

Testoni or Photography as Method

Alfredo Testoni began his career as a news photographer. In Uruguay during his time, the 50's and 60's, he stood out above all the rest. His photos were not documents of facts, at that time usually done in the most conventional way in the press around the world; they were something quite different. His sharp eye found new compositions or formal structures that at first glance were not perceivable but which the photograph would in time reveal. (I recall a composition of several football players jumping to head a ball which he had synthesized into a totem.)

One day Testoni moved over to art in the strict sense. Photography, a mechanical medium, became transformed quite simply into an instrument for making art without painting or drawing. It was not what at that time trivially was called "artistic photography," which was little more than an emphasis on conventional themes with a bit more quality in the treatment or focus. Rather he was to use the photograph as a method, to be evaluated in the same hierarchy as drawing or painting and utilized with all its versatility and peculiarity.

Thus were born his Muromagorias, in the mid-1960's. There were walls: Viking walls, Montevideo walls, Venetian walls, walls from everywhere. At times the origin of the wall would be of importance in the work for some suggestive reason. The majority of the time, however, not. During the period of the rise of pictorial informalism, he achieved a new dimension of this aesthetic tendency. Taking forms from reality, as real and concrete as deteriorated stucco, fissures, wrinkles in the paint, precise elements deformed by the amplified image and the cut-off point at edge of the picture frame. It is reality, but not a reality that the common eye sees. Occasionally, perhaps, it can be seen, but only with great difficulty. It is from this then, that the phenomenal creativity erupts, full of strength, power, even drama.

His own method continues to lead him to new discoveries, and thus the photos of crowds lead him to the theme of man and the masses, so characteristic of our times: his "consumer society" series synthesizes this search. Here there are photographic versions, some engravings and even pen drawings, each with its own value, all noteworthy in the expression, in the dialogue with the very material of the work.

The work of Testoni has continued, and each day it produces new discoveries for us. An in-depth, critical review is still lacking, done by someone who can measure the use of the photographic resource better than the usual art critics who are unaware of its techniques, and at the same time interpret what it is that his work has accomplished in the world of the visual arts. A fine opportunity awaits in Alzella to view Testoni and for European eyes to contemplate this intensely personal work.

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(Translated from Spanish by Timothy Keating, Franklin College Switzerland)