ICONOGRAPHY

Carlo Zanni -
NewNewPortrait: State of Mind
by Valentina Tanni

Humanity has always created tools in such a way that they project a certain worldview. The meaning of these technologies then is the result of a modelling process done by the society that generates them. At the same moment, when a technology becomes a part of our life, it becomes also a new paradigm for the contemporary world.

In recent history we have witnessed the birth of new "symbolic images", having passed thorugh the pre-electric era with its machinic metaphors, to the idea of the brain as an electronic system, which has become merely a stereotype. These new "symbolic images" are a result of the "Digital Revolution".

These new concepts come from the PC and Internet world; hardware, software, databases, web, interfaces, hypertext, and links (to name a few). In this process, the human being, its identity and thoughts, is assimilated into data stored on hard disks. And if you want, this data is also sharable with others via the Net.

As De Kerchove wrote: "Art is the opposite power which balances the explosive effects of the new technologies on the culture. Art is the metaphoric aspect of that technology used and criticized".

From this, artists realize and develop the anthropological mutation signals. They work through the creation of metaphors and new expressive forms. Following the mutability of these contemporary sensibilities, Carlo Zanni interprets traditional genres like the landscape and the portrait. According to Zanni, the contemporary landscape is the mediascape, our computer screen is the window through which we can gaze upon it. The horizon extends from the cursor, through hyperlinks, allowing us to go beyond the infinite dimensions of the digital "elsewhere".

Zanni's work frequently includes oils of the icons and windows we see every day on our comuter screens. They become the new "subject" of the landscape. Conversely, the human being is portrayed through a form of mental identity, which which has come forth as a fundamental part of

comuter interaction. Here, the artist finds a unique contemporary portrait form. The updated version includes e-mail, avatar, ftp login, nicknames, and emoticons. In "u _r your c" (www.e-sm.org) the concept of the piece related to the reflected image of the man on his hard disk. Because of the continuous contact between the user through daily activities, the informatics support infrastructure of the indiviual becomes a faithful mirror.

"Show me your hard disk, and I will tell you who you are"…

Through a metonymic process man identifies himself with his "content". It is exclusively a psychological effect. With "ICOn Portraits" (www.newnewportrait.com) the figurative resurfaces, human features are recalled through simple and clear graphic outlines. The physiognomy is outlined in a simple way following an opposite process: from the portrait form to the symbolic and metaphoric form of the sign.

But meanings can always be different.

A computer icon is a simple symbol, a "face" which recalls a precise action; the underlying link is interchangeable, changeable and temporary. The appearance doesn't coincide anymore with the identity, which becomes nomadic, elusive and indefinite. In a recent text, Zanni writes, "The link is a reload of Fontana's cut, it is the third dimension of the word. The word itself becomes iconized, losing its intrinsic value. The linked word is unimportant, but the importance lies with address where the word is linked."

Every time the link gives a different meaning to the linked word, adding a new point to its defined horizon. An image can also contain a link, inviting us to a new click. With "ICOn Portraits" every single face can have this role. Zanni's portraits aren't painted or drawn; they are the result of a "programming" process, which makes them interactive. Unexpectedly, this process changes when the artist decides to paint again. Along with Zanni's digital works, there are also his large format oil paintings, representing well known computer icons and software's logos (Napster, Java, Linux, JPG). But in this case, the static, physical nature of the pictures negates the interactivity (drag and drop, clicking, etc.) icons and logos have on the desktop.

"ICOn Portraits" are the contemporary version of the traditional portrait genre, not only to be observed but they also become "tools". They can be used, saved on your desktop and linked to folders, software and web pages. The "ICOn Portraits" are links to new cognitive and experiential dimensions

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