

The etched light

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Photography, like sculpture, takes life through light. And yet this art, perhaps more than any other, has many dark sides: it demands them. The term that denotes this activity declares an immediate and irrefutable truth: it is light that forges images. However the professional who snaps the photo and prints it, knows that it emerges from the dark shadows of a darkroom protected by the obscurity that envelopes the film on which it is etched. It emerges from darkness; only from there can it come to light. The imprint of reality, not unlike that drawn on a sheet of paper, seems to arise from a reality that is not so much a copy as it is a double. This is the case of black and white: two opposed entities, often mirror images, capable of vanishing and yet necessary to each other in order to be discerned, to exist and to be perceived as such. Two indomitably different natures, complete in themselves, but also complementary, capable of partaking and communicating. Two absolutes with fading contours, as unfathomable and cryptic as life and death, which take part in the mystery of existence. Our vicissitude unfolds and our intelligence unravels between these two poles, of which we can only see intermediate ranges: lights and shadows mark our way, allowing us to assess the distance and at the same time they appraise us, involve us and differentiate us, inhabiting the most hidden recesses of man and the world, allowing us to look into creation and helping us to get to know ourselves. This is perhaps the reason that Elio Ciol can use the original dichotomy that is the basis of photography to capture the essence of things and return the intimate structure of the universe. Aware that lights and shadows permeate the folds of life, he follows with black and white the traces of all possible colour combinations. Black and white and earth and sky; these are not only basal elements of a tale, but also immense and inscrutable dimensions that human beings cannot encompass or fully comprehend; in fact, humans cannot even capture them with a glance. However, it is in these amazing and daunting places, where the gaze and the analytic thinking of the artist patiently linger. It is among them – the first image seems to tell us – that our destiny is fulfilled: our dwelling place is always merely a horizon open on one or more gaping spaces. The search for the equilibrium that characterizes these photos unites even people. Suspended among spaces, they are called on to confront something that is indefinite, instinctively strange, and different from them, something that warns them that what would appear to be inconceivable – and which is detectable – exists and therefore, simply remaining mysterious and in part incommunicable, it can be portrayed. Faced by what has no boundaries, everyone can test that extraneous reality, and even spiritual reality, are just as real, just as present and undeniable as intimate reality. These images invite us to go beyond appearances, reminding us of how things have different consistency and how, according to different points of view, it can change. The light that soaks up and emphasized Ciol's landscapes, emphasizes, moulds, highlights, scores, caresses, glorifies, purifies, touches, dispels, reveals: it changes, one could say, its own essence and engraves reality in a different way. The eterea atoms that form it can be reflected and permeate earth; they can assume substance and take it away from the object they rest on, even take their place and be, at the same time, forced to duplicate a side of reality: like water, that flows or stands still, that bursts in, or on the contrary, that lies muted and crystal clear, to the point of doing away with its own evidence. Just like rain, light can flood the earth: it is snow: a naked sky resting on things makes itself tangible, palpable, and yet it is a sky that cannot be seized. An agent that is unable to recall the most solid sceneries modifies tradition and renews

perspective. Light is also fog: a diaphanous and enigmatic presence, visible and elusive, which in the suspended moment of a sigh, allows us to see what is essential. It is a light that can conceal, filled with promise and yet a jealous cherish. It is the invisible taking shape and revealing while hiding, abstract becoming reality, a fleck of life suspended in emptiness, whole within void. Art, just like fog, needs to be decrypted; despite this, it takes shape without needing any theoretical statements. Just like fog, it shows us the density of silence: that vibrant and enveloping space—where it takes shape – that is at the base of each authentic communication. The silent being of the photographer then appears for what he is: not reluctance, but rather openmindedness: a tendency to listen and understand rather than speaking of oneself. The opposite of chaos, silence denotes an interior order which is the net in which interpersonal relationships can be built, unusual geometries tested out and new geographies defined. We can welcome within us a measure of infinity. Slow or fast, diffused or grazing, light draws and transforms, together with man, the scenery it goes through. It shows us beyond the scenery that light, an external and transitory factor that could get lost among endless stretches, can instead creep into the minutest reality, live in its details and illuminate them from within. When this happens, we accomplish the unusual: the solidifying of light, for example, and elements turning pale. Much like snow-capped sequences, the infrared pictures show a reversal of light and shade effects. The unexpected brightness that flares from terrestrial bodies contrasts with skies of heavy matter: without a light on the ground and in some cases, and for this reason, absent. Light then speaks about earth. Pungent, stark, hostile, or lit up, kind, fertile, it records the toughness and the poetry of a life spent in a distressed and miser region, conquered by stubbornness and dreams of prosperity of his inhabitants. Much patience and effort was placed in Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the attempt to control a nature not always provident and benevolent. For this reason, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia territory carries the memories of the values that defined it. They tell about harmony and respect of a microcosm in which the humble beings recognized they were part of a superior reality. These areas, clearly and unmistakably personalized, are seen by the naked eye – just as disciplined - which, gazing in certain directions reveals its bold personality. Through perception, the photographer reads and interprets all that surrounds him; he shares his knowledge, and lives in a world, which he shares. Vision places us in the universe, to interact with other entities. It forces us to create relationships. The different ways we interact determines a *modus vivendi*: a way of seeing and living one's life. Likewise, the way Ciol expresses himself (or his style) is not a mere issue of technique – of which he is indeed a master – but rather of vision. The photographer does not see according to the lens, but through it. Technological advances make us sometimes forget that photography was never a simple plate imprinted by the sun; rather it was always a backup to be developed with intelligence, and (if necessary) in other ways. Although observation connects insolvably vision to reflection, it is necessary to remember that to see, thought alone is not enough. The geometries and geographies depicted by the artist are real. Elio Ciol can represent order and harmony as they are all around him. The photographer does not fabricate (with the exclusion of the Latin definition of the term): he finds. If he wanted to be abstract, he couldn't in any way elude the direct ties with the real world. Photography, in fact, differently from other arts, maintains a strong and much needed connection with the real world. The drawings the author finds in creation are signs, ancient or recent of a work, which preceded him and which is awaiting him. They are symbol of a creation that is nowhere near its conclusion, but rather regenerates itself perpetually. Just like other living creatures, the photographer can also modify the environment but in front of the heavens, he is co-creator and not creator. When he admires the

universe he feels like he is being watched. As he stares at it, he realizes he can seize only what he welcomes within himself. Attempting to describe it, he immortalizes and transcribes the spirit of the places. What he does implies the responsibility and the choice of a testimony (reflected in the selection of subjects and framing, and in the choice of beauty over ugliness), along with patience, modesty, and respect, in keeping with a translator. From this perspective, photography is less a free form of expression and more a task, a constant exercise in research, in listening, and staying in synch.