

Ronit Dovrat, May the 12th. The creative breath of a life.

Ronit's life is strongly marked by a creative tension that revealed itself with surprising vitality and fruitfulness both in the civil and politic commitment and in the artistic research. Her production has been documented from 1978, the year of her first exhibitions in Tel Aviv, to 2011, the year of her death.

During this time, no less than fifteen personal exhibitions were held, five of which were held in Tel Aviv, one in Paris, nine in Italy and about thirty participations in group exhibitions.

It is a surprising outcome, considering that Ronit Dovrat was moved by the passion for the aesthetical research, joy and communicative game, remaining consistent with her word of values and never yielding to the logics governing the art market.

The quantity and quality of the works she produced is such that it would take a time for viewing and studying much longer than we have for organizing an event that goes over the tracks of her life, as if we wish to still keep her creative breath, tension and human warmth. Thus, postponing the thorough analyses of Ronit Dovrat's works to other times and places, we now only provide a few indications and suggestions that are supported by the important statements Ronit herself gave me on the occasion of the "La Realtà Esplosa" exhibition (Massa 2003).

The current exhibition of about seventy works, is the outcome of a broad selection that aims at showing the originality of an intense and laborious research, as it can be appreciated from the continuous exploration of the expressive potentialities of different materials and the experimental mixture of different techniques and languages, often acted in the almost obsessive repetition of some subjects and themes, that are recognizable even in the absence of a descriptive figurativeness of the reality.

These elements are further confirmed by leafing through the album that collects another ninety works by the artist.

The exhibition focuses on a thematic rather than chronological order in a strict sense, as Ronit Dovrat herself wanted.

What really matters is the inner time, the "state of mind", the urgency of finding her own expression sign and its consequent aesthetical translation.

(For convenience, except for some single dates, the reference periods are indicated. The rare titles of single works or series are maintained, as they are given by the artist – among which the Untitled Works).

Strongly tied to the reality, her work excludes the simple mirroring to the reality, it seeks its meaning and vital essence, with emotion and thought, together. "*I'm not interested in reproducing what is visible, because I think that reality is already per se strong. I'm not concerned, for instance, about drawing a landscape, as the landscape is so beautiful that there is no need for me to transform it. I work on the invisible*", Ronit states. She looks into the invisible for making it pictorially visible. In fact, Ronit's works never show a physical description, for instance, of neither the tragedy of her people's historical Diaspora and the shoa, nor the violence, tortures and the slaughters perpetrated by the Israelis against the Palestinian civil population that Ronit, as a pacifist Israeli woman, has always bravely denounced.

Yet, the works arisen from these facts make us perceive, almost physically, the horror, the shouting, the tragedy: they give us shudders, shake us out of the quiet of the inurement, they look into our thought. Ronit achieved this strongly involving aesthetical result not through an immediate reaction to the reality, but through an elaboration of emotion and thought: this is the process of her artistic creation. "I have to elaborate. *What does a massacre mean? Not only a physical thing. Even everyday tortures, oppressions are a massacre. Let's only think about*

the shocks experienced by all the Palestinian children and the many consequences this Israeli oppression and criminality create on the everyday life. For all this, I feel that something inside me is stained. It is even difficult to wake up in the morning and ask "how are you?" without smiling at the answer. You say "I'm well", but this is not true, you cannot be well. Unfortunately, there are people who can be well even in this situation."

We are thus in front of a non retinal painting, a painting that is not only intended to the eye. It is a painting that gives emotional and critical reactions, urges questions and discussions, gives rise to interpretations aiming at 'discovering' roots and meanings beyond what can be seen, in several directions: in a psychological, ethical, aesthetical, cultural and historical direction. In the relationship which is established between the artist, or better, her works and the audience, any interpretation can be legitimate. Being aware of that, we can put ourselves in front of Dovrat's works, looking into them starting from ourselves and, if we want, comparing ourselves to some of the rare answers-statements given by Dovrat herself.

