

MICHELE CIACCIOFERA

The Library of Encoded Time

Following *The Translucent Skin of the Present* (Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, 2018) and *A chimerical Museum of Shifting Shapes* (Voice Gallery, Marrakech, 2018), *The Library of Encoded Time* is the third of a series of exhibitions exploring the relationship between signs, memory and matter, starting from a fundamental rethinking of our perception of time.

The Library of Encoded Time is structured around the concept of “duration”, as defined by philosopher Henri Bergson in his 1907 work *Creative Evolution*. The focus on duration characterizes the artist's creative process and is reflected by his use of techniques that reproduces the natural process of stratification. Created by layering coats of clay, gauze, painting, shellac and wax, these “stratified” artworks bear the marks that duration prints on their surface. As both a key aspect of the creative process and as a theoretical framework, stratification allows us to understand the ongoing process of construction of human history, memory and identity, thus representing an act of resistance against the obliteration of humankind's most precious heritage: our words and our actions. Through stratification, culture can be preserved in time: only the vestiges of the most “stratified” cultures have survived to the present day, unscathed by the passage of time.

Because it contains both the present and the future, the past is a key element of our quest for identity and meaning. In an era in which the technological revolution has led to both the development and the erosion of memory, the question of the legacy that the contemporary age will leave behind becomes more and more pressing. Going well beyond mere contemplation, the reflection on the past leads to the reactivation of those symbols, forms and signs that had first exemplified humankind's need for expression. Repurposed through the creation of new artworks, or re-imagined through the use of their contemporary equivalents, these signs take on new meanings, shedding light on our understanding of past, present and future.

Time is “encoded” — that is, charged with meaning — because its definition is intimately linked to the process of material and intellectual stratification that constitutes its very essence. As both a manual and mental process, stratification leads to the creation of the artworks, the objects, the fossils and the fragments that make up the “library” of the exhibition's title, allowing visitors to experience the temporal and spatial extension of their field of perception and contributing to a radical reconfiguration of the exhibition space. Conceived as an archeological site of sorts, the latter is also, and most importantly, a fertile ground for personal and collective reflection on universal questions whose answers are deliberately left open-ended, thus making *The Library of Encoded Time* both a place of arrival and a point of departure.

Bricks / Books

The cleansing process — an initial firing through which the bricks are purified, and prepared for a new life — determines their colours. The magnetism of red, which evokes the element of fire, but also symbolizes the pluri-millennial history of the Mediterranean civilization, contrasts with the lighter hues of some of these bricks, which bring to mind the off-white and pale yellow shades of limestone, another construction which has been used since antiquity. The green, red and blue enamel inscriptions on the bricks' surfaces symbolize the natural elements of fire, earth and air — the latter standing for the sky and the cosmos. The artworks bear thus the traces of the elemental substances that have contributed to their formation, establishing a dialogue between present, past and future. Articulated by memory and transcending time itself, the atemporal quality of this dialogue is evoked in the sentence “We will remember this planet”, the epigraphy on writer Leonardo Sciascia's tombstone, which is also inscribed on one of these bricks. Placed on the gallery's floor, these artworks form a mosaic alternating full and empty spaces, symbolizing the fragmented forms of both memory and history. As both utensils and books constituting the library of the exhibition's title, the bricks are records of the linguistic, paralinguistic and graphic signs, of those archetypal forms of communication that have allowed humanity to articulate its identity since its very origins.



Janas Code



The perpendicular lines constituting the grids' frameworks evoke the spacetime diagram. As with the bricks, the works in the Janas Code series are created by repurposing a construction material — the grid — which takes on a new meaning, but whose primary function as a supporting structure is also preserved. Very much like the ancient “Domus de Janas — the pre-Nuragic chamber tombs found in Sardinia after which these artworks are named — each grid is an “edifice” of sorts, reduced to its skeletal frame, its most basic form, a “scaffold” bearing witness to the passage of time and the extension of memory in space and time, causing both its saturation and its erosion. The grids' spatial pattern, alternating full and empty spaces, encourages the viewer's gaze to travel across their surfaces, starting from several points of views, from right to left, from top to bottom and vice-versa. Profoundly polysemic, these objects bring together signs from different cultures, civilizations and eras: from yarns of fabric to small archaeological finds, including trilobites, shells of ammonites, medieval necklaces or Neolithic objects as well as more contemporary finds. Establishing a dialogue between past, present and future through the multiplication of references, these artworks exemplify the unfolding in time of the creative process, whose trajectory follows the perpetual metamorphosis of forms.

Bees' books

In the « bees' books », created by layering several coats of Chinese paper, Michele Ciacciofera incorporates the natural element by repurposing actual honeycombs. Linked to the image of an idealized nature, honeycombs are self-sufficient microcosms, models of natural perfection reproduced by men in fields as diverse as architecture, technology and science. By recreating organic forms whose shapes explicitly evoke the human morphology, the artist references a philosophy of nature that posits the all-encompassing harmony of all its forms. Like fossils embedded in the surface of the earth, the fragments found on the surfaces of these works — such as pebbles and clay statuettes — symbolize the perpetual transformation of forms, their passage from one state to another, as well as their evolution in time.



As an « entry door » to the past, and as a means of establishing a dialogue with it, memory allows us to consider human history through the prism of synchronicity. Theorized by Carl Jung, the concept of synchronicity posits a fundamental unity of spirit and matter, and is also the key to understand the history of creation as a continuous, open-ended and dynamic process rather than an act of individual creation. Michele Ciacciofera's work falls within this creative continuum and is structured as an open-ended reflection on the sense of infinity, which, despite the profound cultural shifts we are witnessing today, does never reach a definitive conclusion. The enigmas these fragments embody are bound to be unsolved. Moving the creative process forward by force of their symbolic value, these objects' true scope, the mysteries and magic they can only be revealed in the realm of eternity.

The Inner State

The interpenetration of organic and inorganic forms, and the latter's mysterious vitality, is perhaps most apparent in the series « The Inner State », which consists of objects whose forms evoke the human morphology as well as its evolution over time through the reference to archeological fragments. For Michele Ciacciofera, who has gathered antiquities and miscellanea since his childhood, collecting is an integral part of the creative process, as it allows him to assign new meanings to the objects he finds, which he stores and takes care of during several years before repurposing them. Whether they are integrated within the artworks, or whether they are evoked more subtly — as in the works on paper or the watercolours, for instance — these objects live a new life, whilst also preserving their original symbolic value. The use of Paleocene fossils such as the ammonites, or the reproduction of the shapes of trilobites on the surfaces of these objects do not serve a merely ornamental purpose — on the contrary, their enrichment represents the last stage of the stratification process, the key to understanding the creation of these works. The sticks, made of clay and then coated with gauze, paint, patina, shellac, wax, gold leaves and paper fragments, are decorated with signs including geometric symbols and emojis, and painted over with natural or fluorescent colours, indicating the complex temporality of these artworks. Similarly, the sphere, whose circular shape evokes that of the globe, presents a contrast of lighter and darker shapes that give us a glimpse of the signs, the objects and the materials hidden behind the work's shellac surface. Taken as a whole, these artworks, having undergone a process of enrichment through stratification, complete the archeological site devised by the artist, giving new expression to men's vital need to create signs.

Virna Gvero

