

## Hands as recovered gift Christian Gattinoni<sup>1</sup>

If Arthur Rimbaud was able to proclaim "the hand with a pen is equal to the hand with a plough. This is a century of hands". One of the constant orientations of the XXth and the first decade of the XXIst will have been of power of the manual, the tactile and the virtual. Abandoned, the hand would become a museum object of society not in the field of arts, crafts and techniques but rather as a pretext for folklore curio to put in a new tradition linking aesthetics and utilitarianism.

When Röntgen gave everyone access to his internal depths, something of the body was suddenly in a new way endorsed by scientists. The year 1895 was caught between seeing and knowing, between the photographic image and the emergence of new imaging, radiography, chronophotography, film and psychoanalysis<sup>2</sup>.

Then the diversion of such artistic process often takes place over a period of time that is more or less long. In 1923, Moholy-Nagy wrote: "an X-ray is also a photogram, the image of an object obtained without a camera. It allows us to look at the inside of an object and to simultaneously perceive its external shape and internal structure".

Indeed, X-rays in their usual form produce a negative image that is predominantly blue. This colour quality could be seen at the same period of time in the printing process called cyanotype mainly used for architectural layouts. Artists quickly perceived the interest of such aesthetics in particular to provide new images of the body. Thus the strange scenes of attachment and suspension pictured as a ceremony by Charles-François Jeandel. So, the way would be mapped out from an internal body with a scientific purpose to its desiring transcription or at least to a transcription in terms of senses. Such a hypothesis needs only be confronted with the works of Marc Ferrante.

This should not prevent us from tracing the lineage of contemporary artists who used the same tool. Salvatore Puglia has approached the material post-pictorialist aspect of radiography mixed with of archives stemming from experiments in human sciences while Xavier Lucchesi was listing the big size potentialities between scientific police extrapolation, scientific and the creation of a new inquisitorial design of the object of consumption. As for Wim Delvoye, he used compartmentalized X-rays in order to create modern pornographic stained glass.

To address by Marc Ferrante's sensual series, one only has to remember that to disseminate his discovery, the physicist W. Röntgen showed his German colleagues a picture of his wife's hand, A. B. Ludwig, which was taken on December 22nd 1895; her bones were visible, her wedding ring appeared as a black form. Going against the logic of imagery inherent in radiography Marc Ferrante's images are achieved technically without resorting to digital tools: skins so sensually reproduced could only be obtained in such a fine definition with a scanner or a computer graphics pallet. And from this in-between the magic of presence found again emerges.

And today, in these images a hand touches another and life hunts death, the flesh tries to reach its own skeleton. The visual dialogue that has started plays with a purely sign

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<sup>2</sup> Monique Sicard, *L'année 1895. L'image écartelée entre voir et savoir (The year 1895. The image torn between seeing and knowing)*, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1994.

choreography. It gives itself the lightness of small shadow play games for adults who would care little about being figures and even less figurants. Although at certain stages of representation, for example the exhibition or the catalogue, the devil prevails upon those ugly games as a grandmother would put it, that of the photographer or mine, though we do not belong to the same generation.

These stories of warm hands are as old as desire. The dance of the two radio-photographed hands remains nothing less than silent. In the backstage of the opera of caress, there are screaming, squeaking noises and songs.

"A human body exists when seeing and being visible, touching and being touched, one eye and the other, hand and hand, come together over and over again, when sparkles of feeling -sensitive light, when the feeling and the being felt sparkle, when the fire that never stops burning starts"<sup>3</sup>.

In the delicate touch of his pictures drawn by X-rays Marc Ferrante gives me something of the thrill of the love feeling your hands convey when the convey life to mine in return.

Gift for gift.

(translation Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert)

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'esprit*, Gallimard, 1997.