and universal meaning.

Augé defines 'place' as a construction or a landscape having three characteristics: identitarian, or rather able to mark the identity of the people inhabiting it; relational, or detecting reciprocal relationships among subjects through their belonging to the same environment, and lastly historical because it reminds the individual of his roots. Modern society, on the other hand, offers a wide range of 'non-places', standard, identical places, spread over the whole planet. They might be buildings, landscapes or interiors, reassuring in their predictability, where one can feel lonely even if in the middle of a crowd, where one can find one's thoughts even if in the middle of the sound of a roar. The places Hogan chooses have the same impersonal aura, not only open spaces, but also interiors, similar to motel rooms, anonymous and distant spaces where subjects seem to have fallen from another dimension. And if no subject is present, the spectator feels dragged by the meditative and hieratic aura to inhabit that place where the soul observes itself from the outside.

¹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995).