

Still Birth

Ultimate motherhood. Chiara Ernandes' work operates on two generative layers, both absolute. Still Birth, book and project, in this installation becomes a subjective, existential pulsation on the birth of the image and on the eruptive and germinal one of Nature. Two overlapping genesis that open a parenthesis of suspended time. The man, the doctor, the father, the family all stand watching: between the archetypes and the chora. Chiara was, is not, and will be something else. Along this line, a dialogue develops along with the matter that seethes from the natural womb of the woodland, the chthonic, the night. Epiphanies of light momentarily sublimate the ground and the abysses that open there. Explosive verticality, horizontality that plunges the gaze. The time of facts, of the chronicle stands in the archipelago of events to testify to a timeline that is all human. But in this bounce of figurative rhythms and recurrences of forms, the discourse on the image and its instantaneous metabolism is urgent. The liquefaction of boundaries is the impossibility of retaining recognisability and clarity. In the ghost of the image, the historical role of photography is lost. Archive photos, document, story, become diaphanous apparitions in the fertile womb.

Simone Azzoni

Stillbirth The birth of a child is like chasing disconcerting hours. It's a cathartic event, a transitional moment. But sometimes the cathartic expectation chokes with a cracking sound.

Faceless medical white coats act out empty medical words, made of hope and resignation. Each and every family history preserves their own.

In a summer night of 1989, Chiara Hernandez was stillborn after childbirth. She was like that for five long minutes.

The most rhetoric, shocking narration would spend some words embellishing the grief of a mother, It would linger on the frantic father's powerlessness, on the doctors' frenzy and their search of a small rationalistic miracle as priests of a rationalistic cult. And on the relief of that first breath. But it would neglect the fundamental protagonist, the newly born baby, as if her unripe emotional state could make her immune from the changes in a still unknown world, which let her keep waiting on the threshold for five interminable minutes.

Still Birth is not only a book, it's the result of a visual imprinting, of a limbo that left a scar on a child's subconscious mind. She decided to wait on the other side before staking her claim to exist. These pages try to rebuild the whole of an almost thirty-year old woman, who doesn't remember that child but feels an earthy energy flowing through her. The one that the Spanish call Duende and Garcia Lorca described like that:

"The Duende belongs to a few people. It's the energy of the Earth. It is known to burn your blood like a tropic made of glass, which is consuming or rejecting the sweet geometry we were taught. It disrupts the styles we know; it leans on human overwhelming sorrow."

In this restlessness Still Birth took shape.

From the first narrational foundations, inhabited by motionless landscapes, by rocky panoramas-by the Duende, indeed, that in those five minutes nested inside her- Chiara Ernandes has continued her ceaseless wandering. In those suspended landscapes, another narration found roots, the one of her Inner Self.

Still Birth has become the reconstruction of her past, starting from an epicentre, her Non-Birth, to get to understand herself and her imagery.

Family objects, archive images, suggestive and poetic symbolism, her birth's medical records, all these instruments contribute to expanding those five minutes, turning them into a fundamental narrative starting point, around which all the author's existence is revolving.

Her existence is also defined by the ceaseless search of her own image.

Chiara Ernandes lingers on her face and its very details, as if she were trying to claim it as her own, as if she felt it didn't really belong to her. She also takes obsessive pictures of it, comparing it with her parents', melting it into light. Until her countenance becomes a mask, carved in chalk, turning it into an effigy, a sculpture immune to the passage of time.

To create a mask with one's own features can evoke ancestral, hazy traditions. But Chiara Ernandes's mask is not a funerary one, it's an utterly changed butterfly's legacy while leaving its cocoon. Perhaps this is the deep value of Still Birth. Before being a poetical search of Chiara's past, of the celebration to walk on the earth, it's the end of a journey. It's a rite of passage where the author collects and condense her being while expanding and absorbing it.

In this way she's getting ready to walk on.

Francesco Rombaldi

Chiara Ernandes (Rome, 1989)

Chiara Ernandes is a visual artist who lives between Rome and Viterbo. After high school, she attended the Scuola Romana di Fotografia and Officine Fotografiche, becoming interested in stage photography.

She began working as a stage photographer in the field of contemporary theatre and performing arts. In 2018 she meets Francesco Rombaldi in Rome, founder of Yogurt Magazine and a space focused on visual arts and contemporary photography. Between 2018 and 2021 she worked on and realised "Still Birth", an autobiographical research in which he tackled and explored various personal themes relating to his birth, a research that laid the foundations and structured his artistic research. The work became a book in 2021 published by Yogurt Editions, presented at Charta, a biennial festival of contemporary photography in Rome. In 2022 she won Young Italian Photography, exhibiting 'Still Birth' as part of Fotografia Europea in Reggio Emilia. She was invited to exhibit at the Athens Photofestival 2022 and was a finalist at the Circulation(s)'22 Festival and shortlisted at several international festivals.

In 2023 she was invited to the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm as part of Eyes On Tomorrow, organised and curated by Giovane Fotografia Italiana. In recent years, the author has enriched her research through participation in various artistic residencies, which have given her the opportunity to work with new media and use a multidisciplinary visual language.