

CORNELI

SCIENCE AND ART

In his work *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire did not hesitate to declare that the best way to explain a painting could be to write a sonnet or elegy about it. I have never been very convinced of this, however, for several reasons. One reason is that a poem can propose an *ekphrasis* of a work of art or provide a description of it, but it will always be a subjective interpretation and will never be the work of art itself. Therefore –in the case of Fabrizio Corneli- he refuses all attempts at any poetical explanation – however tempting it may be, and I must admit it is very much so- and opts for an approximation of it from the sameness that creates his work of art and at the same time forms part of it. And it is precisely the play of light and shadow that creates his work of art and also forms part of it –as you might expect from a work inscribed with the mystery of visual arts and the optical magic of plasticity-, what Santiago Olmo defined as “the shadow of light” and which is no other than light in constant discourse with its otherness, in other words, shadow. Walter Raleigh said that no man walks without his shadow. And we could add that no shadow exists without its light, or what the Chilean poet Enrique Lihn perhaps expressed better than anyone else: that “Everything has its shadow” and “each shadow has its light”. Corneli’s interest does not lie in the body or figure itself, but in the moment -the equivalent of the *satori* of a haiku poem- when *illumination* (according to poets from the Far East) comes about, both outside and within ourselves. That *illumination* is always illusionistic, like in painting. The confusion that is generated within us strengthens –or rather complicates- our capacity of perception. His *Nymphs* – several of which can be seen here- would have delighted the great painter of the body in motion, Edgar Degas. In fact, the first of them –*Nymph 1*- floats in the air like a ballet dancer, while the second –*Nymph 4*- floats in the water upon which it swims. The last of the nymphs –of very similar dimensions to the first- seems to sink into the background, the depth of which is unclear. Each of the three *Nymphs* traces their own movement, and –precisely like movement- is how we can perceive and imagine them. This is the effect produced by the play of light and shadow: the effect of a mixed art, which is neither painting nor sculpture, but at the same time is both. In other words, a mixed art that requires a *mise-en-scène* of both painting and sculpture, upon a space that seems magical and is neither canvas nor exactly a wall, but another space and another time. Those of Corneli’s creations are not of any particular space or time but of figures that are as imaginary as we are, which we believe we see and (as they remind us) are in their own way fictional beings and figures, just like us. This is what is so magnetizing about Corneli’s art: his ability to envelop us in Mannerist anamorphosis, which projects before our very own eyes, as we observe entranced, the mirror of our no less complex glistening self. According to the philosopher Berkeley *esse est percipi*, and the same could be said but the other way round: if to be is to be perceived, to be perceived is to be. Therefore, what Corneli makes are constant perceptions of the labyrinth that is both the self and reality. This can be clearly seen in his works entitled

Laboratorios: shadows within a glass ball, illuminated only from above, and within which a human figure gesticulates with one arm or the other. The solitude of the figure is both its confinement and its punishment, since the glass ball acts like a prison from which the figure cannot break free— hence the frenzied and useless movement of its arms. This part of his discourse has been interpreted by some as an allusion to Plato and the allegory of the cave. I am not saying this is not so: I firmly believe it could be an accurate interpretation because – if visual arts is intellectual, as da Vinci affirmed- Corneli's art, as well as being intellectual, is philosophical. I mean that he questions, investigates, presumes, and his creations are the process that his answers follow. Because Corneli has become -not only a creator of shadows– which is what we perceive above all from his art- but also a sentinel and guardian of light. Or, to be more precise, of lights. Therefore –after having created his *Animulae* (which refer to the famous poem that bids farewell to life written by emperor Hadrian, and with which his works entitled *Laboratorios* are closely and directly related) and other equally impressive installations- he presents us with the creation of a galaxy in which lava acquires the maximum strength of light, while the chromatism, which was missing before, abandons the monochrome to which we are accustomed and blurs the figure (which was once well-defined) in an abstract composition, the protagonists of which are the different areas of colour. Corneli acts, therefore, like a magician who was a scientist, who believed that it is not the object but the suggestion of the object that lends artistic *status* to both the observer and what is seen.

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