

Alexander Wertheim: The Whole of Essentiality

by Maria Vittoria Pinotti

It took me some time to fully absorb Alexander Wertheim's painting - several studies and readings, moments of silent reflection during which I would carefully observe the acrylics on canvas and meticulously reread his responses to the countless questions I had asked him. I noticed that every sentence he wrote to me was carefully chosen. Yet, with Alexander Wertheim, something happened that hadn't occurred with other painters: he wouldn't just answer questions - he would always, carefully and thoughtfully, clarify his motivations, even when not asked. It was as if the reasoning behind a single choice had infinite roots stemming from a single perspective that multiplied the possible solutions. So, when I gathered his writings into one document, I found myself faced with countless questions: the study of an elementary mark, the exploration of tones, the meaning of seriality, the importance of chance and the naturalness of gesture - but above all, the uncertainty of a practice that knows where it begins but not where it will end. Beyond this, there was one aspect that remained implicit: the obsessive return to the study of a form belonging to the primordial phases of creative experience - charged with such simplicity that it led me to wonder how such a simple gesture could appear so complex. Perhaps this passion for the trace - as a repeated entity, without hidden or inner meanings - could instead be understood as a form of writing in response to the actions of the world. Alexander Wertheim likely sees painting and life as closely linked, running in parallel and shedding the superfluous to return to a state of pure elemental form. This is a kind of zero degree, reduced to essentiality, where traces, rather than opposing each other, enter dialogue in harmony - within a unifying system of spaces that expand and contract alternately, like a form of inhaling and exhaling that modulates irregularities. Yet another question arises, never openly stated, only subtly suggested: is it possible to consider painting as an end, rather than a means? To see it as a clear tool of knowledge - not of the external world, but of its own technical limits? So why not view it as a rupture from the norm, a norm now denied, or at least deeply questioned with its frayed edges and uncertainties? Reject the norm? Perhaps that's the answer, because it seems to me that many contemporary painters torment themselves in search of a theme, seen as a verification of reality. Instead, there are those who, with coherence, clarity, and without pretension, focus an entire practice on the simplification of a single subject. And in the strength of that obsession, there emerges an execution that is both reflective and intuitive, where form and tone are worked not to create the framework of a grid, but the skeleton of a melody. For Alexander Wertheim, it is the intense desire to touch upon the stripped-down and the absolute that undresses painting, bringing it into a dimension that occupies and insinuates itself into space - not sealing its voids, but delicately guiding them into a system of imperfect correspondences: overlapping traces, repetitions never quite identical, developed along the seemingly

uncertain and wavering trajectory of the brushstroke. A pretended naivety as a painter is, in truth, the rare ability of a few: to make different choices, one must be fully present, with clear motivations behind the work. And the artist cannot shift from one thing to another without reason. For Alexander Wertheim, reason becomes time, the succession of a rhythm in which every moment leads him to work as though playing keys on an infinite keyboard, without adhering to any fixed rule. Thus, this is not a painting that relies on varied repetition, but rather on the reiteration of a gesture that follows a consequential creative logic, where every choice motivates the next. The truth is that these forms - so similar yet broken by their continuous mutual differences - ask us what is contingent and what is necessary. In this drastic formal purification, devoid of representation or personal expression, the problem is revealed. For Alexander Wertheim, the canvas becomes a process of laying bare the way painting happens - through the discovery of the primary gesture and the search for its balance. A form of *presentation*, no longer *representation*, shown to us with the objective force of its self-signifying value. Rejecting the sterile rigor of minimalism, Alexander Wertheim neither controls nor predefines anything, but instead allows himself to be freely guided by intuition alone - by uncertainty and the subtle tremors of the brush. Thus, going back over a passage already completed, accepting smudges and drips of acrylic, are conscious choices in a practice that justifies itself through form alone. Thus, even though the canvases are conceptually and figuratively devoid of meaning, they remain full of significance, precisely because - through their strong sense of unpredictability - they come very close to life itself. And in this absence of intentionality, the naturalness of the gesture plays a fundamental role: a gesture never disconnected from the first sketch, but rather an action that is studied, deliberate, and supported by numerous trials. Several times, Alexander Wertheim told me how important paper sketches were in his practice - not as preparatory studies, but as essential to an endless associative attempt to work with elementary primary structures, allowing one to take one direction over another. In this stripping down, the language lies right before us on a white canvas, as pale as ivory. Some lines are gently tilted; others bear traces of dripping paint. And so, it becomes apparent that this visual framework - so dry, with unadorned and rough brushstrokes - is part of a method where form is always the result of a dynamic and concrete act, not aimed at producing a finished outcome, but at acting through essentiality to open a mental dimension. It may seem strange, but behind this radical simplification there is a development of comparisons - not only with music, in its infinite possibilities of nuance, but also with the structural system of lines, which, although they have the advantage of making information more easily transmissible, risk flattening the material complexity they are composed of. But with Alexander Wertheim, all superficiality and adherence to rigid paradigms is avoided. In achieving this unnatural simplicity, the opposite happens: the painting trembles, the image is cleared of obstacles, and it evokes an intense need for knowledge and vastness. Thus, this absence contains much; it empties itself completely in order to be stripped bare - so that *that* everything can open up and speak to us.