

COVER DESIGN

IMAGINARY SIGNALS

Eugenio Carmi

Eugenio Carmi (b. Genoa, Italy, 1920) had two parallel large-scale retrospective exhibitions in the Fall of 1992: one at the museum premises of the Royal Palace in Budapest, and another at the Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh. Instead of a formal introduction, let's quote from the foreword written by his famous friend to the catalogue (Macmillan, 1992, pp. 10-11) of the latter exhibition:

"We all know that the pediment of the temple at Delphi bore the words «know thyself». But I think this exhortation is usually interpreted in a one-sided way, as though it were just encouraging deep and continuous introspection (as though by pondering on ourselves we would in the end succeed in understanding ourselves). In my view, there is another way of knowing oneself, which is an indispensable complement to the first, and that is to pay attention to the way others see us. However distorted their view may be, and however much their view of us may be a caricature, we have to remember that even caricatures pick out certain genuine features of what is represented.

If that is true of caricatures, it should be all the more true of such a wide-ranging, well-informed and affectionate portrait of Duncan Macmillan has painted of Carmi and in passing, of me.

As I read this portrait, I found in it things that had never struck me before, and I was led to think back to various past episodes in my life in which my path crossed that of Carmi. As I recall them, these episodes seem unconnected and only partly a consequence of intellectual considerations, for there were professional factors involved as well (the long hours spent organising book pages and dust covers at Bompiani's, for example), not to mention the social and family occasions (such as the times we spent on the old Cheirasca estate in Piedmont, when our children hunted around in the field together chasing fireflies - which were still to be found there at a time Pasolini was lamenting the fact that they had gone into exile); and then, well, there were many other convivial occasions... What I mean is that we were in each other's company without feeling that we were carrying out a clear aesthetic plan, or that we were impelled by a need to bring into line what each of us was doing in his own field. It was almost a coincidence when occasions for us to work together turned up, such as the introduction to a catalogue.



Eugenio Carmi (right) in the company of Umberto Eco (left), (Milan, 1967).

In all these episodes, which we thought of as unconnected, Duncan Macmillan now finds a thread: not just evidence of intellectual congeniality, but the pursuit, - though by different means - of a number of common interests.

I have always taken the view that when an author creates a text (whether in words or images) he is entrusting to a bottle a message which others will have the task of interpreting, and in which they will find links and connections which may escape the author. Thus Macmillan's essay has shown me paths, routes, logical sequences, crossing points, and even cases of inevitability, where Carmi and I may well have thought only chance was at play.

It is very nice to take a fresh view of oneself through the eyes of another. We did not know ourselves well enough."

(Umberto Eco)

Without taking the task to interpret E. Carmi's art, let's open the bottle to make a few of his *imaginary signals* to escape, to show signs of "links and connections", what belong to the most important aims of *Symmetry: Culture and Science*.

REFERENCE

Eco, U. (1992) Foreword, In: Macmillan, D., ed., *Eugenio Carmi*, Lugano: Fedà SA, (Fidia edizioni d'arte), 88 p.