



## **G. Paolini, *Idem*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Turin 1975.**

For his first book Paolini collected writings and interviews that had appeared in periodicals and exhibition catalogues, together with descriptive notes and comments on several of the works illustrated.

Bringing out a book is not only an unusual act for a painter but also, at least for me, an occasion to which I can dedicate this first page. Transcribing an appearance, authenticating an imponderable datum (the original space of a picture or some brief notes) may elicit a presentiment of limitless presumption or, contrarily, the lucid awareness of scandal. I cannot delude myself that more than one suspicion will not flow into the former hypothesis, but the obligation of the wager comes more under professional duty than the expectations of the gambler who, by precept and vocation, will continue to conceal his own cards. Till when? The answer is obvious: forever, meaning never.

[p. 3, Prefatory note]

Translation by David Smith.

“... moreover he lacked the essential quality that makes a truly excellent artist, which is to say selection of forms.”

G.B. Cavalcaselle, J.A. Crowe, *Storia della pittura in Italia*, 1898

What I may intend by dignity, by the “essential quality” of an artist, does not lie in the solution of experience. The project is irreducible to the object, imagination eludes the image, I am not the picture.

Everything instead yields to direct translation, guaranteed and legible, corresponds to the compositional elaboration of a technique, of a process that already exists per se.

Hence the difficulties in restricting the said plane of research to this problem only, what with the false solutions, precisely, offered by tautology on the one hand and by the satisfaction of the witticism on the other, and the difficulty, lastly, in giving an “aesthetic” evaluation to the problem.

This is why planning today can only mean the desire for a “finite” experimentation (meaning no longer “aimed at” but “applied to”) such as to define in itself the relationship and qualitative difference, not in accordance with outmoded hypotheses of purity and freedom of language but through correctness of expression, for instance between painting and design: in terms of strict interpretation of the work, of pure appearance, design “signifies”, it exhibits the project, whereas the picture forgets it, cancels it out due to the infinite and profound openings which we can only glimpse but which we must pursue so that reality may be further exploited and therefore more real.

[p. 10, *Il quadro di sempre* [*The Usual Picture*], 1963]

Translation by David Smith. Different English translations were published in G. Celant, *Art Povera*, New York: Praeger, 1969, n. pag.; C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999, p. 258; *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, exh. cat., London: Tate Modern, 2001, p. 270; *Giulio Paolini 1960-1972*, exh. cat., Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2003, p. 242.

Breathlessness, the urgency of the idea, “obligatory” inquiry and preoccupation about evidence mark the grotesque destiny, the fascinating unpleasantness of today’s art. The upside-down muse, the reverse of the picture, endless transcription and the judgement of time mock the precariousness (and splendour) of the image.

In my work I invoke the etymological transparency of Fra Angelico, Johannes Vermeer, Nicolas Poussin, Lorenzo Lotto and Jacques-Louis David.

[p. 34, excerpt from *Una lettera sul tempo [A Letter about Time]*, 1968]

Slightly revised version of previous English translations published in *Contemplator enim*, Florence: Hopefulmonster Editore, 1991 (enclosure with English translation); *Giulio Paolini 1960-1972*, exh. cat., Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2003, pp. 242, 243.

1960 The work pre-exists the intervention of the artist (who is the first able to contemplate it). The investigation is aimed at absolute images inherent in the very nature of the canvas, and in the use of an elementary technique: tempera paints, ink, etc. (the geometrical squaring of the surface of a painting, monochrome grounds, the tracing of squared paper, the design of a letter, a colour scale).

1961-63 The enigmatic nature of the tools makes it obligatory to interpret them as an ineffable subject. The picture ceases to convey an image and becomes a mute presence; in other words it represents the very elements with which it is constituted: a surface of Masonite, a sheet of paper are trimmed in order to reveal the stretcher to which they are attached. A regular sequence of colours is presented in an orderly manner in the “void” of a transparent sheet of plastic, and the same applies to a tin of paint, the reverse of a canvas etc.

1964 An exhibition that appears to be still at the preparatory stage: a number of panels of bare wood (placed next to or over each other, leaning against the wall) are a substitute for the presence of pictures and analyze the pure conventional relationships of an exhibition. In the “drawings” dated 1964 the idea is to exclude any kind of intervention or direct manipulation. Thus the sheet of paper only indicates the terms of a pure coincidence (the signature and the year) and keeps, but does not elaborate, the material in question (another sheet of paper, a pencil, a reproduction, a work tool) which thus turns out to be implicated in a project without intention or purpose.

1965 A series of photographs portraying the artist himself or his studio in different “pictures” and at various “moments”.

*Delfo [Delphi]* is a canvas coated with phototaphic emulsion with a life-size image of the painter (myself) and of the stretcher of the painting in a sort of illusionistic identity of the artist and the work. The title *1421965* refers to the date (14 February 1965) when the photograph was taken: the painter has been caught by the photographer as he holds the canvas. The whole scene is seen from behind the same photographer, as an absolute fact.

1966 Other works tend to rigorously interpret the surroundings or to copy their own image.

1967-68 In *Una poesia [A Poem]*, *Qui [Here]*, *Lo spazio [Space]* the word becomes the image of itself: it tends, that is, to identify the spatial metrics of its meaning. *D867* is a canvas coated with photographic emulsion representing the artist as he carries a picture (another photo canvas of 1965, on which I am portrayed as I carry a blank canvas). The reproduction of a detail of a painting by Nicolas Poussin is “double” so that Flora herself offers the spectator the portraits in which the painter has represented her (*Nel mezzo del dipinto Flora sparge i fiori, mentre Narciso si specchia in un'anfora d'acqua tenuta dalla ninfa Eco*) [*In the middle of the painting Flora strews flowers while Narcissus gazes at his reflection in an amphora of water held by the nymph Echo*], 1968. In some works on paper it is the same sheet of drawing-paper that tends to redeem, in its role as a support, its absolute and enigmatic presence. And this is possible thanks to the designs that, from the edges or in the centre, intervene as revelatory elements: they highlight and define the fortuitous and provisional borders of a surface or image that we had before our eyes and which perhaps we would not have noticed.

1969-70 The impossibility of definition (why that picture *is* that picture, its potential extension or reduction), the infinite interpretative equivalence of a dimension that is, however, always the same (the categorical existence of the picture as such).

*Francis Picabia: Senza titolo, 1917* [*Francis Picabia: Untitled, 1917*] is indeed a painting by Picabia. The idea is to “see” things: in other words, the painting divests itself of all its features of location in order to offer itself to the visitor’s gaze. This is not, therefore, a critical choice or the rediscovery of a particular work, but an affirmation that this, like an infinite number of others, is a moment of creativity.

[pp. 42-43, *Note di lavoro* [*Work Notes*], 1973-75]

English translation published in *Giulio Paolini 1960-1972*, exh. cat., Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2003, pp. 38, 46, 120, 150, 162, 250, 286.

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