

The Translator

Nina Kettiger

17.10 - 31.11.25

Silver Point

It can happen, during the warm weeks that characterized the end of the summer, that we step from a bright courtyard to a dark hallway.

The first day of teaching is always something to think about. Once I was with my brother and my friend Erica at the opening of an exhibition in a small town when a man in his fifties came to look at us, thinking we were artists and flirting a little bit with me and my brother in a very nice way. He spent some time telling us the most amazing stories. He was skinny and kept smoking. His face was all red and purple and his eyes were large and frenetic. He belonged to a wealthy family, probably land owners but he was now alone and did not have the same money any more. He was a painter and worked in his family's palace cellar. Since he had nobody to talk to, or no one he wanted to talk to, he used to hang his paintings in the cellar, go back upstairs and drink something, take a bath and dress very well. He would then go back downstairs and look at his work as a critic, or curator, and decide radically with a newly found detachment, what could be kept and the paintings that had to go he would then burn or destroy. He told us many stories like this one. After each story he would finish his cigarette and with a twirl run away from us like he didn't care anymore about us, only to come back a few minutes after with another story. He told us he had to find a job, and had decided he could be an art teacher at a high school. He hated the idea and didn't want to work at a school but, forced, he found himself in front of his first classroom's door. Hearing the students chatting behind it, there, that day, he decided that it was all a theater play, that he was the main actor on stage and at that very moment the curtain had to fall and the show begin.

I often think of him on my first day of teaching each year, or the first time with a class. I think about entertainment, the silence before everything starts, the way to begin a performance, the moment in which an institution is created. And how to do all that in such a way that with everything you say, you do a twirl and go away, leaving the public wanting more, and at same time making yourself ridiculous, or at least trying to undermine what you had just said. I know it's probably wrong in many ways, and it never quite works, but I think about it anyway.

That day in September, when I started teaching again, I entered the building they had told me to go to—a former clinic, now part of the university—and I immediately felt this thing of the threshold. A very classic mechanism in literature. And I think I felt it mostly because I had no idea what to expect, what kind of atmosphere—a busy school or something else, the feeling of being in the wrong place. And I didn't even have to spend time trying to imagine how it could have been. I had just found myself there after a phone call and now was getting in and that was it; so it was a radical threshold somehow.

I entered and it took me some time to get used to the darkness, the sweat on my back turned into cold drops. I paused and looked around. Heavy marbles covered the entrance corridor. Large slabs of grey stone hung from the low ceiling. Brass handles showed people's fingerprints: nobody was there but me. On my left, there were some vending machines that hummed with a silent buzz. Inside them, brightened by a blue LED light, were some refrigerated snacks. I bought a bottle of water, one of these bottles with very thin and uncomfortable plastic that folds in your hand as soon as you take the first sip. I started walking up the stairs. The steps were high and made my head move left to right. I thought: do I walk like a doctor, or do I walk like a patient?

I was still alone, nobody had seen me, no students, no school personnel, my role was still dormant and I could have been any kind of element in the institution. As a kind of Kafkaian character I was still a victim and a perpetrator, a guard and a prisoner, and everything could have happened to me. I reached the end of the stairs where a yellow glass skylight turned the upper part of the staircase orange. Behind the panes rested some rotten leaves that looked like little black silhouettes on the bright surface. The rest of the space was almost dark. A mellow grey light flattened all contrast. I stopped for a moment and had the feeling that everything was one surface—a good feeling.

I continued looking around and entered a corridor from that previous two-dimensional condition and felt the dizziness of the long distances, like hundreds of meters of horizontal falling. Above me hung large spherical white lights—somehow not in a straight line. The upper parts of the orbs were covered in dust. These were two different kinds of decorations: the neoclassical marbles of the staircase and the 1920s looking orbs.

As a young artist, I studied and worked with people that believed that decorations are the expression of a certain society's condition at a particular time. This stayed with me, and I often think that I am able to feel it, even though, like now, I can't really explain it in detail. Thinking of ornaments and decorations allows us to think of art and production in general as something that is always contingent, or let's say, anti-individual. I don't mean that there is no self, but that—using the concept of Gilbert Simondon—we are always in a process of individualization, meaning we are always undergoing a transformation that incorporates the environment we are in. I think this could be a kind of understanding of the world as decoration, where transformation is reciprocal and a matter of measurements of the portion of things that change from before something happens to after something happens.

I continued walking in the long corridor, nobody else was there. At some point I smelled cigarette smoke. A cold trace of silver bitterness drifted from the end of the hallway and it immediately made me feel I wanted one. I saw a door that opened onto a terrace where a group of young students stood on the sunny balcony quietly smoking their cigarettes.

Stefano Faoro

Profil

1. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 1
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
2. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 2
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
3. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 3
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
4. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 4
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
5. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 5
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
6. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Stamp Sleeve Montage) 6
2025
Silver point drawing on paper in plastic stamp sleeves, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm
7. Nina Kettiger
Untitled (Photo Album Montage) 1
2025
Watercolor on paper in plastic photo album sleeve, mounted on cardboard, artist frame
52 × 52 cm

