

Jan Fabre at the Uffizi

quali Siena, Pisa, Lucca, Volterra, Prato, Arezzo, Cortona, Sansepolcro, ma anche di borghi più modesti come Asciano, Montalcino, Pienza, Anghiari, San Giovanni Valdarno, Montevarchi, Impruneta, San Casciano, San Miniato al Tedesco, Lucignano, Castiglion Fiorentino, ecc.; o ancora dei piccoli musei di valore come quelli di Staggia o di Cavriglia! In occasione di una visita privata alla collezione di autoritratti degli Uffizi con Giovanna Giusti, abbiamo visto una serie di autoritratti di artisti belgi che vanno dal XVI agli inizi del XX secolo. È stato allora che ho concepito l'idea di un possibile progetto. Gli Uffizi tengono a completare e aggiornare questa impressionante collezione ed è pertanto importante che anche i nostri migliori artisti siano presenti a Firenze, dove avranno il privilegio di affiancare gli altri grandi del mondo intero. Ho chiesto l'aiuto di Nicole d'Huart che è stata una straordinaria direttrice museale in Belgio: ha messo a disposizione la sua conoscenza dell'arte contemporanea in generale, degli artisti belgi in particolare, e ha dato credibilità a questo progetto che allora non era che un'idea personale. Insieme abbiamo proposto a Giovanna Giusti un programma intensivo di visite di studi d'artista. È così che il 7 maggio 2010 siamo stati ricevuti da Jan Fabre nel suo grande atelier teatrale ad Anversa. Rientrava dal Giappone e non aveva praticamente dormito. Abbiamo fatto il giro delle sale e subito siamo giunti all'oggetto della nostra visita. Jan Fabre ha proposto un bellissimo autoritratto in bronzo. Per prudenza, gli ho ricordato che gli Uffizi non comprano mai gli autoritratti, ma li ricevono in dono. Dopo una sonora risata, ha espresso il suo stupore aggiungendo che allora avrebbe offerto ben due opere agli Uffizi. Rimanemmo sbalorditi; dopo un momento di silenzio, ha aggiunto che aveva un debito nei confronti del museo: durante il suo primo soggiorno in città nel 1979, aveva trascorso la maggior parte del tempo agli Uffizi e conservava ancora negli archivi un 'giornale' con gli appunti presi allora. Missione compiuta ed è solo l'inizio.

Damien Wigry

Jan Fabre is at once draughtsman, sculptor, choreographer and set designer. A Belgian artist of international renown, he has his rightful place in the Uffizi's collection of self-portraits. His presence in Florence is also the result of a human and aesthetic adventure that Giovanna Giusti has asked me to relate to you.

We have owned a home in the Chianti for almost forty years. Tuscany for us is quite simply the antechamber of paradise. Its countryside is superb, its nature is imbued with the spirit of man and the historic centres of most its towns have been admirably preserved. Once again, this is not the result of mere chance but of an intelligent and farsighted policy. Its cities are historical and aesthetic jewels, the food is good, the wine is excellent and the people are friendly and cheerful. The region is alive, and it lives well. The spirit of the great Renaissance merchants who knew how to conjugate a sense of business with a love of beauty is still very much a presence. Tuscany has given us so much and made such a contribution to the quality of our lives that I began to wonder what we could offer it in return. The rich collections of the Uffizi and of Florence's other museums are immense (overwhelming, in fact), yet one has to add to that wealth the splendour of such cities as Siena, Pisa, Lucca, Volterra, Prato, Arezzo, Cortona and Sansepolcro, not to mention the charm of more modest towns and villages such as Asciano, Montalcino, Pienza, Anghiari, San Giovanni Valdarno, Montevarchi, Impruneta, San Casciano, San Miniato al Tedesco, Lucignano and Castiglion Fiorentino – the list is almost endless – and even of small, one-room museums such as Staggia and Cavriglia! While enjoying a private tour of the Uffizi's collection of self-portraits with Giovanna Giusti one day, we were able to admire a series of self-portraits of Belgian artists stretching from the 16th century to the start of the 20th century, which set my mind working. The Uffizi is eager to complete each period of its impressive collection, and it is equally important for our major artists to be present in Florence, side by side with other great masters from all over the

world. I sought the assistance of Nicole d'Huart, who has had an unparalleled career as a museum curator in Belgium. She kindly shared her knowledge both of contemporary art in general and of Belgian artists in particular, and lent credibility to a project which, at the time, was no more than my own personal dream. Together we submitted to Giovanna Giusti an intense programme of visits to artists' workshops. Thus it was that we were received by Jan Fabre in his large theatre workshop in Antwerp on 7 May 2010. He was just back from Japan and had hardly slept. We toured the establishment and very soon broached the subject of our visit. When Jan Fabre offered us a fine bronze self-portrait, I cautiously reminded him that the Uffizi never purchases self-portraits; they are donated to it. He burst out laughing and expressed his astonishment, but he added that in that case he would donate not one but two works to the Gallery! We were struck dumb. In response to our silence he explained that he had a debt to pay to the museum. On his first visit to Florence, he spent most of his time in the museum, and he still has in his archives a notebook containing the notes that he jotted down in 1979. Mission accomplished, and this is only the beginning.

Damien Wigry



Jan Fabre, *Chapter XI*, 2010, cera, Collezione Angelos / Jan Fabre / wax, Angelos / Jan Fabre Collection