

An ancient Greek philosopher known as "the dark one" used to tell his compatriots that everything is changed and transformed in the unstoppable and contradictory evolution of time; he stated this by saying that "the war is the father of all things". A couple of thousand years later it proves difficult to disagree with this way of seeing reality, when present times are defined by absolute mobility and are scanned by shattering technological, social and cultural changes. And we, immersed in their stream, cannot avoid feeling a certain disquiet. What levers will we be able to grasp? Another philosopher, who lost that other war we all wage against ourselves, has suggested we look into the spoils of history, into its ruins. Look into history in order to rescue its dreams and utopias. The possibility of rescue is proposed by uniting the fragments of the historic site, not to restore the origin of the past - as if it were a repaired fossil - but to reinvent it like a mosaic that can be used as a pavement of the present ground, on which to prefigure a future path.

In this frame of mind we slip into the photographs of María Bleda and José María Rosa, with the hope of foretelling some form of rescue before finding an answer. This is indicated by their strategy - a blend of parody, melancholic exercise and perhaps even of a future dream.

On the battlefields

The photographs of the battlefields of María Bleda and Jose María Rosa are images produced in the style of documentary photographs, with a neutral, transparent use of the photographic medium in the service of a direct representation of reality. Their photographic technique is inspired, in fact, in the documentary approach of the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher. The point of departure of this approach is the exclusive choice of an objective element of reality, which will be photographically recorded in the vague plurality of its casuistry. While the German artists have always dealt with some sort of industrial construction, such as their well-known water towers, María Bleda and José María Rosa have developed this approach in the football goals of their previous work, and now in the battlefields. In both cases, each photographic record is always produced following constant formal indications referring to the choice of frame - which excludes all elements foreign to the object of interest - and to the establishment of one single point of view for the taking of all the photographs, which is always slightly below the horizon. As to the rest, each image is conceived not as a separate individual element, but as an integral part of a photographic series, in relation to which it should be considered.

The adoption of this photographic form in the work of María Bleda and José María Rosa presents a clearly linguistic character, for it is used as a code to indicate the objective condition of the battle field, in other words, it awards the image the function of a historical document. This function, which could initially seem to express a historiographic interest, is in fact subordinated to a parodic purpose. Indeed, in complicity with the documentary resort, what truly identifies the location recorded by the camera as a battle field, instead of a merely picturesque landscape, is the informative text placed under the photographic image. This text, which dates and locates the martial event, does not serve the purpose of a photograph caption, but forms an integral part of

the work, as if it were an archaeological inscription. Thus, the way in which these photographs remind us of the discursive dominion of history is through parody.

These photographs are, in fact, impossible documents of a remote time, of a space devoid of all remains of the battle; for this reason, their intention is not to go back in time in order to establish continuity with our present moment. Neither is it their objective to present a static image of time, a sort of eternity of history. On the contrary, in these spaces photographed as battle fields what remains is a dispersal of accidents and transformations - of wounds healed in fields of crops or wild mountains - which have completely altered their meaning as a historic topology.

Even when the photographs reflect historic remains, the attitude of our two artists is not one of archaeological recognition; assuming a certain gesture of incredulity, they transform the ruins into another accident of the landscape.

Denouncing through photography the lost condition of these battlefields, evincing their already passive reality transformed into a ghost of the past, confers them a certain melancholic intensity. As had previously occurred in the series on the ramshackle football goals, the battle field becomes a melancholic sign, the sign of an otherness disposed not towards nostalgia of the past but towards a personal and intimate experience of that past. The historical cartography marked by the project of María Bleda and José María Rosa acquires a subjective meaning. The physical encounter with the battle fields is interpreted as the experience of a discovery, the emotion before the revelation a myriad of nuances and secrets. A revelation which in the last analysis - just as that proposed by the photographic oeuvre of the *stroller* Hamish Fulton - also affects the artists themselves.

Considered the historical scene of combat, the battle field is represented as a deserted landscape. From the closed field where the battle took place, from the area in which the contenders stood face to face, we are led to a pure absence, to a scene devoid of the noise of weapons and bodies.

In these photographs the battle fields produce a sense of emptiness, becoming a sort of "non-place", as if they were all one and the same hollow place. A spatial identity whose meaning would serve to shape the unitary condition of historic time. In this way, the battlefield - as the representation of the Time of History - would express that unique ambit in which the diversity of chronological events intertwine, an ambit that is tacitly referred by means of the warlike episodes.

All battles are fights between rage and pain, force and humiliation, with an unavoidable result: victory or defeat. Thus their logic - which is not linear but dialectical - is visualised in the present works thanks to the structuring of the photographic survey, divided in two halves which are separated by a blank space. The insertion of the aforementioned space is not an act of suppression but an open breach, splitting the photographic image of the battle field into a sort

of *no-man's-land*. The image asserts itself as a metaphor of the fragmented continuity of historic time, and simultaneously, of the endless struggle between the dominators and the dominated that inevitably criss-crosses history.

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