

The in-visible city New York and memory

by Flavia Rovetta

As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands.

(I. Calvino, "The invisible cities")

Memory is intangible, but photography gives shape to the invisible, making an instant that no longer exists perpetual. Patrizia Dottori, with "Americana Breakfast *table set*", devoutly reconstructs the fragments of the memory of New York. The project includes works created between 1990 and 2017 and it was born from the ashes of the traumatic event of 11th September 2001. The places immortalized are always the same, sought after by the artist with a desire comparable to obsessive collecting: by photographing them she enters into communion with them and eternally becomes part of them, although they have been profoundly transformed by time and tragedy. Thus the Twin Towers give way to One World Trade Center, but in the images this transition takes place with delicacy, almost in a whisper. One symbol flows into the other and the latter does not erase the memory of the previous one, but amplifies it with unsettling absences. The passing of time defines both the plot of the tragedy and the patient mending of wounds. New York dialogues with its past, it feeds on the wave of memories and expands, becoming an imagined city, a dimension of possibility. Patrizia Dottori's photography has a sort of intrinsic "transmediality", which makes it a complex organism. The first medium is the mirror, which is both the structural material of New York's architecture and the surface of a primary self-representation: the real city meets the reflected one. The second is the lens, the mechanical eye that captures this first spontaneous image, making it something other than itself. The city freely crosses different spaces of existence, at the same time finding itself outside the mirror, inside it, inside the lens. Finally, the third is the printing surface, through which the image in transit anchors itself to a distinct position. Far from being fixed, the printed photograph feeds on the physical characteristics of the support – metallic paper or aluminum – to expand, moving through dazzling glows. In a perfect circularity, this material body expresses a significant correspondence with what is represented on it: the metallic and shiny facades of the buildings are not simply evoked, but they are physically present. The artist therefore does not just *represent* the city, but she has the demiurgic faculty to configure it as an in-visible city: evanescent and iridescent, yet concretely displayed within the photographic eye, which allows the spectator to see even more than what appears. In particular, in the *Reflexion* series, the artist depicts the many facets of the city, which are outlined in the mirrored forest of its own architecture. Distorted and unstructured, this second New York lives in the ambiguous dimension of the double. On the one hand it is elusive and unreal, on the other it is materialized and imperishable. *Reflexion* is at the same time an ephemeral vision and an existential meditation. The counterpart of these works is constituted by *Point of view*, which is the invitation to consider reality from different angles. The observation position conditions perception, to the point that the same place can be radically transformed from one shot to another. Thus New York becomes an Escherian labyrinth of improbable geometries made possible. Finally, *Life* is the soul of the Big Apple: a trembling city, absorbed in its vital chaos, it flows in the shots, as if it wanted to be in constant motion, while being fixed. The kaleidoscope of colors, sparkles, lights and faces captivates the eye, until it is suddenly struck by what Roland Barthes would have called the *punctum*. A detail, an accidental element that enlivens the scene and makes it present, as if it was really happening at that precise moment. The in-visible city is a vivid and real place in the imagination, or it is lucidly imagined in reality. After dealing with the painful dimension of *no longer existing*, New York joyfully opens up to the possibility of *still existing*.