

## **The poetic of matters – Rachele Ferrario**

Eielson started out as a writer. His poetry was appreciated the world over, and it made him into of the leading contemporary poets in Spanish. He added the visual arts later, because of the gradual clarity he achieved in linking the written word to the image. He did this through signs. Just as some of his poems were already images, so those signs belong to the everyday reality of the artist and all humanity. If Eielson saw everything as originating in a global poetic conception and from a cyclical idea of creation, it is nonetheless undeniable that his works in the 1950s and 1960s included some of the fundamental points for his subsequent evolution.

The “knot” is the principal result of this research and can be identified with the Quipus, the Incas’ ancient language and the artist’s homage to the ancient Peruvians who transformed a primordial, minimal and elementary physical gesture into a full-fledged linguistic system. The reference to pre-Colombian art implicit in the knot was however joined by a range of meanings from various cultures, particularly – as other commentators have already noted - the double meaning of “knot” in Spanish, whose “nudo” means both knot and naked.

In Eielson’s case, this play on words gives stronger expression to the duality linking the knot and his entire work. An investigation into corporeity, the state of being corporeal, especially with reference to “nudity” and the ritual of “dressing”, is central to Eielson’s poetics. It precedes the twisting movement with which cloth is folded back onto itself and on the picture’s surface, and it provides the foundations for the series of Infinite Landscapes of the Peruvian Coast, which are still “informal” and in which the artist uses material from the place he is depicting. The manipulation of matter and the reference to the pre-Colombian tradition are extreme points of contact between Eielson’s culture of origin and his obsession with cloth, clothes, jackets, shirts, hats, trousers which are ripped, burned and cut and lead him step by step to 1963, when he did his first Quipus by knotting a shirt.

The treated clothes inserted into a traditional picture reflect the artist’s need to have a human trace in his work. Some time before the fashion for jeans and the myths of the 1960s, when he was living in Rome, Eielson started using an artistic language halfway between Nouveau Réalisme and Neo-dadaism. There are numerous references to the important figures he was in contact with at this time: Rauschenberg, Klein, Burri, Hains, Capogrossi and Colla, to quote just a few. Yet, despite these encounters, Eielson participated only incidentally in the partially American cultural and artistic climate in Rome or Paris at the time, and he never identified with it completely. An emblematic case is his Marilyn of 1962: an inflated fetish of pop culture and portraiture, created before Andy

Warhol's more famous version and seen by Eielson in terms of the physical features that made her a sex symbol, rather than her later role as an anaesthetised and aseptic icon for the contemporary world. Thus, seeking to give expression to the corporeity implicit in the use of clothes and, later, the knot, he still maintains the option of expressing poetic meanings, beauty and harmony, as can also be seen in his literary works, especially in the novel, *The Body of Giulia*-no.

Throughout his work, Eielson expresses his personal way of seeing and living in the world. This is certainly the fruit of the various cultures that contributed to his make-up; as the artist himself said, what he wanted to be and what he became was a "cross-roads of cultures". Eielson pursued his search for origins primarily in the torsion and tension of the cloth used to knot the Quipus, the sign that immediately, became his signature, and it is only by trying to participate in that search that one can grasp the main nexus of these works, which simultaneously deny and assert their physicality, for it is artist's intention to reveal the ambivalence of meanings.

Eielson's mercurial temperament enabled him to move with extreme freedom from poetry of the image and the destruction of the picture ad a traditional support to installations and performance art. As a result, the most frequent criticism he received was the he tried to experiment with too many forms of expression, when this was in fact his unitary, global and organic vision of reality.

On the other hand, the tension for change in the search for new knowledge, new interpretation and new metaphors of the real is an integral part of his artistic personality. He is continually breaking new ground in new ambits, for example, his interest in Eastern philosophy over the last decade, and his more recent interest in quantum physics. This aspect is a factor in his authenticity, beyond modes and means of expression and reaching deep into his everyday reality.