



Armida Gandini: STANDING UP – The grid and the coordinates of the identity

The main through line of Armida Gandini's research has always been the reflection on individual identity. She has explored this theme through different mediums and studied it, along the development of her production, in many facets, constantly interrogating herself during a gradual and continuous process aimed at self-knowledge, never definitively determining the identification of the own self and its collocation within the dynamics of the relationship with the world and with the other.

The ideal starting point for the series of new works presented at this second Dutch solo show (the first, in 2009, was "Noli Me Tangere", curated by Marco Nember) is the 2009 video "I say I can try". In this sequence, a young protagonist moves within an absolute white expanse, devoid of coordinates and directional references. This undefined field is often employed by Armida Gandini as the image of the infinitely extended space of existence and as a metaphor of the inner region of the psyche, which, as the void of an immaculate sheet, is suspended, open to anything that can be marked, written, imagined, drawn on it, a kind of "theater of the consciousness" of events, actions, appearances. If on the one hand it lends itself to cater to every conceivable desire of the person, on the other all possible external manifestations can materialize on it, or even disappear. In this case, Chiara, the little protagonist, who at first plays moving freely, is compelled to deal with the increasing appearances of various barrier-surfaces, grids, walls and obstacles interfering with her vital, instinctive and spontaneous dynamic impulses: with various expedients and creative strategies she learns to accept challenges, to come to terms with uncertainties and fears or to overcome them, to deal with what is different from herself and to become stronger, in a situation that would otherwise constitute a limbo, a bewildering desert without occurrences or changes (a situation examined in the sequences "Pregnant silence", 2008, and "Muovo sonnambula al mondo", 2012).

These latest works were produced in 2016 following the same investigation that already showed another interesting point of view in the video of 2015 "Ask her how it went". Here the barriers, now closer to networks of coordinates, are assimilated, processed and read, through different and new nuances and connotations, as important and useful references for the personal identity, which mark, indicate, demarcate, highlight, offer shelter: comparison structures that mediate the knowledge of the exterior and of others, or covers that, with their package, conceal and at the same time reveal, through the signs of their presence, introverted personalities.

In the works of the series "Standing Up" and "Casing" the grid is superimposed on the figure and assumes a value somewhere between protective and concealing cocoon and necessary support framework, threshold of the appearance, interface useful for transmitting information and reading coordinates or denouncing a block.

The artworks "Standing Up", realized through a mixed media of photography transferred on paper and graphite, contain, already in the title, a reference to standing, erectly, in order to continue to face the multiple experiences of life while we ourselves personally responsible for the way we react to them.

The works of the series "Casing", magazine pages processed through mixed media, show the grid as wrap, cover that basically supports, hovering around them, these sorts of ghost bodies of characters taken from fashion shoots, photo models whose feminine appearance is individuality rarefied in the artifice of the crystallized mechanism of the pose, idealized and ephemeral universe of a staging, which loosely communicates by way of mannered stereotypes.

The photographs of the "Coordinates" cycle, cut through carving, highlight the grid as a device of structuring and of mental recognition, weft of information that regulates the organizational processes of the brain and of the perception: on the one side these works transform the image into a reticular weaving of solids and voids, decomposing it into presences and lacks, on the other they subtend the permanence of the recognizability of personality through the coordinate, even more evident when Armida Gandini uses images of icons well imprinted in the collective memory as Frida Kahlo and Romy Schneider.

A different game of presence and absence, but also of the relationship between surfaces in the space, is carried out in the works of the series "Stand Up", small pieces born from photographs which are sliced and made three-dimensional as a way to enclose more points of view; in these works, different characters are placed, as in a scene, in relation to stairs, to a net, to the slats of a window shutter, to a pedestal: the separation of layers, the detachment of a portion of the figure from the background, and the negative silhouette that is created reproduce, in different ways, the bond of the subject, the center of identity, with a scheme of references to which it is inseparably connected and with the almost metaphysical field of the suspension on the vacuum.

The dichotomic tension between the central plasticity of the essence of identity, potentially infinite, and the two-dimensionality of the layer of the information grid is evident in the works where the photograph of the little girl protagonist of the video, printed on large white sheets, is confronted with walls, nets, lattices of pencil-drawn signs, almost plots constructed by the thought in creating an interpretive projection of the world of its own: she appears to gradually acquire a greater awareness and trust, actually passing from "I" to "I say" to "I say that".

The layering carried out by the memory and the mechanisms of the mind, transposed on a linguistic level, is typical for Armida Gandini's style and is utilized in many artworks and variations, not only as an interplay between drawing and photography: "Screened", "Ring a Ring-o'Roses" and "Way to escape" make use of the distanced overlapping of layers of print on glass and print on paper, visually creating an interconnection between different planes of reality.

Like on a journey in search of oneself, an experiential path where one loses oneself only to find oneself again, examined by means of the relation between the figure, the space in which it is placed and the grids of coordinates in relationship to the world, this exhibition seems to close a cycle that culminates in a composition: the artist has decided to cover the white background of an entire wall of the gallery with a large hand drawn network on which we are to place, like in a picture gallery, a travel diary or album of memories, various characters of this inner itinerary of confrontation with the infinite eventualities of existence to find in these a position, a balance and to finally reconcile with references and structures, networks of concatenation between entities, tools of recognition and processing of multiplicity and diversity, necessary complements to the vastness of the void of unlimited potentials.

The figurative elements of this path are characteristic of Armida Gandini's visual universe: the white space without connotations, non-place territory of the experience; the little girl, character of the explorer, of the open-mindedness towards the new, of the purity of a psyche that inherently follows its instinct; the braid, symbol of the organization of coordinates in a precise weaving, structure of thought, DNA code carrier of information which, as the line of the drawing, is a matrix that brings order and from which each shape branches out.

Sonia Arata, 11 November 2016, Amsterdam