

GIOVANNI OZZOLA

LA THÉORIE DES COMÈTES

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When we look at stars and comets, in the darkness they all look the same, shining marvellously, casting their distant light upon us. Looking at them closely through a telescope, they reveal themselves and unfurl their diversity and beauty, extraordinary for each of them. Somewhat resembling human beings, as each one of us radiates a special, complex energy.

Understanding the movement of the stars helps scientists to locate our position within the Milky Way and is essential to define our place in the cosmos, that is: where we came from, where we are now, and where we are going on our trip through the stellar system.

Giovanni Ozzola's work speaks of life, a life that is intimate and unique, and yet shared by all individuals.

On occasion of the artist's first solo exhibition at the Galleria Continua in Beijing, the works are arranged to interact with the space and bystanders. An exhibition conceived as a sensory and cognitive experience, where the works, which comprise photographic images, objects and videos, emotionally captivate the viewer, who tends to identify with the message they transmit.

Each work in the exhibition tells the story of an inner journey, *"Landscapes acquire a landscape through us. Hence, if I imagine them, I create them, if I create them, they exist; if they exist, I see them as I see the others. [...] where would I be if not inside myself and in the sort and kind of my sensations?"* (F. Pessoa).

Different temporal situations intersect continuously, transporting us from the past, to the present and the future, experiencing moments of exquisite spiritual tension.

The exhibition slowly reveals itself to the eyes of the observer. Through a half-open door, we pass from a state of intimacy and adaptation to the inborn darkness that fills us and is the perception of ourselves, thence to a state of pleasant curiosity and wonder, attracted and partly dazzled by an unknown reality that unfolds before our eyes in the form of bright and contrasting light.

Once we cross the threshold into the light, into new constellations, we are faced with an enormous map, ninety-eight bright golden panels, where the artist has engraved on copper numerous routes of seafarers of the past, using the century-old engraving technique. Undulating, bare paths wander across the immensity of the sea, devoid of geography, as if suspended in the mist and darkness. Navigators like Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Magellan, Zheng He, astronomers and geographers, driven by willpower, by their desire for knowledge and their own audacity, sailed towards "emptiness" facing their fears.

To acquire self-awareness, man needs to tackle fears and go towards the "unknown", to overcome fright driven by intuition. Self-awareness directs one's self through archetypes, dreams and intuitions, and leads the individual to make mistakes with a purpose, thereby pushing the psyche towards individuation and self-realisation.

Hence, a fluid connection is created with a theme particularly dear to the artist: the "Shipwreck" or better: "Castaway", a philosophical metaphor used to define the ultimate meaning of human existence (Karl Jaspers). The continuous unfolding of reality, as opposed to the human need to have fixed points of reference; in this sense, the shipwreck puts an end to human despair caused by being at the mercy of the instability that populates the world, and gives life to a renewed consciousness.

Each one of these trips is a headlong dash, representing a new beginning, a journey of change that slowly, path after path, losing one's way time and again (we believe that most of these adventurers died on their journey), as it proceeds, influences collective consciousness and therefore the structure of the psyche of all mankind, which emerges from a shared culture, a common instinct and experience that render the substrate of the unconscious equal for all human beings. *«[...] to the ephemeral world of our consciousness they communicate an unknown psychic life, belonging to a distant past; they communicate the spirit of our unknown ancestors, their way of thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, men and gods.»* (Carl Gustav Jung)

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Inside the main hall, a projection on three screens covers the largest wall. We are fully absorbed by a placid ambience of darkness and tranquillity, suddenly shattered by the mechanical sound of a shutter, raised to reveal to our eyes a landscape of light, sand dunes that replicate infinitely, while we hear the ceaseless breath of the wind that undoes and recreates them in an endless cycle of rebirths.

Here, the use of the paradox takes on a necessary value, allowing the onlooker to translate an irrational vision, such as that of a garage that opens onto a horizon of sand in a mental situation where, from a state of tranquillity and semi-darkness that eased our thoughts, we are rushed into a state of loss of reference points, attracted as we are to the light, the immense, the unknown. Once again, an invitation to dare beyond the apparent life.

Opposite the video, an old jute rope stands out on the wall, reproducing the symbol of infinity, underscoring once again the theme of the eternal return, the cycle of life, death and rebirth, "the ocean of existence", in many Indian religions identified as Samsara. For the meditator, abandoning this state represents the attainment of a condition of light, of absolute awareness (Nirvana).

A wreck, an old boat no longer in use, is lit inside by a neon sign that reads "*Rising every time we fall*" (Confucius), to signify that the greatness of an individual lies not in never falling, but in knowing how to rise again, driven by courage and by an ever-renewed energy and positivity. A phrase that spurs us not to surrender to failure, leads us to redemption and incites us to focus our energy on our goals. We return to the theme of the "Shipwreck", losing ourselves to find ourselves again, the perpetual motion of life, consciously moving towards death, which inevitably ensues in rebirth, hence in self-awareness.

The absolutely perfect shape of the propeller is a representation of motion, continuity and energy. Ancient propellers, belonging to watercrafts caught in seaquakes and shipwrecks, oozing experience, are engraved with philosophical, scientific and religious treatises, confirming the single truth that lies behind the concept of continuity, of unfolding, of materiality, eroticism and carnality: the wheel of rebirths, life on earth, the material world, pervaded with pain and suffering.

Transparent and crystalline globes hang in the air, emanating light like distant planets, reflecting trajectories of light and ocean crossings on the entire perimeter of the room, the ceiling and the floor. They emphasize once again man's need to overcome insecurity, and face fears, pain and uncertainty, unperturbed by failure, affirming his position to find a new self-consciousness.

The bells always sound the same note... Castaway bells, solid workers employed on ancient ships, also bear on their thick skin phrases that, in Giovanni Ozzola's life, are stamped in his memory without ever leaving him, coming back to surface in different stages of his life, renewing their meaning.

The exhibition comes to an end at the top of the exhibition space, where the viewer, again projected into light, is surrounded by the peaks of sacred mountains.

In any landscape, mountains are an important and imposing presence. Many peoples have worshiped them, attributing them a divine and cosmic relevance. The sacred mountain is at the centre of the cosmology and geography of many religious beliefs, from the most archaic shamanic traditions to the great Abrahamic religions. It crosses and connects the three worlds: divine, human and hades. Temples and shrines of all religions have been built on mountains, demonstrating man's endless search not only for the symbolic centre of the world, but also for the place that inspires the most profound experiences of asceticism and revelation.

In this latter vision, on which the artist invites us to dwell, earth and sky cling to each other in a loving embrace that will last forever.

...So, we descend again.