

Behind imaginary landscapes

The relationship between Paolo Chiasera and Frank Gehry's architecture for Marta Herford is not new. Back in 2005 with his *Tupac* monument in front of the entrance to the museum, part of the *Tupacproject*, the artist established a close link between the concrete life-size sculpture of the rap hero on a five-meter tall pedestal and the curved, organic forms of the building's exterior. And in 2006 he employed the museum's titanium roof as a sequence of the *The Trilogy: Cornelius*, in which a mask of M.C. Escher could be seen on the edge of the roof, hence relating the complex mathematics of the building to Escher's absurd architectural spaces.

For *Unter freiem Himmel*, his first solo exhibition in a German museum, this time the relationship is expressed in the space inside the galleries. Once again the artist is addressing the themes of monumentality and illusion. Two large installations invade the spaces of the museum, transforming them into two surreal landscapes simultaneously showing and hiding something. One is two-dimensional, the other a large sculpture; both interfere with the museum proportions of the galleries, making the walls an integral part of the installation.

Chiasera's works in this exhibition are based on the concept of concealment. A big forest and a mountain are elements in the landscape that suggest something hidden behind them. A wood is always concealed behind the first rows of trees, creating a space of mystery hidden by secret isolation. And the mountain always marks the horizon.

The scale of *Unter freiem Himmel – Berg* is related to Gehry's soft curved architecture. The monumental installation of the mountain creates a direct relationship with the white soft forms of the walls and ceilings. The oversized structure seems to be too big to be hosted in the galleries and communicates the feeling of gigantism. The abstraction of the painted mountain incorporates the structure of the walls, changing them into a bright cloudy sky. The architecture evaporates and reveals the potential of Gehry's intention to find an alternative to the white cube typology of exhibition space. Gehry's space is indeed a metaphor of the lightness of art, transforming a wall into open air.

Chiasera's piece contains a reference to the complex process in art history of depicting mountains as forms. In the landscape genre, it took many centuries before the right dimensions were found. The cave/mountain became a central element in the landscape in the early fourteenth century. The symbolic dimension of the mountain was synthesized in a large cliff that works as a fractal. The same forms of a stone are visible in the mountain. The cliff is a measure between the rock and the mountain. Chiasera is interested in this synthesis of the landscape element: the rock-mountain depicted in early Renaissance paintings. The environmental experience spotlighted by Chiasera is that recreation of the pictorial representation of the mountain on a three-dimensional scale. Hence the mountain is not a depiction of a mountain but instead a depiction of a depiction of a mountain. It is an attempt to analyze the tautological condition of the landscape as both experience and the depiction of this experience.

The landscape in the paintings of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a tool to create additional space. It stemmed from attempts to structure a deeper perspective inside the image and to represent the space between the viewer and the horizon. In Chiasera we see how he tries to negate this space with the landscape. The landscape is used as a moment hiding something, the illusion being revealed by the artistic creation. The mountain is painted; the trees are just shadows. The elements have lost their physical realism to become an artificial image.

A row of trees limits the horizon. Shadows of different trees are revealed in this barrier. *Unter freiem Himmel – Wald* is the second large installation offering a counterpart to the landscape. On the trunks of the big silhouette are hanging the gouaches from *The Trilogy: Vincent, Cornelius, Pieter*, a body of works of videos and gouaches representing the figure of the artist in his landscape that Chiasera made in recent years. The three artists Vincent van Gogh, M.C. Escher and Pieter Brueghel are depicted inside specific landscapes that are a metaphor of their own work. The enigmatic elements in their artistic practice are synthesized by the undiscovered forest and the mystical mountain.

Lorenzo Benedetti