

## The main beam and Chiara Banfi's rabbit

“The real sunset is imponderable and transitory. The sunset of your dreams is fixed and eternal”

*Livro do desassossego* [The Book of restlessness], Fernando Pessoa<sup>1</sup>

When Chiara Banfi showed me her exhibition project for the Galeria Vermelho, I raised a thousand issues – as I usually do – but I was especially skeptical with her wish to make the main beam of the mezzanine “descend and spin” (in the mental, not physical sense, of course) and “embrace the place with the drawing”.<sup>2</sup> I’ve known that exhibition space since it still was three joint houses. After the remodeling, the mainstay of the building consists of five crossbeams scissoring away from the main beam, forming the roof’s framework. From a bottom-up perspective, this trellis obstructs the overlying effect of the main beam. I let my questions keep some tension in the air.

How to write a critique along with the artistic creation, i.e., based on a still invisible object on the order of the ideas, which would not be the cold description of a result visible to any observer once it was ready? The critic’s task requires comments (a less evident requirement than it seems), and then what? Yet the search of interpretation demands, in the case of contemporary art, the knowledge of a fumbling walk in the dark. We will arrive somewhat together, Chiara at the gallery and I at the printer’s, blind to each other. Not so blind, however.

Like few artists of her generation, Chiara Banfi has built her own repertoire, characterized by a spontaneous line, which dilates into cellular elements; free in space, they would be blessed conversations with Calder’s mobiles. To be recognizable for a formal unity is a double-edged sword: while it represents an achievement, it can signal a shyness to experiment a feat outside of the assured territory. Not content in having an unmistakable stroke, Chiara lets herself be guided by curiosity, which has given her the transition from a wall painting to an environmental occupation.

Chiara’s drawing unfolded after a trip to the Amazon, from the contact with the traces of Toltec civilization and from her bond with the phenomena of nature, the rational field being activated by the spiritual<sup>3</sup>. There is a “magical” dimension - always present in Chiara’s statements - whose transcendental character reminds me of Kandinski’s freedom with balance, his painting integrated to musicality

Her apotheosis took place last year in Brasília, with “Várias marés” [Many tides], her first individual exhibition. Waters and clouds penetrated and came out of eight shades of gray. It can even be said that Chiara’s slow metamorphosis came from a surrealist wave

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000 (p. 487).

<sup>2</sup> Statements of the artist on one of our meetings.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that the Galeria Vermelho showed, at the same time as Chiara’s exhibition, photographer Claudia Andujar’s first-time installation on the house proper. Claudia is known for her work with Brazilian Indians.

foretelling a latent surrealism, but found stability in a kind of abstraction, in which the third dimension corresponds to an ideal plane to be cautiously subdued. The material world, reality as it presents itself, does not seem to seduce this artist.

Yesterday, when I arrived at the gallery, the beam had already been taken down. Just with the strength of the green color. Together with Calder, it was possible to distinguish a tangent toward Leda Catunda's shapes (drops, tongues, bellies). The trimmed wood structures showed the outline of extracted "fullness", each one maintaining its autonomy. The glued vinyl drawing was not there yet, awaiting the end of the dust-raising sanding and polishing phase; nor was the sound track of the "minima" band, which would give the impression of constant rain outside. As to the mezzanine, I suddenly saw it reduced to a rudimentary shoulder pad. Besides the main beam, a liquid beam, spilled or drunk, overflows from the walls to the floor. The beam is down and there is a beam which almost rises, inflated by the drawing. This very beam, stretched on the floor, gets in the way. This obstacle-beam will certainly trip the inattentive, and a sharpening of the senses will come, I believe, from this inattention. The environment can influence traffic: the public will "avoid" the passage through a virtual wall raised with the simple drop down of a girder, now dividing space...

The role of art, for Chiara, is still close to the moment in which the sun shines on the leaves and has the power to take the visitor to another place. Just like Alice's rabbit....

**Lisette Lagnado**, January/2005

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