

Little by little, caused by urban disorder and speculative building construction, the Roman countryside is disappearing; its prestigious landscape and the richness of its ancient ruins has, for centuries, made it a required stop on the Grand Tour for artists, historians, writers and poets who came here to meditate on the brevity of things, the envy of Time and the Variety of Fortune.

Antonio Cederna, *Roma da Salvare*, 1994

As the sky between the wings of birds

A project of contemporary art and a tribute to nature and its places

Works on paper by Elisabet Norseng

In a world overwhelmed by the electronic image and digital technology, those of us who have consumed art like food and water for most of lives have a particular affinity for the creativity of the artist to “mark” territory – and the most beautiful of all territorial mediums is paper.

By “mark” I mean “sign” (in Italian *segno*), which is difficult to translate. It is the ability of the artist to make his trail on the medium, often using a graphic line, often a symbol, often a kind of writing or script, and of course many times resorting to an image.

No one makes a “mark” like the Norwegian painter Elisabet Norseng.

Exceptional was her artist book from 1999 entitled *Aria e Vento*, produced for her exhibition at Salon Privée in Rome. The drawings reproduced elegantly in the publication as well as the original works on paper in the exhibition were of the most complex yet minimal expressions ever seen. They consisted of very small “dots” or “marks” on paper, executed with ink, and producing an almost oriental *aura* of highly complex simplicity. They are also about calligraphy, and a very close approach to nature.

Equally compelling was another exhibition by Norseng in Rome at the same venue. Entitled *Tocchi*, and also accompanied by an artists book, the approach was equally complex and equally linked to nature. But this time, instead of minimal “marks”, the artist chose to dive into the world of nature and color with the execution of dozens and dozens of small pastel drawings on paper, each framed separately but with an environmental construct that made it one complete installation. They seem to be drawn by a child, the outlines are simple, the link with nature absolute. Norseng’s works is never what it appears. Her observations (be it the sky, the night, the flora, the earth) are translated on the medium of paper in a controlled, methodical, yet playful way. With an explosion

of chromatic simplicity. And how difficult is simplicity, few have the courage for it. Most want to overdo, exaggerate, excess.

So after admiring these two projects by Norseng but also following a discovery in Rome of a place that is so magical and so linked to nature -- Capo di Bove -- I wanted to produce a third project in Rome for new works on paper by Elisabet.

But this time she was captivated, as I was, by the place. A place that has seen thousands of years of history, a place that has been dedicated (with enormous difficulty) to nature and the preservation of one of the largest green natural areas in this part of Italy: The Appian Way and the Park of the Caffarella.

Elisabet Norseng begins her project citing Andrea Palladio:

"Beauty will result from the form and the correspondence of the whole, with respect to its individual parts, each with regard to the other, and of these to the whole; that the structure may appear an entire and complete body." (Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, 1570).

The paper "friezes" by Elisabet Norseng make more than fifty, large-size water color drawings. Animals, plants, fountains, water sources and thermal baths are represented in these works, as well as mystical numerical symbols and scenes of magic and myth, which perfectly match the natural theme of Capo di Bove. And the *raison d'être* of this museum is exactly linked to the environment of nature that surrounds it. Its director, the archeologist Rita Paris, is correct in her adherence to this identity. That the artists who have conceived works for Bove must have a priority for interpreting nature and thus sustaining a *vita* aspect of our lives in an urban context that often denies nature.

"Drawing is considered to be visual thought, it is deeply personal, intimate, subtle and often fragile. It is free also to create forms that are not obligated to be definitive or monumental. Drawing permits the artist to live "hidden" in the studio, to work on one's projects, to write or draw one's personal diary. To find a new form, not necessarily explicit and not necessarily explicit and centered in the desired concept. And leaving space for an uncontrolled imagination, space for dreaming, to follow one's own interior path, often obsessive. Drawing is about gathering "signs" that can be enigmatic and mysterious. It is about vulnerability, about uncertainty, about impermanence. "Drawing can be innocent, it is based on the beauty of the immaterial, the sensitivity of the unread. Its suggestive force in a less complicated and desired medium is linked to an internal silence of powerful thought."

These words, borrowed (or stolen) today from an anonymous text on drawing, are certainly true when looking at the interpretations of nature placed on paper by Elisabet Norseng.

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