

Paola de Pietri

Exhibition from 4 September to 4 October 2003

Opening Friday 12 September from 6:00 to 9:30pm

After Paola de Pietri's first French appearances in group shows where she got a good visibility - such as *Cosa Mentale, Paysage (s)*¹ and *Le nouveau Paysage italien –new Italian landscape-* at the Electra Foundation in 2000- she will make her first personal show in France at the *Les filles du calvaire gallery* with a work already shown in *Spazio Aperto* and Modern Art Gallery of Bologna². At the same time, she will also present at the *Jacques Coeur Palace of Bourges*³ the work she made for *Image au centre's* commission this year.

Born in 1960 in Reggio Emilia, Paola de Pietri stands as a major Italian photographer. Beyond showing in Venice Biennale⁴ in 2001 and Tuscia Electra⁵, she won international recognition in 2000 through two different works commissioned by the photographic mission *Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea* from Reggio Emilia's land, for which she was chosen with Walter Niedermayr, Luis Baltz... Those missions did follow the policy of the *European Convention for Landscape*, which initiated 6 photographic missions as did the *Datar* in France⁶.

Paola de Pietri was certainly selected for the purity of her compositions, far from bucolic description they fit with the wish of the European Convention for Landscape of "creating new representations of the territory to catch a unique phase of its evolution"⁷, because landscape is not thought as an objective real but as a consequence of a particular cultural environment. In Paola de Pietri's case, the images all present specific characteristics repeated throughout the various bodies of work.

First the expressions of time in her series made in 2000 supposed geographic position and time appear on parts of ordinary landscape (grass, path, pound...) in the form of numbers. This fake specificity pinpoints the question of intemporal landscape dialectic. *Dittici*, series made in 1998⁸, show the spatial movement of characters, the two pictures being shots then in a very short time space in slightly different positions. Nathalie Leleu speaks of "echo's rooms between locations and people crossing them"⁹. Then, the choice of the location – Italian Renaissance cities- enhances the beauty of the images as well as the frame shots when in parallel the ascetic aesthetic of the images is reinforced by the almost white light purity.

This plasticity flourishes in the work shown at the Gallery. She seems to have thought it as an ode to Nature, ever and everywhere, wandering among seasons and elements, which through extreme simplicity turn out to present extraordinary physical and chemical properties: The immensity of skies orchestrated by mass of birds echoes big images of trees blown by

¹ *Landscape as Babel*, curate by Nathalie Leleu, Les filles du calvaire Gallery, Paris, May 31st – 12 July, Brussels, 20th Sept. – 27th Oct. 2001, et *Decomposition Précis*, curate by Emmanuel Hermange : Pasquart Center, in The photographic days, Bienne, Switzerland, Sept. 2001, Rham Chapel, French Cultural Institute, Luxemburg, Nov. – Dec. 2001, *The Landscape is a method*, Chamarande Domain, April – May 2002.

² *Spazio Aperto*, Bologna Modern Art Gallery, Villa delle Rose, Bologna, Italy, 5 April – 20 mai 2001, Cf.exhibit. cat.. *Spazio Aperto*, Ed. Pendragon, 2001

³ *Images au Centre*, commission and exhibition from 19 September to 23 November 2003.

⁴ Venezia-Marghera, curate by Paolo Costantini, Venice Biennale, 15 June - 12 October 1997

⁵ 2003.

⁶ *Datar*, photographic mission of the Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'Action régionale which commissioned 28 french and foreign photographers from 1982 to 1989.

⁷ Bernard Latarjet and François Hers, « L'expérience du paysage », in *Paysages, photographies : En France, les années quatre-vingt*, Paris, Hazan, 1989, quote of Emmanuel Hermange, « Linea di Confine, Une mission photographique pour étendre les territoires du paysage », in *pour « Voir » les photographies* n°6, nov. 2000, p.49.

⁸ Cf. *Paola de Pietri, dittici*, Ed. Art&, Musei Civici Reggio Emilia et Biblioteca Panizzi, 1998.

⁹ Nathalie Leleu, 2001.

the wind. Paola de Pietri shows optical natural phenomena's by the precise and elementary shots of small details like foggy sights, frozen leaves adrift melting snow on lava – the show resulting in “natural” monochromes.

Through this tasty ambiguity Paola de Pietri offers her specific vision or rather a different appearance of earth and territory. This series is conceptually oriented towards the abolition of time as a continuity, which is often found in Paola de Pietri's work. The space /time relation here is abolished as well as in *Via Emilia* and *Luoghi e non luoghi*: macrograph of pieces of landscape taken from a montgolfiere. The artist shows a completely separate universe impossible to recognize liberated from any reference, a pure relation ship between site and its photographic representation.

In parallel Paola de Pietri use human figures as archetypes: she just made systematic photographs of travellers in an airport: they are all the same, standing in front of the same grey wall, facing the camera. They look like a typology of humanity. However, she introduces duality in her work through supposed genealogic precisions about the characters – as in *Via Emilia* – whether it is real or invented filiation does not matter to the viewer. It is more linked to an identification mode to the character that carries his origins, as a piece of land within a located and dated space: the one of his place of birth and death to come.

In the work she just realised as an order for Image au Centre, *Here Again*, Paola de Pietri goes on with her quest putting the stress on the transmission of culture between two generations. She chose to make portraits of women and their newborn babes side to side with their familiar landscapes. She reverses time in the project: “I want to freeze the relationship mother / child as a piece of the time dimension towards past, understood as an example of biological experience transmission and cultural between two consecutive generations.”¹⁰

Of course the quotation of Renaissance is too obvious not to be mentioned, especially as Paola de Pietri is Italian. It is also impossible to forget that this image of motherhood is remade by a woman, through women of her age. Added to this is a recent set of videos where each individual whispers in front of a landscape he has selected before vanishing. On top of that, each of them is born the same day as the artist. All that leads to a self-critical dialogue.

The conceptual aspect of the work embodied with the creation itself, making useless any effort to make more radical the concept itself.

¹⁰ Paola De Pietri, 2003