

'Sometimes the echo is louder than the voice'.

Liliana Barbieri

And the cities on a distant plain stood intact
Before they rose in the air with the dust of sepulchral brick
And the people who lived there didn't know.
-- Czesław Miłosz

I met Liliana Barbieri in Beijing where we were both artists in residence. From memory, it was only a couple of weeks before the art compound where we lived and worked was condemned by the authorities and rapidly demolished. After the dust had settled, the displaced artists returned to present an installation exhibition in the ruins of what had been a vital community. It was there perhaps, we caught the very first whisper or perspectival line of this new trajectory Barbieri is following in her practice.

In the works of Barbieri there is always an underlying thread. In conversation about her practice it becomes apparent that this thread can be traced back in time to another and another. I find it difficult to believe I have never asked if this is an aspect of her Italian heritage. I suspect it is as Barbieri draws reference from the cultural richness of centuries of Italian art and architectural history, which are by their nature layered and nuanced.

'Sometimes the echo is louder than the voice' was being sketched out by Barbieri in her studio when the recent earthquakes hit Central Italy. As she worked, Barbieri's [attention was captured by](#) the daily reports of destruction in her homeland. Villages and towns she knew so well became the scene of lost lives and general chaos. This new body of work was materializing in Barbieri's studio as central Italy was dealing with the aftermath of the earthquakes. *'Sometimes the echo is louder than the voice'* has emerged for Barbieri as a meditation on the devastation the earthquakes caused.

As many will know, it is usual for an artist to spend long silent hours in studio creating work. An intensive hands on technical practice such as Barbieri's leaves time for one's mind to wander and for the journeys to become imbued within the work. Although a hemisphere away, Barbieri's thoughts were very much in Central Italy. With obvious empathy for the lives lost and for those who are facing the recovery, Barbieri questioned what it must feel like to experience the displacement of the ground she knows so well.

In this latest body of work, we see Barbieri investigating disrupted architectural abstractions of form and void. Canvases and boards hint at locations and moments in time neither past nor present. Working intuitively, Barbieri purposefully eludes representation but rather articulates an emotional realm. Her language follows that of Renaissance and Italianate architecture. Rendered carefully over time with layers of gesso, natural pigments and marble dust, Barbieri separates built form from her characteristic delicate skies of gentle calming blues. The care for these works and the subject matter she references is profound. *'Sometimes the echo is louder than the voice'* demonstrates Barbieri's wish of hope for the future of Central Italy. To take a universal view, one doesn't have to transit far in order to apply this notion and gentle meditation to the challenges each of us face in our daily lives.

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