The more one penetrates the travelling path that Adam Berg proposes to those who have the courage to look beyond the thin cinematic films wrapping the world, the more one falls under a magic spell, expanding the visibility spectrum to absorb the ghosts of the inner memory on the one hand, and of the cultural and historical memory on the other. Fixed in the meditation of Berg’s veils, the eye is educated to a transparency where the rapacious gaze of the subject trapped in the delusion of its own empirical self-subsistence is displaced by the dialectical flowing of inner and outer, self and world, present and past into one another. All that is established, defined, enclosed in its parochial identity, is boldly open to the other, to infinity. As R. Barthes has written regarding the Oriental organization of space, here “there is nothing to grasp”.

Berg brings the watery translucency and almost insubstantiality of Chinese and Japanese painted curtains and screens to its fullness, thus materially shaping the idea of a fundamental fluidity and permeability of being, traditionally associated with oriental wisdom. But, I think, he also wants to warn us about the danger of the visionary and vital materiality of nature being sold out in exchange for the lifeless televisive ghosts with which the technological and mass-mediological culture of the West is submerging the whole planet.

Such an ambivalence is a general conscious quality of Berg’s work. His veils show us how behind and within the destructive western utopia of a hyperactive artificialization of the world stands the constructive utopia of an inner contemplative identification with the whole of reality and knowledge, a realistic dream that has been brought back to our western minds mostly through the encounter with eastern philosophies and religions; and how, on the other hand, the realization of such an absolute impulse implies a sentiment of universal responsibility (as with the buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva), from which springs that socially active and productive life which the West has been the master of, before corrupting it by a faustian forgetfullness of the limits that the principle of cosmic interdependence imposes on the worlds of life and action.

Beyond the immediate aesthetic pleasure procured by Berg’s veils, chiselled in a very classical yet modern manner (the artist has used the help of a laser), the first intellectual sensation that they generate in the viewer is this fusion of Oriental emptiness/transparency and western mathematical and scientific images. Berg makes us feel how East and West, each from its particular perspective, share a common soul, in accordance with the holographic principle (the hologram being an image such that even the smallest part of the film that records it contains and can reproduce the whole of it), whereby every particular form/identity essentially encompasses the whole of forms. The artistic expression of such a principle circulates throughout the exhibition, as we shall see, and is connected to another crucial aspect of Berg’s veils, namely nomadism.

These are paintings so light and immaterial as to be almost unable to take roots in one place. One could roll them one within the other and transport them with him/her throughout the world. They are the perfect works of art for those who live in pain the loss of their origins, a pain which nevertheless and ambiguously becomes their guide to retrieve the whole and its harmony in any place and culture. In his geographic and intellectual nomadism around Europe, Giordano Bruno has been able to uncover and liven that perennial and transpersonal wisdom which constitutes the common invisible centre both for the higher philosophic and religious manifestations of the East and for the Socratic tradition in the West, from which the Neo-platonism and Hermeticism of the Renaissance derive. With the rich individuality characterizing those who drink at the sources of intelligence and intelligibility, Bruno has built his intellectual barycentre around the axis running through that invisible centre. Forced into the obscure garret of the intellectual junk first
by the authoritarian traditionalism of Aristotelian-Thomistic Christianity, and then by the empiristic and capitalistic secularization, his ghost has continued to silently challenge our blindness, offering once more to the eye of the modern mind, dazzled by the excess of exterior (tele)visions, the gift of the macrocosmic truths rooted in the microcosm of the soul. Bruno’s phantasm is possibly the last still visible reflection of the Western soul. It is not an accident that the most relevant and fertile ideas introduced in this century by quantum physics, which have blossomed into many other scientific areas, recapture, at times in full awareness, ideas that were central to the Hermetic and Neo-platonic tradition. With his paradoxical fusion of scientific/artistic futurisms and Bruno’s “pre-modern” philosophy, Berg challenges us to recognize the deep identity of past and future, and the parallel need to rediscover, beside the linear and progressive time of modernity, a deeper circular time, at whose centre stands, essentially immobile yet existentially dynamic, the absolute reality/consciousness that burned in Bruno’s soul before and more strongly than the censorial fire of the church’s inquisition.

Berg interprets and distills Bruno’s thought through an original exploration, at once biological and metaphysical, of the eye and its functioning, asking us to rethink our relation to the world, which is primarily and increasingly visual, and to experience the complexity of the gaze as a bridge between the visible and the invisible, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, the metaphysical and the historic, perceiving and creating. In his aesthetic and, in a wide sense, optical research, Berg’s art goes to the very bone of visual art, of seeing as a perspective and thus creatively compassional perception of the seen. In so doing, Berg moves beyond the specialistic conception of visual art as an “objectively” naturalistic representation of the world, or else as an arbitrarily subjective constructivism (the two faces of the same counterfeit coin), making visual art a particular form/perspective (let us say, provisionally, the form of visual perception) of the whole of knowledge, and thus of science in a true sense. His constant aesthetic use of logical-mathematical realities such as Peano’s and Hillbert’s curves (the innerly jagged squares and the clouds of nested tortuosities appearing on the veils) goes in the very direction of such a meeting of beauty and science, subjective emotions and implicit rational structures of objective reality.

