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Interference Pearl ***A Project for the Castle***

Marcella Beccaria

A fine but rational thread, like that of Ariadne, marks Alessandra Tesi's journey. Her path winds, by preference, within spaces imbued with a sense of absence, places as empty as stage sets, momentarily abandoned but charged with an energy on the verge of being set loose. Her work is sustained by the full tension of the imminent that only an empty space can contain, but, as in the best thrillers, traces are scattered everywhere and there is the sense that some horror might be unleashed unexpectedly at any moment. The intense inter-relationship between persons and places traversed or inhabited is the theme that ties together Tesi's works. Her glance is continually held by the impression of bodies that mark the upholstery of a chair, by the traces that stain polished surfaces and by the shadows that persist after the protagonists have passed by.

The work *Interference Pearl* conceived for the project room (the Sala Progetto) in Rivoli's Manica Lunga has emerged from Tesi's definition of the Castello "as the drawing of an absence." Indeed the historical data that makes Castello di Rivoli unique goes beyond the grandeur of the design conceived by Filippo Juvarra for King Vittorio Amedeo of Savoy in 1718. Juvarra's project was interrupted while under construction, due to economic and political difficulties, and only one-third of the entire building as planned was constructed. The original portions of the Castello di Rivoli building, at least as we see it today, following skillful restoration, stop precisely where the ambition of the sovereign had to be confined, where the imagination of power was no longer able to impose order upon reality.

The history of this House of Savoy residence is displayed by the artist, who has used as her subject matter the void that separates the two buildings, the tension suspended between the building of the Castello and the Sixteenth century building of the Manica Lunga, partially demolished to leave space for the grand structure of the new residence. For Tesi, this void becomes an energetic and extremely high-tension field. "The plan that separates the Castello from the Manica Lunga - says the artist - is the design at the point where desire was placed in check." Tesi has taken possession of the plan that marks the position of the walls and piers designed by Juvarra, now visible on the courtyard paving. These never-built foundations were meant to support the most significant parts of the residence: the entrance atrium and, above it, the principal reception hall. The later was to have been a symbolic site par excellence, a space in which the exercise of power could manifest itself. In a play of *doublure*, Tesi has projected on the interior, on the walls of the space overlooking the courtyard that separates the Castello from the Manica Lunga, a drawing of what was to be, elements of the never-constructed plan.

Entering the room where Tesi has intervened is like gaining access to a private space where desires run simultaneously in different directions, still free from the necessary reduction that a

confrontation with reality requires. *Interference Pearl* is like the interior space of an open shell, the iridescent walls of which retain luminosity, and where the interference colors are revealed, depending on variations in the light. In fact, the nacreous painting that covers the walls is traversed by the grid of the architectural drawing rendered in its aerial absence, leaving open some of the lines traced by Juvarra, like tracks launched into the void of infinite possibilities.

The drawing is treated as an elastic material, acquiescent to the slant of the walls and discernible only when the space is traversed. Tesi uses colors that are mutable, depending on the movement of spectators, capable of dynamically rendering the wonderment of Mannerist taste for transformation. In other words it is "make-up," painting conceived as if the setting were a body painted over with a cosmetic, which is shaded and mixed to accentuate charm and mystery.

"The folly of the cover-up - as the artist calls it - originates to hold at bay a void that is capable of arousing horror." This "cosmetic" idea of the covering of space, heightening the folly that this implies, is central to Alessandra Tesi's poetics and is the subtext that links her photographs of hotel rooms or hospital spaces to her more recent installations, where elements of the real space become an integral part of the work. The artist's eye is drawn to the way in which spaces stage themselves, to the way they define their function, disguising themselves in proper fashion. Yet control is rarely kept and the attention to detail becomes an anxiety about the covering, an extension of an arcane *horror vacui*, that horror of emptiness that leads to a decorative frenzy, which is also fundamental to the taste that defines the Castello. "Frescoes, decorations, stuccoworks, illusionistic geometric paving, mirrors, *trompe l'œil* - Tesi notes - line the space, making it a closed and enveloping 'bubble'; the castle must contain the world. In keeping with her osmotic approach to the places she encounters, in this installation Tesi's concept of "make up" assumes the form of a painting treated almost as if it were a fresco. Like the frescoes that decorate the spaces of the Castello, this painting is capable of "breaking through" the space, moving beyond the heavy concreteness of ceilings and walls, with skillful artifice.

Accentuating the unfinished quality of the existing architectural grid, "the made-up room" also brings together within itself the technique of suspension (another secret of Baroque magic) and the idea of suspense, which ties Alessandra Tesi's work to the atmosphere of contemporary cinema. Scanning the grid traced by the artist over the walls is like traversing the two-dimensional space of a film, penetrating its surface with one's body. Thus one enters a total space, getting to the center of the labyrinth indicated in the geometry of the architectural layout.

There are two variants of the myth of the labyrinth. In the first, Ariadne gives Theseus a spindle with the thread. In the second, she helps him, lighting his path with a glowing wreath, conquering the darkness, which in this version constituted the true complexity of the site. Alessandra Tesi's work is a space where light plays a fundamental role in its capacity to reveal the convolutions of the layout. An abstraction of difficulty, a project that begins with a lack, this work, with its lustrous presence, contemplates the possibility of deciphering, a liberating solution that allows a way out, past the obstacles encountered along the way.

(translated from the Italian by Marguerite Shore)