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THE ENIGMA OF EPISODES OF UNCERTAINTY

Reflections on the work by Paolo Grassino

by Loránd Hegyi

For many years, Paolo Grassino has focused his efforts on highlighting, exploring and spreading the poetic messages encompassed within the imaginary, evocative and connotative layers of his three-dimensional expressions, without any compromise. Moreover, the perception of these sculptural creations, with their dramaturgic arrangement, suggests an imaginary and cryptic narration, extremely dense, at times somber, which deeply moves the spectator. This narration, which is magical, enchanted, enigmatic, pathetic-dramatic, and yet also intriguing and disconcerting, with fairytale-like hues, appears before us in a sudden, surprising, intense, irresistible and natural way, as well as unsettling, unexplainable and mysterious. This way of becoming sensual and concrete, immediately perceptible, holds an inexplicable secret, as the internal forces that move figures, by either relating or opposing them, remain hidden and invisible.

Therefore, the observer interacts with a mysterious, puzzling, bizarre, external and unexplainable instance, which includes a dense entanglement, carrying a strong emotional component and rich with relations, so much so that the entire tangible scene, with its strong and almost monumental physicality, as well as its heightened materiality, dynamism, sensuality and iron-clad expressivity, appears as something known, almost natural, something that comes from our interiority. The combination of these sculptural groups carries an atmosphere that is excessive, psychedelic, alongside a reality that is magical, enchanted, incredible, but also shows itself as an existing, tangible and immediate truth. This ambiguity fills Paolo Grassino's work with a poetic vagueness, an uncertainty, which, in turn, produces a destabilizing insecurity and evokes something invisible, intangible, mystical, which we cannot remove, as it's rooted deep inside us.

This magical, beguiled and puzzling scene, which is equally apparent, perceivable through the senses, physical, with no doubt vital, and which manifests itself in the sculptural reality, recalls an even broader meaning, an enigmatic layer, concealed, not immediately perceptible, yet fundamentally present, with an impact no less than decisive; a layer of meaning that includes essential and deeper connections, which are also expressed by the representation of uncertainties and improbabilities. The spectator feels that this layer, consisting of a different, alternative and broad meaning, with its limited, unfettered and free imagination, its inconceivably wide horizon, its textures and its unprecedented connections, proposes a greater and more authentic vision of the world's cryptic events. Figures and scenes, which carry a destabilizing uncertainty, both unsettling and provocative, finally lead us to a renewed consciousness, in which premonition, anguish, experience and imagination combine, giving life to a new form of intense experience.

In this sense, the sculptures and installations by Paolo Grassino deliver a very strong impact and connotative richness, and can be understood as dramatic revelations of the Other, of the essence, of the nucleus, of what is mystery. The Other also represents the alternative,

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the imaginary, the unsayable, which takes the form of expressions that are bizarre, unusual, provocative, disconcerting and full of questions on the representations of improbability. The creatures, shapes, human and animal figures, objects, organic and natural forms, fragments and architectural artefacts all seem to obey a force that is latent and invisible, or even better an internal and intangible yet obvious and omnipresent logic of this poetic microcosm. A mysterious and secret logic acts behind the dynamic and intensely corporeal, sensual and eccentric scenes portraying uncertainty and implausibility. Hence, radical improbability takes on the meaning of essence and authenticity, and uncertainty is reinterpreted as true knowledge.

In his apparently picturesque, chaotic and irrational representations, Paolo Grassino tries to depict improbabilities and uncertainties, an alternative, hinting at a more distinct, broad, free, open, radical and independent perspective; a perspective that projects on a metaphorical level the nexuses and antagonisms, the connections and conflicts between figures, or even those between organic and inorganic formations, between physical-vital elements, as well as architectural and concrete ones, realised artificially, in order to create new meanings and potential connections between the different dimensions of what is lived.

It's for this very reason that, in his works, there's absolutely no trace of narrative tales or anecdotes, structured linearly, following a logic based on causality; there are no intelligible stories showing curious, picturesque or exotic facts, but just mighty three-dimensional shapes, monumental, compact, extremely concentrated, which impose themselves on the space and express a metaphoric revelation of the entire narration of uncertainties. The representation mode of Paolo Grassino leaves no room for anecdotes or secondary plots; in his theatre, each figure acts as a protagonist and there are no secondary roles, drawing attention away from the main events. A dramatic tension, an extreme concentration, a radical accumulation of all possible expressive devices, which carry messages that are moving, emotional, efficient and filled with intellectual stimuli, allowing a very intense and radical fantasy, free from restraints and rich with emotions, which enables the identification of a fundamental becoming in cryptic events.

