

Archaeologies of Memory
by Silvia Cirelli

The works of the young and talented Farah Khelil (Tunisia, 1980) are conceived from an emotional breath, from a visceral, even more than mental, crossing point. To portray reality as it appears to us at a first superficial glance would be nothing more than deliberately betraying, blindfolding one's own unconscious. In fact, according to the artist, the objective truth of things is nothing but the reproduction of a fiction, unable to support and fully interpret the weight of the human soul. It is hopelessly deaf to the deliberate confusion of the inner universe, and must therefore be discredited and replaced by the synthesis of a new "happening". Only the imagination, the magic of memory and the deconstruction of reality give us the power to reach an unprecedented perceptual dimension which is, for this reason, absolutely human.

For Khelil, memory plays a fundamental role in this complex stylistic grammar because it represents the origin from which the construction of the entire narrative can begin. It is as if the creative process required a complete reading in which the works interpret a story that becomes a precious repertoire, both private and collective.

Each of the artist's works emerges from a process of overlapping relationships, associations and different levels of reading that flow into the attempt to understand the present through the past. Thus, there are many references to art history, as in the installation *Effet de Surface*; to the philosophy of Camus, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, recovered in the site-specific work *Solitude peuplée*; or literary contexts as in *Lignes*, where Khelil takes up not only the influence of the writer Bachir Majdoub from a purely cultural point of view, but draws our attention to the family value of memory (incidentally, Majdoub was also his great-uncle).

Along with *Lignes*, there are numerous occasions in which Farah Khelil assigns an indispensable role to re-enactment, as if the entire artistic experience represents a mosaic of confessions reduced to some primordial essence. Family portraits (*Notes de Chevet*), historical images of Tunisian landscapes (*Fouilles*) or traces of domestic fabrics such as laces and ancient cloths (the suggestive bedside table *Notes de Chevet*) intertwine in the aesthetic weave, celebrating the urgency of being the guardian of a cultural testimony. It is also for this reason, that we can better understand her will to use, as materials, objects that reflect the idea of "appropriation". Postcards, old photos, secondhand goods are all taken from the past, they are wastes of previous lives. This notion of "ecology" invites us to consider re-use as a change of context and environment, which gives the appropriate object new functionalities and meanings. Thinking of her artistic practice in the light of a media ecology makes it possible to consider its productions as privileged objects for the study of the media, social and intimate ecosystem.

Art thus becomes the repository of the past, and although it plays with the mechanisms of superimposition and erasure – obvious examples include the works *Point of view*, *listening point (Clichés II)* or *Sphères* – there remains the

desire to translate a profound emotion that has its roots in the precious contamination of memory.

Like fragments of life, fragrances, colours, lived fabrics, Farah Khelil's private narratives constantly evoke a collective resonance: they are like real "boxes of memories" full of implicit cross-references, or lexical allegories that illustrate the complex relationship between aesthetic research and historical documentation. It is on this metaphorical bridge between past and present that the artist projects his own cultural space, a lived space that constructs the authenticity of the narrative upon the evolutionary concept of history.

March, 2019