The exhibition “Bruno’s phantasm” is an organic unity, whereby each individual work can be read through the whole of which it is part. And yet, thanks to the powerful alchemy of the micro/macrocosmic mirroring, each work can also be read as a self-sufficient whole in which the entire journey of the exhibition is holographically encompassed. The journey, visionary more than visual, is composed of three poetical/architectural “stanzas”, according to the triadic and trinitary canon of the Hermetic tradition.

The first room, or “ stanza” (in Italian), represents the moment of the objective look, as experienced in an ordinary art gallery, where the paintings, precisely like the natural objects they reproduce, are subjected to the detached and analytical gaze of the visitor. Hung to the wall, the veils lose their inherent transparency, turning into opaque objects, separate and closed up from the observing subject. Berg brings such an objectivity of the work of art to the extreme, to the point of allowing us to foretell a radical overturning. Having projected their eyes outside, the veils-paintings observe themselves, as to indicate that the “objects” of art, beyond our shallow and ossified seeing, are in fact autonomous subjects of vision, processes tending toward the seeing that emerges from the interiority of things, in which they invite us to descend. It is as if the cosmos as the “immense object” were looking at us with innumerable eyes, asking us to abandon merely sensorial sight and to integrate our reduced empirical subjectivity into its own hidden and profound self-seeing. Berg seems to substantiates Paul Celan’s poetical intuition :“ERBLINDE schon heute: / auch die Eingigkeit steht voller Augen.” (BLINDED from today: / even eternity is full of eyes)³. But he also begins to elaborate experimentally (through the net of metallic strings over which the artworks’ gazes glide) the fundamental hypothesis, wonderfully portrayed in the gazes of Piero della Francesca’s paintings, which are introspective precisely by being lost in the emptiness of an unlimited perspective, according to which the central line of all true seeing, elusive in its being neither subjective nor objective, is immaterial and invisible, a true absence, at once inner and outer, supporting the perceptible presence of the many and concrete...
In the second room the experience of the meeting/clash between subject and object, observer and reality, is intensified. It is the moment of mediation, the ambiguous carrier of salvation and perdition. The whole room is transformed by the installation, so that the visitor is thrown inside the artwork. The veils are here organized in such a way that the work itself, as in quantum physics with its Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle, is modified along the shifting sight of the observer. By choosing one or the other of the many available perspectival lines (materially symbolized by the net of cables connecting the veils to the underlying photographic images), the observer determines the configuration of the work; while the varying of such objective configurations, by modifying the visual interiority of the subject, participates in its constitution, according to the fundamental principle of existential interdependence (or, in the buddhist formula, of “codependent origination”). But if the acknowledgment of the constructive interpenetration of subject and object lets us glimpse into the overcoming of the destructive objectification of the human and natural other, it also looks as if Berg wanted to warn us about the fact that such an acknowledgment can generate a reduction of the world into a consumeristic and narcissistic spectacle. By creatively reproducing the underlying photograms, painful and thus very real images of human suffering, each veil looks like a tabula rasa on which the experiences and perceptions of the world are rebuilt. Thus, the veils are the symbolic expression of the human mind, and even more of the television screens and monitors that are becoming the pervasive substitutes of those minds. What is powerfully represented, here, is that process whereby the mind of the human subjects, through the mass-mediated filter, is increasingly filled with external surfaces, thus losing its inner autonomy and creativity. The result, far from producing a deeper knowledge and responsibility relative to the problems and pains of the world, is the annihilation of the impact strength of reality, aesthetically enervated so as to be quickly eliminated by individuals who are reduced to digestive machines for images, as the empty ovals on the veils in correspondence with underlying photographic pictures seem to indicate.

When is not grounded on the paradoxical dialectics of the holographic principle, whereby the other is inherent to a self strongly and autonomously aware of its own perspective universality, the mediation of subject and object can only lead to their reciprocal annihilation. The visual representation of such paradoxical dialectics is to be found in the interposition, between veils (subject) and photograms (object), of what we could call “omnivisive globes”. They mirror within themselves the visible whole, that is all that is visible around, and do so even while moving, according to the perspective of the observer. Yet, subjectivity does not merely consume the object world, whose substantive and uncorrupted image becomes the body of the observing eye. Reality is organized according to its own hidden principle precisely by being incorporated into a subjective fullness, which is in turn capable of harmoniously (and in fact roundly, following Raphael’s lesson) giving meaning to what is seen by absorbing the inner point of view of the cosmos, by looking with “eternity’s eyes”.

Underneath the chaos of the world (and of our poor, fragmented individualities), which is not mere appearance but stochastic power of generation and life, our archetypal memory can project/recognize (this is the message of hope in Berg’s work) the implicit or “implicate” order, as the physicist D. Bohm would say. The theatre of the world, in its succession of cruel and meaningless games, has a rational and meaningful lining, and such a hidden objective interiority is the same that animates, according to an idea that was dear to the Renaissance Hermetists, the “theatre of memory” of the human subject. Following the lesson of Giulio Camillo, Berg’s omnivisive globes become representations (theatre) of the profound and archetypal identity of individual and cosmic memory.

