

ARCHIVIO TURI SIMETI

SE TURI FOSSE

Matilde Cassani / Turi Simeti

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‘History has no ifs,’ recites a famous, pithy aphorism, emphasising that historiography is based on concrete facts, sources and real events rather than on hypothetical alternative scenarios. By definition, archives are the repositories of sources and documents, scientifically organised and catalogued away. Dedicated to consultation, in-depth study, research and the enhancement and promotion of their contents, archives sometimes run the inherent risk of becoming impenetrable bastions of memory, certifiers of a pre-established status quo. Places of confirmation and not of doubt. However, archival documents and materials are living, dynamic and pulsating matter which, if suitably interrogated, may yield unprecedented interpretations. From this perspective, a useful methodological approach is one that looks to a counterfactual history, based on ‘what if’ questions, which while not denying the usefulness of doubt – a fundamental element for any proper analysis of complexity – remains open to chance.

This approach forms the cornerstone of SE TURI FOSSE, a project by Matilde Cassani for the Fondazione Archivio Turi Simeti. Cassani was invited to engage in dialogue and interact with Simeti’s work in his home-studio, which today serves not only as the artist’s archive but also as a layered space, one steeped in stories and memories. For Cassani, the serendipitous discovery of a letter penned by Simeti himself, in which the artist lists a series of projects for the future, was to provide the starting point for a sophisticated exploration of the artist’s practice. In the text, Simeti juxtaposes art and existence, family affections and everyday objects, on an equal footing and without applying any taxonomic criteria. The perspective is that of a continuation of his painting, expressed in terms of surfaces, spaces, light and architecture, with the hope of establishing a ‘new artist-architect collaboration’. Cassani, whose own practice moves freely across various disciplines, takes up Simeti’s suggestion. She goes beyond the document and decides to follow the path of ‘what ifs’, with an

awareness tempered by a touch of irony and lightness. What if Turi were a curtain? Or a lamp? These questions contribute to the development of an alternative, parallel and possible narrative of Simeti's worlds and visions. In Cassani's work, the oval, an iconic form for the artist, subjected here to a playful act of détournement – the abstraction of an abstraction – forms the basis of the five large Tripolina string curtains that welcome visitors at the entrance to the space; it also becomes a multiplied and repeated object in the mobile form of a lamp-module, characterized by a magnetised oval, conceived on the basis of studies of lamp prototypes designed by Simeti himself and found in his notes on unrealised projects.

Cassani's interventions skilfully translate and reactivate Simeti's poetics – the sense of rhythm and pause, of continuity and, almost imperceptibly, of variety characteristic of his works. They (re)shape the space of the home-studio; they punctuate it – acting both as self-signifying signs and as luminous markers – while guiding and accompanying the visitor even into the most intimate and private spaces of the dwelling, triggering relational and perceptual dynamics and hinting at unexpected paths and connections. Cassani invites us to traverse and experience the space, not conceived in the cold solemnity of a site of creation, but in its warm, everyday domesticity, where the protagonists are as much the works as the objects themselves, in a Mendinian sense of the term, drawing attention to the anthropological component of the object – be it a pair of slippers or a coffee pot – emotional counterpoints to archival materials, documents, prototypes and artworks. This paints a portrait of a lesser-known Simeti, one whose human dimension serves to reinforce – and indeed shed light upon – that of the artist, and vice versa. A fine example of what should always be the role and function of an archive today in order to escape oblivion.

— Damiano Gulli