Eduardo Nery or the intriguing theatre of vision

Painting. 2nd phase of anti-painting series. (Burned works)

Suddenly, a burst of flame appears at the centre of Eduardo Nery's work, consuming it. To date, this was his last original public appearance. I know there were personal reasons of sentimental attachment that helped this arson attack to occur, that blew on the embers under the coating of ash. But it was not this that started the fire, that put the blowtorch to work, definitively corrupting so many attained aims, so much (or so it seemed) achieved certainty.

I dare imagine that it was his wish for purification and, at the same time, for martyrdom. We all know that the essence of fire is grandeur and that the grandeur is fire. It is no coincidence that the gold, which had painted the effervescence of light, burned with the image of that light. It is no coincidence that the fire, when it became light, defeated what had portrayed it. Once again, Eduardo Nery tries to reconcile in one single action, the act with the image, or at least make them communicate, even fight. His whole work has been, I believe (I dare to believe) a problem of reality, a dialectic of reality, moving along impassable paths, sometimes pretending when there is no other way and in that very pretence bringing together the loose ends of mystery towards the point of truth.

In that case, in that last case - for the moment - it was a massive risk. Partly calculated, partly subject to fate. Who knows, as a fire starts, just how high the flames will reach, how much it will consume, what it will destroy in us? This is no idle game. It is difficult for the scorched field to forget. We could here well remember Burri, the Italian who, even before Eduardo Nery, burned everything that he had to burn. Yet there is a great difference. Burri burned the work that had been prepared to be burnt, as a discovery and a spectacle, as a mise en scène. The surprise was not so painful, merely a surprise. In Nery's case, the fire is pain, is agony, is a wait for purification. What is being burned is what was done, what had been done before, a proposal and the result of a certain period of life.

I remember the frames, their similarity to icons. That is what burns. With no irony, with no proximity to the Byzantine or criticisms of the excesses of trade. The interior of the canvas burns, a canvas that had been a comedy, then gold, then light, then a demiurgical stage for it all. It burns from inside itself, like burned wood. What can still be seen is the frame of the canvas, the very cross.

It could be said that it was a symbolic act. Symbolic but not premeditated. Yet it is no miracle either, because it was not a sign, not a sign of deaths that happen; because instead of soothing, it again brought horror. This most recent episode in the painter's work is renewed without being renewed in an unexpected and dense act of drama. The many adventures experienced, the risks, the efforts, the meetings were aimed at perception, aimed at manoeuvring vision, the consequence of being seen. Magnificent games, surprising illusions superimposed one on another. Then, the pursuit of light, the attempted flight from Chaos, was a sort of luminous interior, a surge of spirituality, a metaphysical clarity facing the world, facing the universe.

How can we see this ulceration of the luminous material, how can we see these tortured textures, the corpses of paintings giving up their last gilded ghosts like any thing drained of its blood, like a disaster, like a ruin, like an end? Was everything that happened or that Eduardo Nery tried to do to meet this fate?

Let us allow the solemnity that overpowers dramatic fate to fulfil its role. We see the world with a look, but with that same look, we realise that it is observing us and threatening us. But we also know in the symbolism of the fire lies holocaust and regeneration. The painter will live through this threat, and I am sure, will equally live through this hope.