

Publicato in *Elisa Sighicelli, 9 Years*, SKIRA 2020.

*Wonderfully opaque...*

*Beautifully obscure...*

Marcella Beccaria

Breathing: I inhale and exhale, calmly and deeply so that my whole body is involved. I get closer, maybe a little more than I should, but I can't resist: this work of Elisa Sighicelli answers me and seems to be breathing with me. If I move my hand slightly – from a short distance, without touching – the work even vibrates. It is a subtle movement which, not unlike small waves on a stretch of water, hypnotizes me while spreading on the satin canvas, that is indeed the body of which this work is made. I stop my hand and inhale. But it's just a moment, so brief. You can't stop the flow of breath and I don't want to interrupt this dialogue. All my senses are alerted and obviously I look at the work: better, deeper, because this silky cloth that captured me, that does not stand still before my eyes captures, in detail, a capturing image. It's not a pun. The work in question is the photograph of a portion of a large mirror, and what's better than a mirror at capturing an image? But here is the paradox: even if the mirror, by its nature, can't help giving another image back, here the mirror looks almost captured, harnessed or better stopped, almost convinced by the artist that to reflect also means looking on the inside and not only giving back what is outside. In this work, it must be said, there's more. This mirror was photographed by Elisa Sighicelli while it was covered by a plastic veil, one of those semi-transparent sheets used to protect furniture during renovation works, sheets that, by virtue of the electrostatic force, attract very fine particles of dust onto themselves. So here what happens: though the plastic is very thin and impalpable, and also subject to the slightest movement of air, it somehow becomes the agent forcing the mirror to a surprising "pause of reflection". Returning only what filters through this membrane – flashes of light and some vaguely anthropomorphic shadows, and then of course the back of plastic veil – the mirror, perhaps, is finally placed in a position to look inside itself. If the mirror has a memory to share and return, its trace lies in this work by Elisa Sighicelli, which my breath reactivates endlessly.

And what could be the contents of this mirror's memory? Here, it is useful to tell the context in which *Lumenombra* (0337) (2019) was born – according to the neologism conceived by Elisa Sighicelli as a title of the work that I just described. *Lumenombra* is part of a series that is the result of the artist's encounter with Villa Cerruti in Rivoli, a residence of the Turinese entrepreneur Francesco Federico Cerruti who, since the end of the sixties until shortly before his death in 2015, gathered a surprising collection of masterpieces according to his personal vision of art history, from the Middle Ages to the contemporary age. During 2019, accepting an invitation from the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, which is in charge of the Cerruti collection, Elisa Sighicelli visited the Villa several times, carrying out a series of site visits during the restoration works, before the Villa was opened to the public, when the rooms were devoid of artworks and some wall furniture was partially covered with protective plastics. The works entitled *Lumenombra* give back the emotion of the artist's encounter with the interior spaces of the Villa and, in particular, with the enigmatic dining room that characterizes it. Here, Ragionier Cerruti had interpreted the room's small size by installing on the walls a *boiserie* full of mirrors, following the model of the decorative installations of the historical *palazzi* of Piedmont, and also welcoming two late 18th-century wall consoles, characterized by rams' heads, once belonging to Gustavo Rol, another peculiar collector from Turin, well known for his 'experiments' in the paranormal. In the dining room's environment, already so dense and peculiar, Cerruti had decided to set up some of Giorgio de Chirico's most important masterpieces, which he collected, with particular attention to the years between 1916 and 1920, an extraordinary creative season of the *pictor optimus*. Can you imagine the tension in that dining room on those days when Cerruti was setting up de Chirico's paintings? How many rehearsals could it take to decide the right place for each painting? Where there indecisions, anxieties, bad moods, or instead a Savoy- like, decorous complacency?

While I breathe, the works of the series *Lumenombra* whisper... I hold my breath again. Even if only in fragments – and they are wonderfully opaque fragments, beautifully obscure – it is only through the works of Elisa Sighicelli that the mirrors in Villa Cerruti have agreed to return some of their memories back, temporarily releasing what was trapped between their surfaces and the protective plastic sheets. More memories still saturate that dining room, but that's another story.