

**THE "USELESS LUMP" OF  
IMAGINARY PERFECTIONS**

Francesca Cadel, 2012

*Elisabetta Di Maggio, Dis-nascere*

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When I think of the incredible variety of figures expressed by the art of Elisabetta Di Maggio, the delicate presence of her persistent and silent gesturing, using perishable materials, linked to casual encounters – the whitening spinal column of a mouse, found while walking in a Mediterranean summer – or in search of an inner aesthetic, enamourments of the mind – for a gigantic lotus leaf, picked one morning in the oldest botanical gardens in the world – a passage from Galileo's "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems comes to mind, in which Sagredo has the task of praising imperfection and change, a characteristic of natural bodies and the earth:

"SAGREDO — I cannot without great astonishment – I might say without great insult to my intelligence – hear it attributed as a prime perfection and nobility of the natural and integral bodies of the universe that they are invariant, immutable, inalterable, etc., while on the other hand it is called a great imperfection to be alterable, generable, mutable, etc. For my part I consider the earth very noble and admirable precisely because of the diverse alterations, changes, generations, etc. that occur in it incessantly. If, not being subject to any changes, it were a vast desert of sand or a mountain of jasper, or if at the time of the flood the waters which covered it had frozen, and it had remained an enormous globe of ice where nothing was ever born or ever altered or changed, I should deem it a useless lump in the universe, devoid of activity and, in a word, superfluous and essentially nonexistent. This is exactly the difference between a living animal and a dead one; and I say the same of the moon, of Jupiter, and of all other world globes."

That “useless lump” of imaginary perfections, without births or alterations, does not belong to the dis-born sequences inaugurated incessantly by Di Maggio, leaving the natural elements the space they cross knowingly over time – mould on walls – edible signs of a constantly evolving presence, very slow meditations of patient repetitions which, like in a Tantra, accept and welcome/gather the modulations of existing in relation to a living universe in a constant state of metamorphosis. The making and undoing of life/death, the movement deriving from the acceptance of change, the liberation from the sequence of narrative, as the artist explains:

“I see this exhibition as a sequence in which ‘dis-doing’ somehow recounts itself. Undoing isn’t cancelling, destroying or dying, but rather opening up paths like thin threads that come together forming different thoughts [...].

It is being dis-born, uprooted, undressing, undoing, withdrawing from life and holding yourself on the dividing line between life and death, like when you hold your breath, and then being reborn in other, entirely new forms. It is movement, circulation, starting”.

In this sense the map and synapse concept of connection between parts becomes a central concept in an aesthetic research that has at its core the fecundity of the world; systems which, in their transience and fleetingness produce energies and miracles, such as the exact trajectories of a butterfly’s wings in their four movements and the power of the flight – as in the Monarch butterfly in its journey from Canada to Mexico – reproduced on the tips of pins:

“Maps of territories, trajectories of insects, pins, thorns... leaves with cuts that accentuate the skeleton of their complex structure and lead back again to the weavings or connections of the mind, like the synapses of thought or underground railway systems, physical and virtual places where we spend our everyday life. Wafer-thin, transparent sheets of paper that tell of the slenderness and precariousness of the links, how hard it is to keep our balance and the risk of breaking that we run every day” (Elisabetta Di Maggio).

Although there certainly is a decorative element in the installations of Di Maggio, a lightness linked to the materials used and the symbolic universes of reference – the embroidery of time and the spinning of the Parcae – what fascinates me most is their philosophical depth, their finely subversive value. In a country given over to the superfluous, run through with clamorous bangs and useless doings and doers, the last twenty years of research of this extraordinary artist have been given over to the silence of the mystery of bodies; to their elegance. Working and silently resisting amidst the crowd of sometimes deafening details that run through reality, accepted without wasting any more time, with courage and iron discipline.

This is the paradoxical element that builds a precise pattern of resistance in the production of Elisabetta Di Maggio – an eccentric gesture that becomes ethical and political, precisely because it goes beyond a centre and a capital idea, an idea of history. There is neither *Res Gestae* nor *Historia Rerum Gestarum* in these extremely fragile and yet tenacious sequences which – point by point, cut by cut – run through our recent years; each person, living and dead, finds his or her peace in these markings, and his or her shelter from the many hurts of the all-engulfing arrogance of all possible acts of violence, as in the great Italian poetic tradition:

‘Regnum coelorum’ suffereth violence

From fervent love, and from that living hope

That overcometh the Divine volition;

Not in the guise that man oercometh man,

But conquers it because it will be conquered,

And conquered conquers by benignity.

(Dante, *Paradiso*, XX, 94-99)

Visual art, music and poetry take paths perhaps as yet closed to science; goodness exists, and it is beauty, presence and patience of desires. The work of Elisabetta Di Maggio runs through an aesthetic and philosophical tension that may be referable to the (great) wisdom of women, but which also takes the form of refraction, echo, rainbow, alterations of most traditional elements of genre, post-genre, trans-genre – for continuously being unborn.

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