

## ALESSANDRA BOOK, A SONG FOR OUR ANCESTORS. A PERSPECTIVE BY KAMIL SANDERS

*My grandfather Augusto's wish was to have his ashes scattered in the Tiber river, at the point where he dived as a boy. I have embarked on a journey that follows the hypothetical path of his ashes to the point where the Tiber flows, Ostia, which becomes a place of farewell. Augustus now mingles with the souls of the world who believed in the journey and the reunion with nature.*

This is how Alessandra Book introduces us to her photographic project *A Song for Our Ancestors*. The point on the Tiber from where her grandfather Augusto took his last plunge, becoming one with the regular flow of the landscape, is the point in time from which a path of recognition of the familiar unravels, until a greeting near the mouth that has the substance of an abandonment to becoming. A silent familiar, which emerges from the froth and glitter of the river, but which then needs to be traced in the domestic environment, in a journey that constantly reflects affective interiority in the caressing tenderness of nature.

There have been remarkable artists who have reached some of their own peaks in the correspondence between their biographical events and their artistic production. The flow of existence leaves, from time to time, open loops in which the buttons of art are threaded, bringing with it all the filamentary apparatus of meanings and signifiers that had their origin in life. The circle is re-knotted and intimacy, as unspeakable in conventional language, becomes a paradoxical gateway to a much wider world than it would otherwise be.

In *A Song For Our Ancestors*, this passage from the particular to the universal is formalized in the choice of displaying some images in large format and others in minute size. Optically, this favours the correct perception of a narrative that unfolds between the secluded dimension of family memory and the more public one of the natural landscape. The journey is punctuated with regularity, at times conscious and at times incidental, descending towards the mouth with the grace of a rhythmic, unruffled music.

This is how the song for Augusto sounds.

All music exists by virtue of the silences that punctuate it.

*A Song For Our Ancestors* stages a lyrical time that often retires demurely between the bends of the Tiber, leaving on the lips of the spectator the question that leads him to the next stage of the journey. The editing cuts that punctuate the narration, which often do not fit perfectly between one scene and the next, are intended to recompose themselves in the gaze of the observer, who becomes an accomplice and participant of the author where he is asked to fill in the gaps and wander over the solids. From this point of view, being a listener to Alessandra Book's song for her grandfather Augusto is a profoundly ethical exercise that demands an essential contribution to one's own sensitivity. It is striking that this ethical dimension is so conveniently revealed without the need to artificially appeal to topical issues, but by investigating one's own special intimacy with the highest degree of honesty, spontaneously withdrawing into reticence where information would be intrusive.

This tension between silence and language, between abstraction and revelation, finds its balance in the irreducible, irresistible affective relationship that stitches together all the rhythmic sections of the exhibition.

It is a special property of a sincere affection that it cannot be specified within the narrow limits of reality. Alessandra Book's cognitive journey serenely evades the barriers of analytical investigation: it is the author herself who confirms, at the beginning, that the path of the ashes documented along the Tiber river is hypothetical. Memory is an intimate accomplice of the dream; the banks of the river are realized in domestic scenes, discreetly immortalized in some of the shots. Autograph shots mingle with archive images, and the various dips with which the narrative is littered appear to be flights and contortions, untethered from the pose and abstracted from the natural context.

The exploration takes place seamlessly in the world of the imagination, gently tossing the viewer in and out of it like a tide.

Augustus abandoned himself to the sea. His identity crumbled in the waves, multiplied in the infinite details of the foam, in the dance of the currents never equal to itself. Having crossed the decisive threshold of the mouth, he silently bids farewell to what constituted the scaffolding of his previous life and blends into becoming. Thus the protagonist's extreme restitution is staged, and the economy of the journey is complete.

Yet we can start all over again. The journey undertaken by Augusto and recalled by Alessandra recomposes once again the beloved figure of the grandfather, in the guise of a statuesque diver who could leap into the unknown a hundred more times. Thus photography becomes a living thing, a tension that by approximation approaches eternity, in which no dive is the last and art is an antidote to loss, capable of inventing what history lacks.

