

BODY, SKINS AND WORDS. A Conversation with Dario Neira Claudio Cravero

C.C. *How would you summarize your work?*

D.N. Looking back along the path I've taken, I realize that my work often unites the sacred, the world of nature and life changes induced by science and technologies regarding the perception of the human body. I work frequently with language itself as the text, expressing it through metonym, that is to say, the textual representation of the cause as compared to the effect, and again in the field of semantics, I also often use synecdoche, and that is, naming a part for representing the whole.

C.C. *And when you are referred to as a biotech artist, what's your reaction?*

D.N. The various forms of biotechnology are a means for me, functional means for expressing some ideas. What I bring to my work, installations, photography and video, is nothing more than my daily experience, what I see and feel every day. Art that's considered biotech, including mine, intervenes directly upon the mechanisms of the living, infringing upon its representation and simulation, acting upon an organic presence – for example, through genetic manipulation, tissue culture and plant and animal selection. Some of my projects lead in this direction; in particular, *John 1,14*, an installation in which I investigate the portrait, that of the living will, by means of the test-tube re-construction of skin. Then I use the same epithelium (skin tissue) for the successive creation of words and sentences that are useful for giving a sensible definition of the individual. *Way-Truth-Life* is my most recent work employing biotechnology; where the writing is obtained with a cell culture made up of hybrid cells whose DNA is half human and half vegetal.

C.C. *How come you've proposed a work for the PAV entitled Flip Off (Mancozeb), seeing as it's a far cry from your skin portraits?*

D.N. I've always been interested in reasoning about life and this inevitably implicates also reflecting upon its compromises, and the dangers involved. So that's the reason why my latest works centre around a catastrophic foreboding about existence, and in that sense, *Flip Off (Mancozeb)* is a projects that primarily stems from the fear that life can be questioned by our own hands, even before than by our minds. In fact, Mancozeb is the name of a pesticide molecule that's widespread in the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, and is present everywhere, so much so that medical literature calls it "the parsley of fungicides". This fungicide's name has even become a pretext for creating a somewhat interstitial installation made up of coloured seals taken from chemotherapy drugs and painkillers – like those normally used in the treatment of tumours – that are useful in curing the disturbances and side effects caused by Mancozeb itself. The pharmaceutical seals, like a multi-coloured palette, delineate a landscape that simply represents itself in its textual composition, a landscape explored according to the causes, the disorders and remedies of the disease.

This fungicide interests me both for the urgency as to the disturbances it generates and for the many studies being done – and not yet concluded, most certainly due to institutional reasons regarding power – that involve the biggest pharmaceutical companies who continue to unceasingly produce it. Therefore, writing Mancozeb on a wall is truly on the same level as a *statement*, and signifies talking about it, not ignoring it but admitting that it exists.

C.C. *What is the public's reaction when it sees your work as compared to John 1,14 and your previous works with photographs of skin grafts showing scars, wounds or other anomalies?*

D.N. I know that my work is rather disturbing. The public seems almost annoyed by what it sees, and it is because it is confronted with the reality of the body, which is often crude. None of us seem to want to look at the mirror because it makes us deal with the evidence of what we are or can become. But man's body is made of flesh and it inevitably presents crevices, folds, hair, scars, nerves and discolouration. Indigestion of the flesh is deceived by art through sublimation; just think of the beauty of the contorted bodies of Francis Bacon, the simulated bloody body-art events or Hermann Nitsch's pretense of the orgiastic rituals pertaining to Viennese Actionism. Aside from the artistic sphere, instead the real dimension is hardly sustainable since such close proximity with the body creates atypical phenomena. In fact, one can smell that body's odours, and touch, taste and hearing combine to prevail over sight, the sense that leaves room for the dizziness of projected emotions.

C.C. *In some of your recent works, which seem to be actual landscapes, there are some photographs of smooth water surfaces where marks drawn in ink are reflected. Instead, in the recent series Clouds, there are dark halos which upon a closer look reveal their textile nature made of fibrous mesh and weaving. Knowing your work and your research for essentiality, that is, along the lines of the perfection of the minimum, why is there this analysis of worlds and landscapes elaborated for filling rather than for subtraction?*

D.N. I believe that *Clouds* reflects every aspect of my research, especially its quality of synthesis. Here it's a matter of a series of photographic prints of some surgical gauze utilized during an operation, except that the colour has been converted into black and white in order to by-pass the whole pulp-violence tradition that I feel very far from. So the clouds appear to be almost like engravings or paintings on canvas; they are "pagan shrouds" – testimonies to the disease and the marks left by the person living it.

Instead, *Water/Light* is a series of photographs of the reflections of light on a water surface, which upon a second look, have been filled in with ink marks, and therefore negated. Notwithstanding that there appears to be a procedure for the "filling in" of those white portions of the images, it is actually a repudiation of light – perhaps comparable to a rapport with the sacred – and its aim is to restore a landscape that hard to enjoy, has and reduced to the essentiality of its matter.

Claudio Cravero – February