The same idea, hermetic, holographic, micro/macrococsmic, is to be found in another aspect of Berg’s pictorial work, which refers to the notion of fractals through the use of the already mentioned Peano’s and Hillbert’s curves. As a square constituted by a curve filling only in part and irregularly the plane, Peano’s curve is to be placed among those fractal objects which live in the interstices of the regular dimensions, in this case between the dimension 1 of the line and the dimension 2 of the plane. The mathematics of fractals has greatly contributed to the
comprehension of the dynamics of chaos and irregularity, and has been often misunderstood, even by those who are supposed to be quite close to them, as something that "overturned the tidy world of Pythagoreans and Platonists" (and thus, indirectly, of Renaissance Neo-platonists and Hermeticists such as Bruno). Placing the notion of fractals at the core of an exhibition on Bruno, Berg shows us how misleading is the opposition between the "sacred geometry" of the ancients and the chaotic natural geometry of the moderns. After all, the mathematics of fractals, searching for irregularity at the infinitesimal level, has emphasized again the fact of an equal and intrinsic infinity of each finite entity, for instance both of a sea coast when measured in infinitesimal detail, and of each of its bays and sub-bays. In so doing, it has taken up again a fundamental Neo-platonic conviction of Bruno (and then of Galileo), and in fact has but repropose in terms of space Zeno’s famous paradox (that referring to the race between Achilles and the turtle). Not to mention that a basic principle of the theory of fractals is the rule of "internal homotetia", of self-similarity, whereby each inner part of a fractal whole (as one notices by carefully observing the internal structure of a Peano’s curve) reproduces the form of that whole, according to the Pythagorean, Platonic and Hermetic principle of micro/macrocosmic correspondence.

Such a correspondence, which is at the core of the holographic vision transcending the dualism of subject and object, is fully developed in the third room. Here, the interpenetration of observer and observed becomes even more intimate. The visitor is surrounded by "fans" (these too vaguely oriental) charged with anatomic images of the eye, and of the neuronal-cerebral system which supports it. One has the sense of having entered one’s own head, although it is a head whose biology has been reinvented by the artist. Such an artistic manipulation of human anatomy connects with elements which are, again ambiguously, both utopian carriers of salvation and menacingly destructive. The redoubled eye, for instance, stands out as a physiological materialization of a classical zen metaphor, which tells us of that enlightening tautology in which seer and seen are fused. But the image refers also to the threatening hybris of genetic engineering, which those images of the spiritually absolute try to reify in a catas-
science. But there are also the autonomous meanings emerging from the green as a phase in the continuum of colour. The green, as Kandinskij reminds us, is the colour of quiet and reconciliation, as in it meet and rest into each other the blue and the yellow, the colours of sky and earth, or, as said also in ancient chinese culture, of the centripetal and centrifugal forces, the two fundamental forces of the universe. And since we have returned to the meeting of East and West, it may be interesting to note how in the chinese theory of the five elements (which has many elements in common with the alchemical and Hermetic theory of the four elements) green is the colour of the element “wood”, which governs the functions of the liver and, through it, of seeing. We could say that, as promoting quiet and seeing, the green may be considered the colour of a meditative seeing, capable of penetrating into the holographic unity of opposites.

But if the transparency of the veils in the “camera dello cuore” makes us feel very close to the depths of that seeing, what remains in them of opaqueness makes us feel the distance that still separates us from our own interiority. It is the very images painted on the veils, like the delusions and prejudices that veil our minds, that generate such an opaqueness. We have again, here, the motive of the eye looking at itself, with all the ambivalence described above. The ambivalence is reinforced by another powerful image, the hand seizing the eye. The reference to our desire of owning seeing and thus knowing absolutely, thus satisfying the need for infinity that moves us, is clear. But if the metaphorical and symbolical interpretation of such an image/desire can open the way to inner spiritual growth, in which case the transparency of the “camera dello cuore” would be enhanced, its positivistic and empiristic reification, pursuing the impossible and devastating dream of an absolute control over the conditions of the world, including the minds that through observation and thinking modify those conditions, intensifies to the point of darkness the opaqueness separating us from the universal archetypes that we host inside. Berg leaves us with this dilemma, which is the fundamental dilemma of our times. It is our task to complete the journey, moving closer to the inherent transparency of our own inner room, to retrieve, together with the Hermetic truths of Bruno, our original holographic nature, at once particular and universal.

2) But of course, the idea runs also through the tradition of western wisdom. For a recent formulation of such a view, see A. N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (1929), Free Press, 1978.
6) R. Smoley, “It May Be Sacred, But Is It Art?”, in Gnosis, No. 27, Spring 1993, p. 18. It must be said, however, that Smoley defines the mathematics of fractals as a new type of “sacred geometry”, which “shows us the harmony even in apparent randomness”.
9) W. Kandinskij, Dello Spirituale nell’Arte (1912), Bompiani, Milano, 1993.