

JAY MARK JOHNSON

Introduction to the *tempo lineare* catalogue.

by Massimo Mercanti

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The task of presenting a photographic exhibition of Jay Mark Johnson to the people of Cetona is not an easy one. It is not the sort of normal “institutional” assignment taken on simply to fulfill the responsibilities of one’s job or because one has been “authorized” to translate into words the distinct experience of observing a collection of photographic images. Instead, the task involves a challenge to the mind and to its mechanisms of perception, a challenge in which the viewer is confronted with a series of images in which the “real world becomes unreal”. In Johnson’s images human figures are recognizable but there is a fleeting uncertainty as to whether one is viewing reality as perceived or something closer to a more authentic nature, a more genuine essence. To observe these photographic images is to enter into a reflection on the unconscious processes of thought itself, to open oneself to the influence of strange perceptions, perceptions that clash with our memories and with our normal representations of reality. One feels a sense of disorientation and, in response, is forced to rethink the technical components of this strange photography in order to find a reference that might help restore a discernable “rationality” to the process: an odd digital camera registers a fixed vertical slice of space, capturing the same slice continually over time, recording any changes and subsequently outputting those changes over a horizontal axis. That’s all it is? Yes, that’s it. But it’s enough to set your mind reeling in a whirlwind of thought, questioning the mechanisms of your own personal perceptions, giving rise to deep personal reflection and leading inevitably to the age-old aphorism, “Know thyself”. This process is akin to the tenets of those religions which describe “reality” as being based solely on sensory experiences, on ignorance and on personal desires. It is said that humankind is imprisoned in an inescapable illusion, an illusion which distorts the nature of the reality, provoking, as a result, a false sense of self identity. And that’s the whole point. And that’s why it’s not easy to present a cultural event of this type. The words of St Augustine can be of some use but it is still not easy. “Time does not exist, it is just an illusion of the soul. The past does not exist in that it is no longer. Future does not exist as it is yet to be. And the present is just a nonexistent instant of separation between the past and the future.”

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