

Andro Wekua

Workshop Report

*“Who are we? Who is each of us, but a combination of experiences, information, readings and imaginings? Every life is an encyclopaedia, a library, a sample-book of styles, where everything can be continuously reshuffled in all possible ways.” (Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane*)¹*

The art of Andro Wekua is profoundly polyphonic and hypertextual – rich in both internal and external references. Within his oeuvre of collages, paintings, drawings and sculptures in wax and ceramics, each work “draws nourishment from the others” and his videos are a kind of circular narration where the end makes the beginning more intelligible. The fact that the exhibition “Workshop Report”, created for Museion in Bolzano and Wiels in Brussels, places less recent works alongside new creations, is firmly in line with the artist’s personal vision.

The heart of the show is represented in part by two videos, “Sicut Liliun Inter Spinis” (2003) and “By the Window” (2008); the first begins and ends with the image of a house overlooking the sea, evoking fragments of the artist’s childhood, including his father’s funeral. In the second a boy/mannequin sits with his feet on a table in a box/theatrical set of changing colours, inside which, on a window/screen there alternate visual evocations of waves, sunsets over the sea, moving mannequins, a house in the hills...; all visual elements from the artist’s personal repertory, but that easily find a place in our collective imagination.

Andro Wekua was born in Georgia, on the coast of the Black Sea, and his home town, Sochumi, which was once a renowned seaside resort, has left him with a rich wellspring of memories, stories and imaginings. Yet it would be wrong to see Andro Wekua’s art as a nostalgic revisitiation of his past. His use of staging, which often borders on the theatrical, and his intertwining of reality and make-believe actually serve to render his works more universal, and underline the complexity of human perception. Andro Wekua is not interested in memories for their own sake, but in our reactions to certain images and situations. His paintings, which use distinctive brights to colour black and white photographs and found images, are visual and emotive stratifications which await further sedimentation, but also additions and deductions in the eye of the beholder.

“What I find interesting is that you follow a process of evolution, but at the end you find yourself back at the beginning, at the same place, even though it is not the same beginning any more. It is impossible to go back, even if you feel the need to, because that would lead nowhere. It is about playing with the past. The decisive fact is when something actually happens, that everything occurs in a convincing fashion, but then at the end we find ourselves back at the beginning, passing imperceptibly through the start. That is the challenge.”²

¹ Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, Milan, Mondadori, 2004, p. 135.

² Andro Wekua, *Wind unter den Füßen, Andro Wekua und Daniel Baumann im Gespräch*, in „Kunstbulletin“, Zurich, No. 7/8, July-Aug. 2006, p. 36.

This excerpt from an interview can be linked to many of the images in Andro's works, such as waves, but also to the internal circular motion of references and associations in his work, an intrinsic part of his artistic vision.

For collage is nothing but the desire, and an attempt, to bring together and intermingle different situations, possibly very distant situations, in order to give rise to new situations and moments of intense poetry.

Andro's works give rise to a myriad of micro-narrations that contribute to forming a more universal meta-narration, when seen through the eyes of spectators who are willing to engage with them.

At the same time Andro Wekua's works suggest that history is not just about the possibilities that came into being: it also concerns the possibilities that did not materialize. History is not just about what asserted itself, but also what remained silent, or on the margins, defeated. This is where the polyphony of his works comes from, from his intrinsic need to point out different voices that can offer different meanings to what effectively happened. There is a common thread running through the work of Andro Wekua that closely recalls some of the ideas of a great Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin asserted that history is open and always riddled with lacunae, that the past is dotted with spectres that are not clear to us. We usually think of history as something that was destined to proceed as it did; we don't tend to view it as a set of contests, some of which were played out, while others remained in the shade.

This is the chance component of Wekua's mannequins: the faces of his characters imply a certain attitude, yet offer no certainties. Like the figure of a young woman half reclining on a chair, her eyes cast downwards and her arms folded: isolated yet at the same time presented with theatrical mastery, ready to repeat her scene infinitely and change her role every time it is staged (*Gott ist tot aber das Mädchen nicht*, God is dead, but not the girl, 2008). This is the function of memory in his videos: the more repetition there is, the more new creations arise, and as a tool of creation, memory becomes an arena for infinite and unpredictable metamorphoses.

Letizia Ragaglia

Translation from Italian by Anna Carruthers