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NINE YEARS OF FIRSTIMETUDE

Gianluigi Ricuperati

Nine Years, stuck on my eyes
Nine Years, what a surprise

In Bowie's song, Five Years - the same number of letters, the same sound, the masterless hammer beating his tongue on the ear - one imagines a world that is coming to an end, but not immediately, in five years' time. A feeling we know well, we locals of the time map called 2020, anxious agents of a slow-motion apocalypse.

Elisa Sighicelli's work has nothing to do with the tragic urgency of the climate crisis, of course. But it has to do with an intellectual feeling that I could baptize with 'firstimetude' an invented word (Elisa really likes to invent new words, many of her works are entitled neologisms). The quality of what is done for the first time. It is an expression used by the great Trieste publisher Bobi Bazlen, Roberto Calasso's master and secret inspirer of one of the most important cultural enterprises of contemporary times, the Adelphi publishing house. In his editorial letters, flagging books to be translated or not published, Bazlen often revolved around that need to give a prize to artists (in the broadest sense of the word) who bring things into the world that had never been put before, or do something - a technical gesture, a formal gesture, a comma that moves the axis of language forward.

Now: I know well, progress in the arts is anything but linear, and to tell you the truth it is not so linear even in the sciences. But excitement is a need, and novelty commands our nervous system to react with excitement. And often it is in turn commanded by excitement: to discover something, to illuminate a space previously obscured, to try a different way to express the discomfort or the ease of being in the world. It is a form of judgement that we all feel when we face a fresh work, produced in the air of time that we also breathe, an air spoiled by the prejudice of sharing the here and now, without the healthy pause for reflection posed by the years - five years, nine years, twenty years. I cannot deny that one of the things that fascinate, bind, enchant me about Elisa

Sighicelli's work is precisely the persistent *voluntas* (and *voluptas*) of impressing small novelties in the practice of visual language: no one before her had printed photographs of classical statues on the same material in which the same statues are sculpted, no one before her had worked on silk, plastic, backlighting in the precise and unequivocal way - sensuous and mental - that distinguishes many of the works forged in these nine years.

The word admiration, like many other abstract nouns, contains within it the word 'action'. I believe this happens to induce us to never be silent in the face of the things we love, as we watch a production of wonder. My way of not being silent with respect to Elisa Sighicelli's work was to curate this retrospective volume entitled Nine Years, because it was nine prolific years, nine secret years, nine hyper-technical years, nine obsolete years, nine years that deserved to summon the best writers in front of Elisa's work, nine years that screamed to expand the boundaries of discretion and understatement in which this artist lives and works, nine years of trials and counter-evidence, nine years of obsessive embroideries on light, nine years that now go under the lightspot, nine years that now - I correct myself - *come* to light, nine years of agitation, of voluntary segregation, of extraordinary *voluntas*, of astonishing *voluptas*, of beauty asking for more names, of sealing tapes and nailed books, nine classic years, nine electric years: nine years of firstimetude.