

ROSSELLA PEZZINO DE GERONIMO

by Roberto Mutti

Travel photography is historically placed in the specific field of evocative reportage, that which amazed observers at a time when only explorers, soldiers, missionaries, traders and photographers embarked on major journeys. When Turin hosted the 1911 International Exhibition, visitors could see black people for the first time, in a special pavilion presenting a reconstruction of an African village populated by real people. Today, things have changed profoundly, and travel photographers have shifted their focus to other aspects pertaining to everyday life, anthropological investigation, and naturalistic research. Rossella Pezzino De Geronimo, who has also known and documented places of dazzling beauty, has chosen a different path in the work presented here: a form of study in which details play a predominant role. Linger on a breast framed by a necklace, she captures the attention of the observer, who appreciates the smoothness of the skin, the contrast in colour with the grains of the jewel casting a slight shadow, and the balance of the triangular composition. The same thing happens when the photographer's lens lingers on a disc inserted in an earlobe, emphasising the softness of the surfaces and that small chip that becomes the "punctum" on which all the viewer's attention is focused. In other cases, it is the skin that takes centre stage, although the close-up shot and oblique light accentuate the enigmatic appearance of the whole. One may, in fact, experience the sensation of being before a fabric, a wall, a landscape or - when the body is embellished with drawings - a painting in which the brilliance of white is juxtaposed with countless shades of brown and the incisive marks of black. Another significant but much more radical aspect of her linguistic research and its highly dramatic outcome is the holographic video specially made by Rossella Pezzino De Geronimo for this occasion. Here, the images come together as if caught in a spiral that equally affects the photographs in whirlwind motion, the water that pulls them along, the air that absorbs them, the fire that burns them, the earth that attracts them and our gaze, confronting the elements making up reality.

At first glance, Rossella Pezzino de Geronimo's photographs appear pleasant, chromatically balanced and well composed. We must look at them very carefully to realise that this external and aesthetic aspect does not exhaust their expressive intensity, which is revealed when one perceives their strong inner value. If photography is always and in any case an outward projection of the photographer's personality, it is all the more so in these images, which represent the culmination of a long dialectical process born of the need to overcome the pain and anguish that stood out as real obstacles. In order to overcome them, the artist has worked by "stripping" her images of all recognisable references in order to place them in a timeless dimension. This operation has enabled her to shift her attention from realistic definition of her subject to the pure

forms that characterise it, following a path of research that achieves a balance: that of the photographic composition, but also the inner balance achieved by the photographer herself. In this way, suffering is sublimated into a quest to capture, at the end of the journey, the elements that lead to beauty, simplicity and purity. All of this is present in these recent works, where the sense of an acquired self-awareness is metaphorically revealed in the harmony of the geometries and the mysterious sinuosity of the lines.

Rossella Pezzino de Geronimo's strong drive toward experimentation has prompted her not only to investigate the language of photography, but to intervene in the medium itself: she does so using holograms, a rare and precious photographic genre that has the merit of arousing that sense of wonder that we tend to lose too early in life. Focusing on the technical aspect of creating three-dimensional virtual images, she uses a supporting shelf and a background to create a sort of meeting-place between real objects and virtual representations. Having acquired precise technical knowledge, she then puts it at the service of her intention of conveying a message of great symbolic power. The three phases, corresponding to the three temporal realities of the world in which her thought develops, begin with the past, to which a butterfly gives an intense, fragile lightness and beauty. It then develops in the contemporary world, where the protagonist is a moth born in a polluted world that is dominated by restlessness and disharmony, acoustically and otherwise. Finally, it is projected into a new phase, that of a possible future in which to hope: it is once again the butterfly that returns to the forefront, identified with water, the symbol of rebirth.