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BIRTH AS SYNERGISTIC DRAWING

An encounter with an artist is always something special which necessarily transforms an activity into "an event," leaving an impression not only on the memory of the individual but also on the collective memory of the community involved in the event. Such has been the case in the work accomplished by Morgan O'Hara in the Birthing Ward of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic at the University Hospital of Modena in September 1999.

The author, by profession a collaborator within the scientific community, habitually opens ideas for discussion in order to gain the perspective of colleagues, including those with vast cultural differences, has come to recognize the seeds of innovation. Thus, by degrees, in a simple yet elaborated way via multiple pieces of information, this writer learned that Morgan O'Hara wished to draw the birthing process and recognized the proposal as truly innovative, an original expression of human creativity. Such an impression was not merely personal. Both Directors, Professor A. Volpe and V.M. Jasonni, as well as the entire staff of Birthing Unit welcomed the artist with enthusiasm and offered her their valuable support. My generation has seen, and in part participated in the birth of the multicultural dissemination of images and so we can today evaluate the impact which these images have on general formation and on the education of our own children. Omnipresent technology, however, has very much induced a passive and acritical attitude toward images and the messages associated with them. The creativity of Morgan O'Hara restores the possibility of seeing with one's other eyes, thus demonstrating that the recording of an event by means of a simple pencil is much more complete, complex and powerful than any telecamera (on-line, digital or otherwise) because it activates the emotion which has been lived during the experience of the event. Affronting the theme of birth from an artistic-descriptive point of view is not simple, given the quantity of images which each of us has stored in a personal visual memory bank. The "Live Transmissions" of Morgan O'Hara give the opportunity for individual reflection which would otherwise risk becoming lost in routine gestures, which, considering their positive purpose, are a professional guarantee on the part of those assisting at birth. Birth in a hospital requires the synergy of many people in which technical-emotional support is given the mother so that the "happy event" can develop with maximal serenity and security. We must, unfortunately, emphasize that, in spite of the fact that we are living in the third millenium, birth remains one of the most frequent causes of maternal death in the world! Acknowledging the complexity of the situation, the work of Morgan O'Hara incorporates in a single image not only the labor of the mother (in all its accepted meanings: labor which creates, produces and reproduces) but the labor as well of the whole support team which does its utmost to assist at birth. Given that birth is an event philogenically repetitive in mammals and therefore is continuous (the history of birth is only the history of the culture of birthing) it is extraordinary how O'Hara has known to concretize on paper the individuality of the different births at which she was present, their uniqueness, the unrepeatabe mix of fear, joy, tension and gestures which no one has escaped in order to be "brought into the world." Finally, whichever other aspects are brought to light by a critical study of these works, one cannot overstate that in the context of something so global, a holisitic refiguring of birth in all its complexities, Morgan O'Hara has given us extremely appreciable drawing, which brings to mind the great humanist traditions of the Renaissance.