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Mario Perniola

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Primordial Graffiti

Mario Perniola

The work of Angela Biancofiore can be considered part of a trend typical of some very recent aspects of contemporary art, in which the artist is in search of the elemental foundations of artistic activity. In the case of Biancofiore, the basic principles of her work are the letters of the alphabet that the ancient Greeks called *stoicheia*. This aspect of artistic production is the focus of Augusto Ponzio's book *La scrittura degli elementi* (Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 1988), in which Ponzio points out the relation between graphic signs and natural symbolism.

The primordial signs in Biancofiore's paintings, however, come together in a foundation that is more original and fundamental than its component parts. It is no accident that her most recent work seems characterized by close attention to the background on which the *stoicheia* are drawn. In order to remain within the compass of Ponzio's hermeneutic proposal, which is inspired by Platonic thought, the notion of *chora* takes on the greatest emphasis. Plato, in fact, says in *Timaeus* that there is a more primordial element, that cannot be called earth, fire, water, or any of the things that are born of these or from which these are born. It is something so formless that it takes everything into it and participates as something comprehensible, in a way that is obscure and difficult to understand.

In Greek, *chora* is a space understood as a full container, not as unoccupied space, which is *kenón*, nor as mere place, which is *topos*. *Chora* is the countryside, territory understood in a strategic sense, free space that is ready to receive and to welcome that which turns up: to seize it, to dominate it militarily, to become master of it. The verb *choréo* is to contain, but also to tolerate

and to refer to the capacity of containers, and to the understanding of a lesson, as well.

Biancofiore's "artistic foundationalism" thus moves in a very different and even opposite direction than that intended by philosophy's use of the words *arché*, *foundation*, *Grund*. The point is not to find the basic principles, simple and elementary, from which everything would derive, but just the opposite: to be introduced to a difficult, contradictory, and paradoxical experience, in which the maternal aspect of creation and nutrition is inseparably connected to the warrior characteristic of appropriation and victory.

In the history of the western world there exist two completely different notions of the *beautiful*: the esthetic notion that reconciles opposites in sensible experience, and the strategic notion that maintains these opposites as such in the experience of the logos. *Chora* belongs to the second kind of beauty. As does the work of Biancofiore.

[Translation by Aninne Schneider]