

BOOK REVIEW: Light - the color of desire

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Andrea dall'Asta: Light - the color of desire, Ancora Editrice, Milan, 2021.

In this second book dedicated to light in art, Andrea Dall'Asta tackles modernity, after analysing its presence in antiquity in: "The light splendour of truth" (see: Color Culture and Science, nm. 10 - December 2018).

The author, continuing the path of analysis and research on the tension towards light, asks himself whether in contemporary art light is symbolic, physical, or simply functional, and answers in seven chapters: seven interdisciplinary paths starting from Impressionism to monochromy, through the icon-works of some artists, including at the end of the book, also sacred architecture, photography and cinema.

Chapter I - The Light of Impressionism: completion of a Western journey?

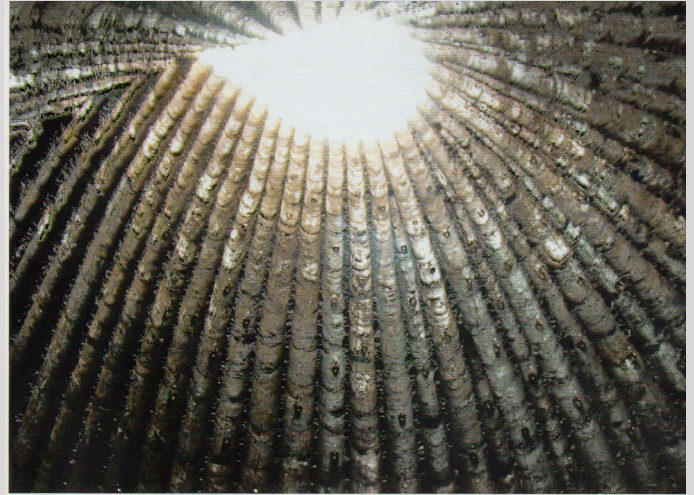
The 19th century ends with Monet's color, who in the landscape in "Impression, sunrise" shows a phenomenological vision of light (1872); with Seurat's color, who in "A Sunday afternoon on the island of Grande-Jatte" shows a system of optical rules (1884); and with Cézanne's color, to whom the author dedicates intense pages, who in "Still life with peaches and pears" (1889) revolutionises the representation of light in the image, in fact: "from within the thing comes a light, as if it were its splendour, its *éclat*".

Chapter II - The twentieth century: the dissolution of the 'realm' of representation

In the new century, philosophy rethinks itself, aesthetics and the function of art, which the author compares.

Chapter III - The modern icon and the spiritual power of color

The 20th century opened with the renewal of oriental spirituality of Byzantine origin, led by two Russians: Kazimir Malevich and Wassilji Kandinsky, the former with his radical rejection of all representativeness that in the painting "Black Square on a White Background" (1915) partially hides the light of the cosmic white background with the black of alchemic lead and the latter, as a true synesthete, creating the structure of a metaphysics of colors, based on the construction of a sound symphony: a music of the celestial spheres.



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Chapter IV - A journey into the beyond. Beyond the perception

After the Second World War, research into color and light in art achieved results on the borderline between aesthetics and mysticism.

Yves Klein's radiant colors, reach the limits of visibility through luminous blue; Mark Rothko's colors "create the sensation of an evanescent movement of matter" in which color becomes light, atmosphere, even in the very dark tones of the Rothko Chapel, where they "shine a kind of black light".

The American Barnett Newman vertically crosses his monochromes with zips as rhythm, separation, wound.

Chapter V - Light is the material of the work!

There are beautiful the pages dedicated to Lucio Fontana and his relationship between light/space/time and to the spirituality inherent in his works, where the holes and cuts show a further space that "is neither physical nor

perspective, but cosmic, infinite, illuminated by the light that enters and spreads", or to the installations with neon light or Wood's light, where the spectator loses his bearings and feels disoriented. He describes Nanda Vigo's immateriality of the play of reflections and light; of James Turrell and Irwin's Ganzfeld, the a-directional immersive spaces that seem to be a journey through a giant three-dimensional monochrome; of Dan Flavin's the environments enveloped in the intensity of light-color energy. Then he describes contemporary research on monochrome: the changing colors of David Simpson's canvases, the RGB LED projections of Pietro Mega's "Blue Church", the constant and elusive flow of light in Shay Frisch's modular elements, the meditation on light in Ettore Frani's works.

Chapter VI - Light in sacred architecture

In contemporary sacred architecture it is emptiness that dictates the spatial and functional relationships, and light is a protagonist: now purely functional, now symbolic. Dall'Asta looks for the most spiritual expressions, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day.

The beautiful pages devoted to the chapel in Vence (France) created by Henri Matisse (1949-1951), focus on the warm light of Provence that illuminates the chromatic symphony of the pure colours of the partly transparent and partly frosted stained glass windows. Are at the opposite the 104 aniconic stained-glass windows by Pierre Soulage in Conques (France, 1994) and the Gerard Richter's abstract stained-glass windows in Cologne (Germany, 2007). Tadao Ando's Church of Light in Iwakiri (Japan, 1989) pierces the deep darkness of the ascetic, bare chapel with a cross-shaped slit in the solid concrete walls. Also are described the Friedrich F. Haindl's church in Munich (Germany, 2000), the Peter Zumthor's extraordinary chapel built like "a cave dug into the belly of the world" in Wachendorf (2001). Among the Italians, Mario Botta's churches and the mystical chapel of Villa Serena (2017) by Ettore Spalletti, drowned in the metaphysical silence of its blue hues.

Chapter VII - Photography and cinema: the landing of a long journey?

Since photography, as the term itself composed of *phòs-photòs* (light) and *graphé* (writing) says, is "a writing of light", as is cinema, to which movement and time are added, Dall'Asta traces a brief history of the two arts, in which photography and cinema are seamlessly intertwined.

Conclusions VII

An exciting, well-documented, original and unmissable book for all those who are passionate about art, light and colour.