

Light in the dark

di Cynthia Penna Simonelli

The knowledge at which geometry aims is knowledge of the Eternal (Plato)

Geometry as knowledge, as a method for interior yet universal research.

All great thinkers have wrestled with the conceptual aspect of geometry, often using it as a philosophic means of research of the self: some by denying it and others, like Plato, by considering it the basis of universal knowledge.

Rhea Carmi adopts geometry by subjecting it to the laws of visual art: she uses geometry like a visual means of expression, above all to express her innermost feelings and emotions. Geometry impresses its mark on human existence much more than one may imagine, and has done so since the beginning of time. The universe itself, nature, are largely made of geometric relationships which we neglect or tend not to notice, because we never dwell on them: we always take everything – far too much – for granted. Rhea Carmi has captured this subtle and secret aspect of geometry as a source of knowledge, also personal and interior knowledge, and she has made it her own by transferring it to canvases charged with an emotional intensity which does not leap to the eye immediately, but which is a closer and more attentive examination gradually unveils.

Born in Israel but resident in America for more than 20 years, Carmi takes nothing for granted, and neglects nothing, because nothing can be achieved in life without research, struggle and effort. This is what her husband, a survivor of the tragic period of the Holocaust, has taught her, and this is the lesson which has been handed down to her from her people of Israel: that one must never give in to life's hardships and difficulties. But if this is to be achieved, life requires order, discipline, common sense and sentiment. However, the geometric element of her artistic expression refers to the order of things, to the organization of nature and the Universe which would not have generated anything, not even life from primordial chaos, without iron-clad, mathematical and geometric rules.

Carmi constructs her works like an architect would: the space is “built”, or rather designed, with great ability: a kind of spatial project, an architecture of the canvas which follows the artist's own interior order, her own method of expression, through vertical and horizontal lines which, in their most complete manifestation, combine to assume the form of a triangle, which Carmi considers the perfect form or the symbol of a perfection which is not only material but spiritual and, in some aspects, religious.

The scientific aspect of her personality, which has its origins in her youthful studies of physiology, makes her subdivide the painting surface in a regular and regulated manner. Carmi instinctively seeks a discipline, a procedure, a scientific approach to research. A kind of order, organization of thought and energy which the artist renders through a geometrism which, while it does not contain exact mathematical relations, represents a way to approach the painting area which leaves nothing to chance.

Her work is not the result of an underlying geometric design, and neither is this its ultimate goal: Carmi's work is inspired by, culminates in and centers on the artist's instinctive nature. It is instinct which guides her creativity towards a geometric order, and it is reason and thought which then makes the mind and the hand interrupt the verticality of the lines by introducing an X symbol used to decompose, to "disrupt" the scientific rigor, to allow room for the freedom of sentiment.

The graphic X sign one may glimpse in her work represents an element of freedom of reason and thought, which allows the artist to interrupt and almost cancel the obsessive repetition of the vertical lines.

Carmi does not want to indulge in a pure geometrism, as an end in itself. because her vital energy makes her opt for a richer and wider universe, made of sentiments and emotions. Her work therefore centers on force relations and a balancing of these apparently contrasting forces: scientific rigor and pure vital energy coexist in her personality, as well as in her work, incessantly alternating rather than cancelling one another.

The result is a work which is essentially "alive": a kind of song of praise to life, an act of pure energy expressed by color, and at the same time an incessant graphic sign which organizes the space and alienates it from chaos. Her "interior architectures" tend to leave space to color, and above all to light, which is her preferred means of expressing her emotions.

Light, in its highest symbolic expression of catharsis, is the fundamental theme of Carmi's work: not catharsis in the sense of self-purification, but as a glimmer emerging from the darkness, from the evil, adversity and negativity one may encounter along the path of life.

The life and thought of Rhea Carmi is never without the hope and force of passion, a message of strength and positivity, a very strong belief in the humankind's potential and redemption. The sense of redemption through struggle and through love: a theme very characteristic of Hebraism, which is all too often misunderstood and mystified by a superficial knowledge of this culture.

The whole cycle of life, with its ups and downs, expressed by means of colors: the colors chase and follow one another with an incessant rhythm, in a continuous alternation, because that's life: an alternation of good and evil, positivity and negativity.

Life is made of hurdles and of tests, it is an obstacle race. Rhea's rhythm is incessant because life does not leave us any way out: it is a never-ending alternation of events, passions, emotions, sentiments. It is also a kind of grid, from which we must disentangle ourselves; however, it is never hopeless. The grid does not block us, seizing and suffocating us, but only a tangle of events we have to deal with.

In Carmi's work the colors remain detached and clearly defined: there are no superimpositions, nuances and accents of lyricism. Their clarity serve to underscore the alternation of events in life and the harshness of existence which according to her does not yield to gratuitous sentimentalism, and cannot be softened by easy concessions.

Life has darkness, and at the same time light: adversities and triumphs.

Hence the use of colors, mostly primary and always intense: BLACK, expression of darkness, adversity, evil. RED, expression of struggle, passion and sentiment. WHITE, expression and symbol of the interior peace achieved by pursuing a just cause and fighting for it. YELLOW, expression of resurfacing from darkness, light which triumphs over evil, the light of redemption, hope for the future.

Is Rhea Carmi a fiery fighter, what we define a "pasionaria"? She undoubtedly is if passion stands for the struggle for redemption from Evil and for the triumph of Good and, in short, the battle to guide us from darkness towards light.

Traduzione dall'italiano di Jorunn Monrad