

## **"Weak Art" — A Premise**

**Maria Campitelli**

"Arte Debole" has been circulating in the world for over two years; it started in Turin, the city which both in its images and its social structure insists on contradictions, and generates the oxymoron permeating the work of these artists.

The oxymoron is today the foundation of every appearance of reality: there is no place on earth which does not live and exhibit the contrast between what was and what is; between the loss of values anchored in outdated presences signifying a lost dimension, and the disguise imposed by technological civilization, the empire of the plastic object which you use once and throw away. Ours is the age of the simulacrum, an age without glory which has allowed the emergence of "weak thought" (*pensiero debole*). "Capable of articulating (and therefore reasoning) in the half light," . . . accepting "existence as a trace, memory, and existence consumed and weakened and deserving attention only for this reason" (Vattimo).

Renato Alpegiani, Luigi Antinucci, Renato Ghiazza, Gian Carlo Pagliasso start from these premises; they have absorbed Vattimo's orientation by working along this trace, qualifying the sense of absence. Their work, which though severely structured, moves freely between the pictorial and the plastic, are testimonies of paradox and impossibility; the idea materialized in objects which have retained their connections to the "usable," or they recycle materials and structures by which we are surrounded every-where, from the construction site to the supermarket. These are not simple assemblages, a distorted version of ready-made done in the post-modern vein, but signify, as Pagliasso explained speaking of his work: "the passage from the usable to the loveable object and finally to the work, always retaining their basic relation to marketable wares."

This process is opposed to that undertaken by conceptual art; the idea is not strengthened by tautology; it needs the reference to the object in order to become a tangible paradigm of irreconcilable opposites, typical in a gnoseological epoch hovering over the relics of history.

These artists have different origins: Alpegiani is closer to pictorial matrices, as shown in previous seasons through the colors of his materials, going "beyond" painting but still intimately related to it. Antinucci loved Magritte and the alienating wonder of alogical stories. Ghiazza and Pagliasso have worked together constructing, at the close of the 1970s, a kind of performance, philosophical by nature and defined as "Group for Materialistic Research". That was another attempt to decode thought in gesture, through the senses, to appropriate it as something material, and verify its tensions and paradoxes with socializing intentions. Their present operations can be related back to that experience; the analytical will to review the patterns of intellectual enunciation is transferred from corporeal gesture, the physical quality of space/time, to the enigmatic concentration of the artifact. With Ghiazza this aspires to a weakened monument, to deconstructed furnishings; in Pagliasso we find a picto/plastic object as a coagulation of disparate techniques and materials. The work is seen as an instrument verifying intellectual tension, it helps us to understand the movement of thought approaching consciousness, inserted into a broader discourse placed between the new sociology and the image-making power of rhetoric.

Neo-classicism remains the point of constant reference for Arte Debole: its condition of death recycled with the forms of classical purism removed from its original historical context and resulting in the coldness of artifice. Even today, in effect, the decontextualized fragments of a vanished world are stitched together, by means of bloodless copies (comparable to those furnished by the Hellenistic *koine* of the Roman epoch) emitted by the industrial/consumerist system.

In some of its aspects even Arte Povera, which was fashioned in a "strong" area exalting the energy potentials of nature and of materials, can be invoked as a linguistic predecessor of Art Debole, in its choice of operative freedom introduced (as a reflex of the American conceptualism) by the preceding generation of Turin artists, working on highly politicized terrain.

"Weak Art" was born in a larger context, between painting, sculpture and design, between Milan and Turin, in an apparent *Ludus* which, however, from the very beginning harbored non-epidermic meditations and statements. It has grown in stages, ex-

pandering from the Piedmont to Liguria, Bologna, Trieste, to Switzerland and London, each time singling out, through the work of the four artists central to the movement, various aspects of the problems related to the seductive skin of objects: from the "de-realization" to the obviousness of the "object" where the difference base/surface is consumed; from the "fantastic" as a category renewed because liberated from the cumbrous network of historical iconography, to "the rest," that residue of the irreducibly artistic, clinging to the work, not as a concession to hedonistic aestheticism, but rather as the contradictory persistence of a subjective trace in spite of the death of the object.

"Beyond the rest," there is already movement in the direction of registering cold pulsations which are rooted in memory, redefining the concept of return, which has Nietzschean contours, moving along the path traced by Vattimo.

Today the four protagonists of "Arte Debole" tend to come closer to the consistency of the object, aware of the beauty inherent in the texture of materials, descending into the order that composes them, and emphasizing by the juxtaposition of contraries and the symmetry of imbalance.

