

Francesco Pignatelli, *Translations*

Francesco Pignatelli has taken another step forward in his investigation of the specificity of the language of photography: this is a sudden and unexpected step, especially if we think of the works to which he has accustomed us.

He has now produced a series of works that at first sight seem abstract photographs: their grey patterns on a black ground are, in fact, reminiscent of a certain type of monochrome painting. In reality, each pattern, each relationship between abstract forms, conceals an image — the one that the artist has found on the Internet. We are in the presence, therefore, of digital technology and the source of the work is a world of images from which the artist has extracted some fragments and has displayed its secret structure.

Every pixel — and so every part of the image — is translated by the digital camera into a hexadecimal numerical system, a structure of numbers and letters to which certain colours correspond. Everything visible is thus translated into this system and every image has an alphanumeric structure, which is exactly what Pignatelli reveals. This is a discovery that the artist himself made when processing the images before printing them and he has based his new work on this. The process means that the iconic signs become letters and numbers, the elements of a mysterious writing to which, however, recognizable images correspond. Although, technically speaking, the process is easy to understand, the artist has sought to interpret it poetically and, for this reason, has accentuated its intrinsic element of mystery: entirely black surfaces are scored by white stripes or rectangles composed of a mass of letters and numbers. Each work has a title referring to universal truths, feelings or situations that regard all human beings: life and death, war and peace....

We don't know what images Pignatelli has found on the Internet and how he has associated them with these titles, but, when all is said and done, this doesn't really interest us. Everything has been transformed into sequences of numbers and words: their graphic layout organizes the surfaces in ways that are always different, each of them being allocated to a specific title and content area only as a mnemonic device.

It is this mnemonic device that is used to describe Pignatelli's new series of works: they function as a stimulus for the spectators, who are asked to read into the work whatever they want to see, associating, if they wish, the particular structure of signs with the theme the artist has assigned to it, or else allocating another one to it. No longer mysterious, the text becomes open, thereby completing the process of 'translation' that the artist has undertaken from the Internet to the art gallery and from the detail of the image to the generality of its meaning. This is, moreover, what the history of art teaches us: only pure colour, or, in this case, the radical choice between blacks and whites, only pure geometry regarded as a schema from which every possible form derives, and language used as a simple list of numbers and letters — in other words, only this general zeroing of language of photography — can convey the sense of the universal content matter to which the artist intends to restore topicality.

The use of black and white in the visual language is also a starting-point — or perhaps we should say restarting point. In this exhibition Pignatelli reminds us of this by introducing an element different from the series being presented: an assemblage, placed on the ground, composed solely of two large crumpled sheets of photographic paper, which represent the contraries of black and white, as well as the origin and end of every possible image created with the camera. The paper, which could be described as folded back onto itself, assumes plastic form that seems to produce a mimetic effect, with an explicit reference to sculpture and also to manual skill: this is another aspect that interests Pignatelli and he will certainly show us his capabilities in this respect in the future.

Giorgio Verzotti