

Io di te non mi stanco

Ruth Beraha

"Io di te non mi stanco (I don't get tired of you)" is the first solo exhibition by Ruth Beraha (1986, Milan) in the spaces of Ncontemporary in Milan, a new chapter in a broader research by the artist who investigates iconoclasm and the rejection of the image through narrative processes of fiction.

The show presents *Visionarie* (2021), a cycle of eye-shaped sculptures made of hand-painted ceramic, together with a sound installation entitled *Mia cara* (2021). The reflection on iconoclastic logics concentrates and narrows, focusing on the minimal grammar of the vision process. The eyeballs, deprived of the bodies of their subjects, dominate the walls of the space. They are simple organs of the visual apparatus, but the function they evoke is not only expressed in the exercise of sight. Rather, the eyes trigger a dynamic of interaction with the spectator: we could say that they are the ones who look at the audience and with this action make them images. The *Visionarie* are in fact vehicles of the gaze, as understood in the field of cultural studies and cinema. They are devices for the production of subjectivity and establish a relationship of power between the looking subject and the object being looked at.

In the text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), focused on the Hollywood industry of the 1940s and 1950s, the film theorist and feminist Laura Mulvey introduces the notion of male gaze. Male gaze is described as a system of power that relegates female figures to the passive role of image and object of pleasure to be observed. The actresses projected on the big screen are fetishized and sexualized by the camera and the other actors, subjected to a representation that reinforces the patriarchal dynamics of society. The male gaze then produces a female identity, with which all spectators are called to identify themselves.

The *Visionarie* seem to trigger the violent dynamic described in Mulvey's theory, further expanded by other studios over the years beyond the gender binary, through consideration of the cultural and social categories of class, race, disability and sexual orientation. But the eyes on display do not have an obvious subject, and indeed, perhaps contradictorily, allude in the title to the homonymous collection of feminist science fiction stories edited by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, but also to Wolfram Eilenberger's recent publication dedicated to Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Ayn Rand and Simone Weil. The eyes, deprived of their cultural body, are reduced to the minimum denominator of a relationship of challenge and power, between spectator and image.

In the project room *Mia cara* (2021), a spatialized audio work, feverishly repeats phrases of subtraction from the gaze: “stop looking at me”, “I don't want to see you anymore”. Two voices chase each other and converge, cross the room claiming a space between opacity and invisibility. The litany repeats itself, accelerates and slows down, invokes the refusal to be made an image. In the horizon of the iconoclastic narrative explored by Beraha there is here a choir with a covered face, which looks or hides. A collectivity of voices alone perhaps claims the autonomous production of its own identity, in a perpetual dance between visualization and oblivion.

The act of looking or defending oneself from the gaze in "I don't get tired of you" then implies a dense and invisible network of power relations. The spectator-image of the exhibition are not called only to look, but to look at something from which they are looked at, to counter-look. The comparison and the visual conflict of the counter-gaze thus make it possible to accept or reject one's assimilation into an image, and to question oneself about the negotiation of the terms that produce the zero degree of the construction of a subject.

Bernardo Follini