An example among others. In many works it is possible to notice, in particular, the presence of the face, the stressing on the eye and the mouth, both relational tools *par excellence*. However, it is not the word what the mouth expresses, at least in a series of works, but a stream, made almost inactive, bound, because the chromatic material is usually very compact, very thick, and even when it is the drawing, only, that traces the figure, a stripe of a warm and very thick colour, that seems to indicate a strong need for communicating and transmitting, which comes out from the lips.

And, again, the stressing on the eye that often appears as if it was taken out of the face could be perceived as an invitation to look at, to have the courage to look at and to be aware of what is happening around us. Let's

read what Dovrat herself says about the great faces of the two series of *Frontiere mentali (Mental Borders)* (1) and *Testimonianze (Witnesses)* (2): *"I can say that the eye is perhaps what more attracts me in the face. The eye has its own language. We know that we can't speak, but we can understand each other through what the eye transmits. On the contrary, the mouth does not attract me very much as a shape and I even nullify its verbal part. What I'm seeking for is exactly the primary thing, which is the shout, this medium that existed before the word."*

What are the methods and devices used in her creative process the invisible to be pictorially visible?

Here, it is only possible to suggest some observations, questions and some explanatory hypothesis.

Most of Dovrat's works recall moods of sadness, anger and indignation that Israel politics provokes in her. Starting from this premise, those parts –heads, arms, hands - which are taken off the bodies, may be interpreted as the signs-effects of a reiterated annihilation and destruction work of the individual being; heads, arms, hands are reproduced, exaggerated or dwarfed without any concern for the aesthetical measure, as motionless figures gravitating in spaces widened by a rarefied white with an obscure substance, in the 'negative/positive' pictorial game. But they may be also interpreted as the signs of a threatened, denied and lost identity. The theme of identity goes through the Dovrat's works in an individual dimension that seems to take its strength from the relationship with other identities, to become collective: arms stretched until they are reduced in filaments in the quest for the vital contact with other arms, creating a movement, like a dance, a ring, a ring of roses ... And we find here another strong theme, that is the individual's social dimension, which is a fundamental value in the human life, like it was for Ronit. This theme can be found combined with the 'maternity' or 'rebirth' , as well as in that of the 'couple' or 'home' as

shapes and places of a relational living and doing in the individual microcosm. In the house, the table chosen as an almost dominant element, has a particular meaning: it is the symbol of the object around which affections and elective conversations are gathered; the table is a convivial place par excellence. But the table stretches and becomes a bed, the place where the "two people", carried away by the love attraction, twist each other and become "one person". The many moods, feelings and values that can be seen in Dovrat's works are really surprising; they are an expression of a vital experience that is shown in various ways: her eagerness for freedom and justice, her curiosity about knowledge, her need to create affections and friendship nets, cultural exchanges, sharing joys and sorrows, projects and creativity.

The pictorial modes are various and often coexist in the same work: the chromatic drawing is wide and warm, sometimes in an almost plastic, but also thin and light relief, and sometimes it is a simple veil that give rise to human figures which are sketched out by thin lines or scratched, almost body traces or essences; the use of "mixed techniques" – oil, acrylics, graphite, pastels – matches with the use of different support materials – paper, photographic paper, canvas, plywood, aluminium.

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Rita Scrimieri

Some of ***Ronit Dovrat's*** most important declarations are the following extracts from "Conversazione con Rita Scrimieri" (2003)

1) Series *Frontiere mentali* (1a e 2a)

"Before many of my pictures, you cannot say that a face is a face. Well, you can see that it's a face, but it is not realistic. There can hardly be a figure such that you can say: "this is really this". The art work is always for me: "there is and there is not", "it is this, but it is not this", "it is an animal, but it is not really an animal". There is a truck inside the image,