The physical creations by Paolo Grassino, the bones and the bodies of both humans and animals, the plants, the trees, the architectural fragments, the industrial components, which remind us of machines, wagons and weapons, generate an authentic perceptive confusion, which is also dense, anarchic, but also carries a liberating effect. At the same time, it appears immediately clear that a contemplative and meditative mind set is necessary when approaching his artworks. The perception of these metaphorical allusions, allow us to access further levels of the harbingers of meaning of associations, connotations and references. The entire sculptural manifestation must be intended as an incarnation of metaphorical summonings, in which this substantial and destabilising state of uncertainty has an effect that is both liberating and disconcerting. Liberating because the spectator doesn't follow a clear, unilateral, limited and exclusive key. Disconcerting because there is no explanation, no rational motivation aimed at legitimising the different movements and

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thoughts, the confrontations and realisations among figures, there is no revelation of the interior conditions with regards to a sculptural scene articulated based on dramaturgic criteria.

Despite the fact that Paolo Grassino's work is permeated by an unusual, persuasive and fascinating intellectual coherence, he consciously chooses, with great acumen, to leverage contradictions and antagonisms, which boost his narrations, explore his emotional and mental complexity, and broaden his connotative spheres. In his dramaturgy, Grassino plays with opposing effects: on one side, he creates a solemn, ceremonial and ritual stillness, in which different figures are positioned generically and where a timeless dimension draws them from the spheres of daily actions, while a hieratic and apparent silence dominates the sculptural stage, while on the other side, he unleashes devastating, wild, violent and even brutal energies, which occupy the entire scene and dominate the movements and gestures of the figures involved. The violent clashes between single bodies, shapes or objects, the permanent tension and hints of possible, violent surges fill his scenes with a passionate dynamism and a dramatic pathos that is put into perspective by the absolutization of uncertainties and of improbabilities; an absolutization that discredits rational explanations and puts in doubt the transparency of narration. In the works by Paolo Grassino, the elements of irony and pathos, a subversive way of calling into question the transparency of narration, together with a mysterious and solemn revelation of the enigmatic sphere, act in tandem, inextricably intertwined.

Even if Paolo Grassino coherently renounces any form of direct citation of literary and mythological contexts, and doesn't employ any easy-to-understand allegories, in his works we can find motifs of the archetypal collective memory, encompassing latent references to great narrations and mythological events. Paradoxically, this provides his structures and sets with a dramatization rich in pathos pertaining to events and actions on one side, and to an almost mythical and archaic timelessness on the other, in which slight hints to fabulous events remain more in the field of eccentric uncertainties, without evoking any form of ancient harmony. Rather, it's the heavy and oppressive silence together with the obscure and foreign solemnness that revive associations with mythical dimensions, without leveraging the pathos of heroism.

This obscurity and irrationality of uncertainties reveals itself in the different forms of change, in extremely complex relations and clashes, in conflicts and battles, and even in disconcerting, unsettling and even frightening bodily metamorphosis, which, in the perception of sculptural scenes, leverage mystic dimensions or even psychological, pathological, gloomy, magical and irrational representations. This way, a dense aura forms, which is emotionally heavy, unsettling, and forges the imaginary narration. Conversely from many of his contemporaries, Paolo Grassino accentuates the dramatic intensity of connotations in his sculptures, and emphasizes disconcerting and unsettling thematic evocations, which all suggest the overpowering yet hardly understandable action of bleak, devastating, dangerous, violent and irrational energies.

