



« RUBEDO »

Works by Leonardo Petrucci

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Text by the astrophysicist Gianluca Masi, Virtual Telescope Project, Rome

nm>contemporary is glad to present the exhibition Rubedo by Leonardo Petrucci especially conceived for Monaco Art Week and artmonte-carlo.

Leonardo Petrucci is a young Italian artist belonging to the artistic pole named « Pastificio Cerere » in Rome.

He had a one man show at Baruchello Foundation in Rome in 2016 and will present « Rubedo » in Monaco at the same time as the Baruchello exhibition at Villa Arson in Nice.

This liaison among the roman institution and that of Nice will allow the public of Monaco Art Week and artmonte-carlo 2018 to discover the continuity between a young talent and an important artist such as Gianfranco Baruchello, close to Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Lacan, Pierre Restany and the French New Realists.

The title “Rubedo” recalls the third and last phase of alchemic transmutation.

During this phase, the matter becomes red and gets to the absolute perfection gaining a cosmic purity.

The exhibition is a synthesis of the alchemic process leading the visitor through two rooms.

Black is the dominant color of the first room and represents the Nigredo, the first alchemic phase, which means corruption and imperfection.

The works displayed recall geometrical solids whose symmetry is build and destroyed to evoke the contrast between limits and infinity.

In the second room the viewer experiences the matter’s purification walking in a red light ambience where a series of carpets, hand made by Indian artisans, reproduce faithfully the first images of Mars surface, taken by Rover Curiosity (NASA) in 2012.

The astronomic aspect of the show is a metaphor of the alchemist research of a new dimension, a pioneering action which makes the visitor direct protagonist of the first step on the new planet and a new mystique world.

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Mars, a planet between dream and reality.

When in July 1976, the technological eye of the Viking 1 probe revealed a curious Martian structure, vaguely resembling a human face, it seemed like certain dreams and visions, by then considered obsolete, were returning to the forefront.

Among the most fascinating and illustrious of all the stars, admired for its vermillion reverberations which garnished it the nickname “the Red Planet,” Mars has always had a primary role in the development of scientific thought. It is enough to recall the extraordinary observations of the planet, conducted in the 16th century by the great Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, which proved to be invaluable to his assistant, Johannes Kepler, in formulating the latter’s famous laws of planetary motion which bear his name.

Mars, though, is embedded in universal culture, a timeless emblem of the imagination and dreams on the one hand and progress and science on the other. A synthesis of two side usually taken to be opposites, that contains a sea much vaster than mere astronomical knowledge.

The pinnacle of Mars’s popularity was without a doubt during the second half of the 19th century, when Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli, astronomer and director of the Brera Observatory, reported on unique characteristics he observed in 1877. That year was quite favorable for the study of celestial bodies, arduous in telescopic investigation. Because of its orbital motion, in fact, the distance from Mars to Earth varies between a minimum of 55 million km and a maximum of more than 400 million km. This first distance is met only once around every two years (just before the so-called “opposition,” with the planet visible in the sky from Earth for the whole night, in the direction opposite the Sun):

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far from that circumstance, the modest dimensions of the Red Planet (a diameter of almost 6790 km, just over half of that of our own planet) reduce its visibility to a few pale details, this especially true using the instruments of the past. Not all of the oppositions to Mars, however, are equal. The planet's orbit deviates perceptibly from a perfect circumference, appearing somewhat elliptical (it is noticeably eccentric as was noted by Johannes Kepler, based on Tycho Brahe's observations), given that the minimum Earth-Mars distance varies so greatly. It follows that the angular dimensions of the Mars disc vary, in fact, a factor of two between an ideal and an unfavorable opposition, with the deductible repercussions on the visibility of its ethereal details. The best approaches are called "great oppositions," awaited with the trepidation by the great observers of the past, who hoped to unveil particular Martians never before noticed.

What occurred in 1877 was a great opposition, in which Schiaparelli displayed the incredible Merz refractor with its 21.8 centimeter aperture, which he acquired in 1862. The Italian astronomer collected drawings of the surface of Mars that were rich with new detail. In particular, Schiaparelli individuated structures called "canals," because of their thin, linear appearance, which he sought to study even more than previous oppositions. Schiaparelli introduced the names of Mars's morphological structures used, still today, as the official nomenclature on maps of the planet.

