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Framing Elisa Sighicelli

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My task of displaying while protecting is a strange one.
I have close-hand knowledge of the work of Elisa Sighicelli. When I say close I hope it will not be interpreted in terms of intellectual proximity, but precisely as direct, physical contact with the works, as we will see later on.
In an interview some time ago, describing several photographs on view in her luminous studio in Turin, E. S. said: "There is no narrative in my work and you can create your own, but I am not interested in attaching a story to my works." Obviously I too, in the writing, am prompted to add meanings and stories, but this is inevitable, called into play by my job, given the fact that "I can", I feel authorized to do it, and assume full responsibility.
We have to start with the absence of narration in order to understand the leitmotif that runs throughout the production of E. S., across all these years.
But one must be careful! In a world of art so full of references to today, to the human, the social, the global, all this is not a matter of lack of interest or indifference to feeling, to participation. If anything, in E. S. it is fundamentally the respect for the viewer, a perceptible modesty of sentiments, an intolerance for any *captatio benevolentiae* (for those annoyed by Latin terminology – understandably – we might opt for "marketing strategy") that comes to the fore, in her sharp, controlled and rare artworks.
With E. S. the natural fidelity to the represented subject slides and evolves in a complex technique deployed to grasp movement, irrepressible mutation of the real, inconsistency of the present.
In her work the crowded dualisms of contemporary works, like soul and body, reality and thought, appearance and meaning, seem like distant worlds, laden with other stories.
E. S. comes to grips with the now insubstantial limit between the real and the virtual.
In her work a ribbon emerges from the photograph, returning to be what it was before becoming a representation of itself. Take note: not the opposite, not the ribbon that becomes representation. In E. S., her respect for the viewer would always preclude the artifice of trompe l'oeil. In the work the real ribbon reveals itself because it has already been represented by E. S., who has photographed it.
The photographed drapery is validated in the folds by real nails that fasten the photographs to the wall.
In other cases black adhesive tape plays this role, creating a work where photographs, walls and the entire room enter the piece, and the viewer enters it as well, willingly captured inside the work itself.
Likewise, a photographic solid of wood reveals the intention of the image of wood to represent a wooden box.
In some pieces the glass diaphragm, the frame itself in the same material and consistency, continue to narrate what is represented in the photograph. In others, still, transparent cupolas protect photographs of objects sharing the factor of transparency in a seamless continuum.
Then further, and further still. We can trace back through her works, one by one, over time – far from just a few years – and recognize in each this complex, fertile thread of continuity.

With each passage the language becomes more complex; the viewer is drawn into a more intrepid mental exercise, in which multiple levels overlap.
In the recent works – some still in progress as I write – E. S. again comes to grips with the transparency of gigantic windows, as the subject to be represented. Transparency becomes an illimitable factor in her photographs. It allows light to pass or reflects it, revealing what lies beyond itself and the reflection. To all this, E. S. adds the becoming of the image itself in time, with the changes of lighting conditions. To make the whole even more fluid, she inserts the variation of the materials that support the image, printing the photographs on silken fabric, thus including reflections, forms and movement, thanks to their unstable consistency and uncontrollable, precarious planarity.
Similarly, E. S. prints photographs of marble statues on marble, stained glass on glass, lustrous forms on gleaming metal plates. In every moment, she seems to be telling the viewer, "Be careful! The distinction between the real and its representation is transient, the boundary is fluid."
A museum, Rivoli, acquires an asset outside the Castle, Villa Cerruti, and E. S. resolves the limit of the elsewhere, inserting two photographs in two doors in a room of the museum. These two photographs seem to furtively slip into the villa, prompting visitors to envision a pathway that will be taken a bit further on.
Obviously nothing prevents the observer from associating stories and meanings with the works. They are not the stories of E. S., but the stories induced by her. The way the works often appear familiar to our memories is part of an extraordinarily hypnotic and slightly disquieting exercise. They are thoughts, almost machines producing collective recollection, capable of triggering nostalgia for lives not lived. This is due to the painstaking care with which E. S. constructs her photographs. They represent what we see, not what we think, and not even what they are. It is like observing the paintings of the Lascaux caves, immediately recognizable images in which the distinction between what is and what is represented becomes negligible. A vertigo that involves both the artist and the viewer. As in the paleolithic images that are so surprising for their ability to grasp not reality but what is truly seen with the eyes, made over 15,000 years before the invention of photography, reality and representation coexist and interpenetrate in the works of E. S., appearing as indistinguishable moments of a virtual dimension that becomes real. The pieces seem to underline the fact that we have to be permeated by thoughts that come from very remote pasts in order to project ourselves into thoughts that probe a distant future. As in the past, representation and possession coincide; the virtual is seen not as representation, but as the foreshadowing of appropriation.
"I don't want to deceive you. I show you the limit, the uncertain boundary between what is, what you see in reality, the representation of what I show you and what you see in the representation." This is what the works of E.S. seem to be saying to a world permeated by a culture that is no longer adequate for the comprehension of the present.
The timeliness of the operation lies here. That which exists, itself, can no longer tolerate itself. It changes with the light, the time. After centuries of limitation of movement, of the impossibility and inevitability of almost everything, a time in which light was light, and darkness was darkness. A time in which the here was inexorably present, and the elsewhere unreachably remote. Today, the place where one is becomes a continuous observation, a matter of verification. How many times we wake up, and in half-sleep we think we are somewhere else, attempting to get out of bed only to realize there is a wall blocking our way. Today, when the time of light and darkness, of real and represented, is a time of transit, without neat boundaries. In a world of constant feats of ubiquity, where the lack of awe in the face of miracles is our culture's daily bread, E. S. constructs a grammar of the deeper meaning of representation.
The desire for the other, in all things, is evident in every work by E. S. Surfaces, materials: everything is constantly escaping from what it is.

Her work embodies a desire for innovation, change, an insuppressible yearning for the elsewhere, the new, the other, which is the essential paradigm of human feeling, the sublimated representation of the stimulating impulse that is expressed in the eternal "discontent with the present state of things".
In all this there is no story; it is a "magical" act of recognition of the inexpressible, irrepressible present.
This contradictory complexity of overlaid and at times antithetical meanings is the key to the work's timely character.
The door of a house, in a photography, in a polished brass doorframe, protected by beveled glass that is already in the photograph, is no longer a photograph but a "hyperphotograph" in which representation and reality, content and container coexist to speak of each other, blending into a virtual real or, if you will, a real virtual.
As I said at the outset, my task of displaying while protecting is a strange one.
What is not difficult, though perhaps unusual in my role, is the task and desire to analyze her work with a sense of true engagement. Prompted by E. S., I have thus written this text, which I hope will be of use to engaged, attentive viewers.
Why have I done this? Because I would like to see you in my shoes, forced by my trade to circumscribe, to create a boundary, a limit to her works. To do it without interfering, without adding meaning, without meddling, without constructing narration in a representation that does not wish to narrate. Therefore my first step has been "at least" to reach a perception of the problem.

Elisa Sighicelli's framer
Silvio Zamorani