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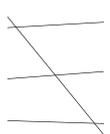
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The encounter with these sculptural expressions, which are structured based on a precise dramaturgy and theatrics, is often dramatic and filled with pathos, accentuated by the conscious and efficient use of the surprise effect. The observation and approach to these sculptures generates strong emotional reactions in the spectator. In this sense, we can say that Paolo Grassino seems to operate using effects filled with the tragedy of baroque sculpture. He employs highly expressive elements, such as faces, which trigger emotions and psychologically involve the observer. In order to activate and intensify specific memories, spheres, experiences and imaginary fears, Grassino leverages the mysterious richness of associations woken by very personal moments, such as stares, facial expressions, or energetic and expressive body language. In particular, a very intense, moving and emotional effect is caused by animal bodies, through the representation of dogs, horses and deer, which lead the entire sculptural complex of different figures and objects to appear as a coherent, fatal and inevitable event.

It's this aspect that makes the work by Paolo Grassino entirely unique: his sculptural technique makes use of cathartic, disconcerting, emotional and dramatic effects, in which the perception of cryptic, imaginary, poetic and extremely complex narrations opens to broader and deeper layers of evocative meaning. This reconquering of narration, this constant search of an authentic, essential and fundamental narration, is at the heart of Paolo Grassino's works, in which endless energies link together different elements and components, mentions and associations of his narration, creating a coherent, evocative, cryptic and strongly suggestive reality. Even if Grassino is still part of the young 'middle' generation of Italian artists, we can say that his poetic vision, his dramatic violence and his turbulent, painful, self-destructive and bleak directness, which sometimes almost brushes brutality, creates a sublime, intriguing, intellectual and heroic aura around his figures, and is filled with the pathos of artists and thinkers of romanticism and existentialism.

In this sense, we can say that Paolo Grassino's work is unique for its broad horizon of a narration that can be defined as contemporary par excellence, destabilizing, disconcerting, skeptical-critical, alternative-imaginary, innovative, a narration that is both liberating and carrier of doubts, in which we identify dimensions capable of revealing unusual nexuses, a narration that is substantially determined and legitimized by uncertainties and improbabilities. The radicalism, the eccentric tension, the articulation and the movement of bodies, the dramatic contrast between different figures, forms and shapes in his works, generate a permanent suspense and intensity, which refer to the most hidden reality of our life, of our mental orientation, of our instincts and anguishes. As an artist, Paolo Grassino has the capacity and the effort necessary to win over and move the observer, to breach the wall of his/her indifference, to bring him/her back to his/her true Self.

Paolo Grassino's unsettling and frightening darkness, his intellectual radicalism and his mysterious and shocking irrationality, produce an even greater effect, since the figures of this bizarre, oneiric, often wild and violent, ruthless and archaically brutal theater, are all represented in such a way that they appear as absolutely natural and, to some extent,

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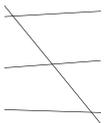
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even concrete and objective, devoid of pathos and with no detachment of stylization; so to speak: immediate and indifferent. Grassino has artistic devices that allow him to represent extremely complex psychological and mental constellations by using simple techniques. The radical indifference, the brutal and violent objectivity, the disinhibition bereft of pathos of this intensely corporeal presentation, the archaic narration, in no uncertain terms, impetuous, made of drastic scenes, rich in tension, hold something somewhat scandalous, implacable, but mostly very intense, moving, attractive and inevitable. Paolo Grassino doesn't allow anyone to escape from this sudden, surprising, disconcerting encounter. He forces the observer to relate with these grim figures, immersed in unsettling, violent scenes and permeated by conflict.

The penetrating radicalism of a fantasy that's both a source of freedom and anguish, and the intense sensuality linked to the dramatic effect of his shapes, characterize the works by Paolo Grassino. At the same time, however, there's a poetic and oneiric melancholy that render the drastic, violent, corporeal interventions, the destruction or deformation of the body, which develop associations with violence, devastation, cruelty, mental suffering, fear, a feeling of dismay, and the power of magic and sorcery. This perceivable, latent, recondite and sudden melancholy, generates a poetic aura of reflection, a lyrical, subtle atmosphere, consisting of memories of experiences and of the times lost, where, in the entire narration of uncertainties, mnemonic personal images combine to a subconscious collective memory; a memory that serves as an anthropological, archetypal and mythical base. And it's like this that new perspectives and opportunities are revealed: broad, liberating, competences of the artwork linked to new connections and references. The pathos rendered by Paolo Grassino coincides with the meanings of uncertainties, also rendered, which accrue in his work with great intensity and charm, and with spontaneity, which, in final analysis, is also the harbinger of confusion, destabilization, stupor and insecurity.

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