Schiaparelli's observations of the canals of Mars had a notable echo in the United States of America, received with particular fervor by Percival Lowell, who interpreted them (along with others) as artificial structures used for irrigating specific areas of the Red Planet. This likely contributed to the translation of the Italian term "canale" as "canal" rather than the more appropriate "channel," practically emphasizing the artificial nature of the supposed structures.

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Schiaparelli ran away from later oppositions, even those which were less favorable to his own work, and he became one of the foremost experts on Mars. Powerful because of this position, he was able to have an even more powerful refractor telescope installed on the roofs of the Brera, enriching his planisphere even further. He observed the precise evolution of the canals, especially some doubling, which he defined as “germinations,” which, to those who already believed in the artificial nature of these structures, only came as further confirmation of their hypothesis. It got to the point where anyone skeptical of this interpretation was automatically condemned to a certain unpopularity

Percival Lowell, amongst others, fed into and defended this idea of artificiality, responding energetically to any argument to the contrary. Despite the fact that this illusion had to come to an end.

There would certainly be some fascinating stories to tell about these events, but for us it is enough to remember how astronomer Vincenzo Cerulli, who had created a precious and well-equipped specular in Teramo, began carefully studying the difficulties of perceiving things with the eye when confined to scrutinizing details found at the limits of visibility. In fact, he realized that the canals were nothing more than a synthesis based on the poor information the brain was receiving from the eye in “difficult” cases such as the Mars observation. To the point that less capable tools were able to show them better, due to the difficulties of vision. In this sense Eugène Michel Antoniadi was also important, using the large refractor at the Meudon Observatory in Paris, giving the death blow to the fantastical hypothesis of a Martian civilization, observing that people were seeing an optical illusion, not irrigation canals.

The famous “Martian” face, photographed already forty years ago by the Viking 1 probe seemed to resurrect that dream, despite the fact that it was just the play of shadows on the superficial structure of the planet.

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We wanted to repropose in its entirety this fascinating affair in order to underline, as noted previously, how deep the roots between humans and Mars actually are, representing that transversal symbol between science and knowledge of what has been said. A connection that today we find frequently degraded to the level of fake news which still captured our attention in the media, taken as reliable by those who confuse popularity with credibility (and Mars reminds us that the two terms are not synonymous).

Certainly, science revealed a different planet, inhospitable and deserted, despite certain suggestive analogies with Earth that insist on making it something familiar: Mars has an atmosphere (even if it is quite different from that of Earth), a cycle of seasons, immense canyons and imposing extinguished volcanoes, at one time it was home to a notable quantity of water (today we find just a modest amount in the form of ice). Spontaneously then, the question arises, if, whether at some point there was life, even elementary life. The desire to respond to this and other questions transformed Mars into the emblem of space discovery of our time, as well as the subject for many very successful films.

The red planet is certainly the most studied planet today, frequent destination of missions of every kind, with spectacular landings that arrive to “deposit” remote operated rovers from Earth onto the Martian soil, like NASA’s extraordinary, advanced “Curiosity,” that investigates Mars’s nature and past from close up. Studies that will turn out to be extremely precious some day, when finally space ships with human crews will set sail for the planet.

Because, after all, this remains our greatest ambition. After having walked on the Moon, half a century ago, and having set aside, the banner of human flight in space will have the vermillion colors of that fascinating and long-enticing planet.

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We will disembark on that world, we will walk the lengths and widths of its dusty surface. We will be the Martians, like Ray Bradbury imagined in “Martian Chronicles” in 1950.

While we wait, there are the works of Leonardo Petrucci to carry us towards that world overflowing with wonder and mystery, “aboard” a carpet, antique symbol of journeys and adventures beyond the possible. Once again, therefore, it is art that overcomes physical distances and brings us to the sensations and visions that further feed the desires and the objectives of science. There is nothing left but to wish ourselves a safe Martian trip.

Gianluca Masi

Astrophysicist, Virtual Telescope Project

Exhibition: 5th of April - 5th of May 2018

Monday to Friday : 10 -12 am/ 3-6pm

Saturday: by appointment

Opening times during artmonte-carlo and Monaco Art Week:

Monday 23 - Tuesday 24 April: 10 am-6 pm

Wednesday 25 – Saturday 29 April: 10 am -7 pm

Special events:

-Press day for Monaco Art Week : Wednesday the 25th of April

- Opening reception for Monaco Art Week : Wednesday the 25th of April, 6 to 9 pm
by invitation

-VIP brunch for artmonte-carlo: Sunday the 29th of April 11:30 to 12:30
by reservation

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