that carries everything beyond the appearance and represents the soul of the thing, more than the thing itself.(...) Let's start from what made me express myself in the first series of *Frontiere mentali*. I made them precisely during this second intifada (broken out in 2000): the connection, continuity element with the previous period is the feeling that people is in prison, left out of their lives, and not only physically. And I did not have this feeling on a people other than these. From then, I wake up every morning with a weight... I felt that while creating these borders to the Palestinians, they created the border to me, as well, they limited my life, my spaces, I cannot wake up calm, because I feel this weight and as long as there is a closure on other people, there is a closure on me. And this is not just a physical closure, it is a closure that oppresses lifes. In *Frontiere mentali* I played a bit on this. (...) But the face is disproportionate because it is very great, magnified, and the body has no more reason to exist, it is nullified and drawn as the children draw. (...) The drawing is childish even because when you are closed like that, what are the things you want? To see the light, to have food, what is necessary for survival. (...) In any case, the figures have different lives: the face is a separated world and the body does not exist. There are also the eyes, but there are no pupils. However, you have the feeling that the face is looking at you: you think to cancel it, but it is very much alive. (...). They do not see that there is a person. There is nothing more here, because the person is no longer seen, his or her identity is cancelled to the eye, it is as if it were invisible. Instead, this exaggeratedly large face in a small place seems to say "I exist, inspite of everything".

(...) (In the second series di "*Frontiere mentali*") Birds joined the faces and the format is larger and rectangular. Birds around the faces, I don't know... On the other hand I have associated them with madness. I had this idea: usually the bird gives the idea of the flight, it represents

freedom, here, instead, it nearly pecks the head. It is something about the lack of freedom and the torment. Moreover, these birds don't have wings, they, too, are prisoners. The birds – three, four, five – symbolically represent what is happening inside the face, inside the person: they are like a torture that acts from inside and leads to madness."

2) Series *Testimonianze*

"The series *Testimonianze* arise from the witnesses given by the Palestinians on what it is happening to them in the occupied territories and published by the B'TSELEM magazine, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Each picture is like a diary page or a piece of paper that someone has found for writing his or her witnesses. I report it in Hebrew. (...) I'm not a means because, as I write in first person – the witness speaks itself – this witness becomes my witness. Then I added a figure that is not an illustration, but something that has to do with the text which, however, is not descriptive. It is difficult, psychologically, to resist inside because, indeed, you feel as if this had happened to you and witnesses are very harsh. The very cold, analytical mode of the report corresponds to B'TSELEM's aim, that is to gather the detailed witness of what happened, minute after minute. It is so strong ... (...) not a detail is missed (...) This detailed information also concerns what you have heard: "I'm frightened, I shouted..." everything is so strong that no room is left to imagination. Only the room is left to you to gather this information and see what you will do of it. (...) "The star of *David*" has been conceived from the witness). Who tells the fact and becomes "I" is a Palestinian who studies at the Nablus University. (...) I don't tell the whole story in the picture. I started from the passage when the officer (an Israeli at the checkpoint) takes the glass and

engraves his arm. There is nothing stronger for a Jewish than the David's star and, in this case, you cannot but connote it to World War II, I'm sorry ...it is not possible not to think about the Shoah.(...)

We must also remember that the star has, for the Hebrew, an incredible value, it is on our flag, it is the symbol that binds the people, it is the reason why they are there: this slaughter against the Palestinians is perpetrated "in the name of the star".

The text can be read in all the four works, but sometimes I make the colours pass on it so who really wants to read it must approach, and I specifically do that, it is important, it is symbolic. This force you to see, because you can even pass and not know. In this painting, I did a thing that I haven't reproduced in the other paintings of the series

"*Testimonianze*": it is a line I wrote a little bit larger, because it was stronger than me. They are four words: "he engraves the symbol of the star of David". For me "engraves" is a meaningful word: it is for the whole life, not because it will never be cancelled – the doctor told him that, in any case, he needs the laser to erase it – but because it affects our being, our future: who can ever forget this? (...) I don't think to the aesthetical effect, the writing is my own writing, even if I make mistakes I can write on it, I make amendments as if it were my diary. I decide everything – format, sizes, colours –according to the part I want to tell. As to the "*Star of David*" I had immediately an idea of my choice: I just needed colours recognizable as elegant colours, the colours of a party, a honour party. And then, the red-pink in the child's tale ... (painting "*Volatile Children* ").