Lucio Saffaro has always been a difficult artist to define. The most qualified criticism has always shown him an interest that, every time, faced his different poetics. An authentic, constant and irrefutable difference. A difference that today is confirmed and affirmed in a conception of knowledge and the arts the logic of which has radically changed from the past, transforming systems and dynamics. Re- combinant style strategies and reactivations of broken but not exhausted pathways have been established. In particular, the cognitive angles have expanded, and the certainty of a plurality of certainty obliges several assessments, a re- mapping of judgments and values. Within this perspective, the figure of Saffaro takes on the contours of certain interest and his experien- ce, unusual and discordant with the contemporar- y art events, becomes, on the contrary, a seductive interface.

Saffaro’s argument, revealed to me in a conver- sation, was that he had come to the conviction, even in the 1950s, of the scarcity of obtaining original results following the dominant orien- tations at that time. So he left those informal texts that he had realized and which, had been shown to Arcangeli, long afterwards also to me. The idea matured in him of drawing attention to his own scientific culture, his interests for some mathematical ideas, studies of perspecti- ve in Renaissance art, and the investigation between classical world and modern knowl- edge. Here he thought to find the subjects and motivations for a conceptual challenge that fully adhered to his feature. The challenge of transferring past elements into the present, contaminating them with the elaboration of contemporary knowledge and projecting them into the future, in full coherence, therefore, with their own thought and the same time in a position of indisputable originality.

On this occasion, referring to his graphic work, I will merely observe issues that arise from these years of reorganization of the vast amount of artistic, literary and scientific mate- rial left by the artist, with the awareness that the part relative to the drawings, in all their applications, will require a thorough study and a specific publication. Drawing is undoubtedly the center of his art and, in many respects, of all his intellectual ela- boration. It is obviously present in the research on polyhedrons, but we also find it in many mathematical studies and in those about the constructive system of works of the past that have particularly appealed to him, such as the Melancolico di Dürer. Although his drawings also investigate structures in the natural wor- ld and, more unexpectedly, is accompanied by writing. This relationship between drawing and written word differs in a fragmented and ever-changing manner in his left- over notes, but has also been resolved in works that can be defined as concrete and visual poetry. One can not but observe the formal and graphic care of his literary publications, confirmed by the thousands of typeset sheets found, where there is constant attention to the order of the texts, the distribution of the paragraphs, the lines, the spacings, testimonies of a text design he much appreciated.

It is unanimous judgment of all those who have written of Saffaro, that his central and propul- sive work is the one hundred and twenty drawings that constitute the Tractatus logicus prospecticus. The depth and amplitude of the conception can not be circumscribed at the da- ting of the work, 1966, year that marks the end of an ideational gestation, of initial verification and then graphic design, certainly more extended in time. If the Tractatus represents a peak of high formal and expressive quality, and also huge conceptual density, I can not ignore my inter- est for the many small drawings, mostly bal- lpoint pen on paper, that the artist performed to fix an idea, in order to continue progressing in a first visual note. These drawings, along with hundreds of others, have been photographed and cataloged but are still waiting to be stu-

Figure 1, 2
Giovanni Maria Accame – Saffaro and the design of ideas

Giovanni Maria Accame – Saffaro e il disegno delle idee
died. A considerable amount covers different, past experiences from the themes and the style related to the best-known Saffaro. However, all of them have been included in his personal numbering and signed by the artist, evidence of their validity to his eyes, as others are left with neither number nor signature.

Beyond the value of individual drawings, the continuous and articulated torrent of research that appears to be so varied and rich in ideas, is extraordinary. Recalling also that here I am referring to the about seven hundred designs owned by the Lucio Saffaro Foundation, the artist has surely performed at least two thousand. Many drawings have served as a starting point for the many lithographs, but there are also plenty specifically designed to be translated into lithographic techniques. In this case, in the prints, colour appears with a certain frequency, while in the drawings overall, it remains an exception. Black and white drawings, particularly accentuated with the use of china, so clear and precise on the white sheet, perfectly fit the conceptual dimension in which they are immersed. About the diversity of the relationship between En Saffaro, painting and design, I reflected on several occasions and directly discussed with the artist. It is evident that drawing is more adhering to the mechanisms of his thinking, both as an art and literature and in mathematics, than painting which has, however, introduced an additional element of interest, in particular, in the direction of an inevitable interference phenomenon, regarding the rationality of propositions. Therefore I agree with Barilli in appreciating the “inoculation of chance” that filters in Saffaro’s work. Casualties, limitations, deviations from canons, which in painting are accepted as events related to the technique used, but in the drawings are more consciously wanted and sought after. Chance often recurs, in particular, in his literary writings, as a presence that opens up on unprecedented, probably distressing for the artist, but certainly inevitable dimensions. The numerous pages I have mentioned above, drawn in ballpoint pen or, in any case, executed as a first materialization of an idea as not to lose it, do not relate directly to the case, but certainly to a suspended, fluid dimension, within which ideas emerge without a definite determination. The same image reproduced on the cover of this publication shows us a Saffaro without ruler and compass (fig. 5), but careful to give shape to a figure that is immediately a thought; thoughts and shapes that change (there are other sketches on this theme), and then become the definitive china in Düer’s Graal and, then, the homonym lithography.

The graphic work of Saffaro is therefore the place of his intellectual and then artistic experience. Intellectual experience because, when elaborating an idea into a shape, historical and mathematical, aesthetic and literary skills are needed and interact, on multiple levels of knowledge and meaning. This also happens in literary works and is not always easy to interpret. I hope the three N.d.R. unpublished texts in this publication, can help to understand more fully the personality of the artist, who – almost always – is known and appreciated separately, by different enthusiasts in the various fields of knowledge in which he worked. In Saffaro, however, the internal connections were rooted: mathematics can hide behind words as in figures, we find these in his poetic prose and here are described as configurations that appear in drawings and in painting. These are often enigmatic links, certainly made more intense by a personality that has privileged introspection, deep reflection on his most natural experiences, drawing on those ideas on which he has written and obtained images that seem to turn thought into shape.

Al di là del valore dei singoli disegni, è straordinario il fermento continuo e articolato della ricerca che appare da una quantità così varia e ricca di idee. Ricordando che qui mi riferisco al circa setticento disegni in possesso della Fondazione Lucio Saffaro, l’artista ne ha sicuramente eseguiti almeno duemila. Molti di questi sono serviti come punto di partenza per le tante litografie realizzate, ma numerosi sono anche i disegni eseguiti espressamente per essere tradotti nella tecnica litografica. In questo caso, nella stampa, l’aggiunta del colore appare con una certa frequenza, mentre nei disegni, complessivamente, rimane un’eccezione.

Il bianco e nero dei disegni, particolarmente accentuato con l’uso della china, così netta e precisa sul foglio bianco, rende perfettamente la dimensione concettuale in cui sono immersi. Sulla diversità del rapporto che intercorreva tra Saffaro, la pittura e il disegno, ho rilevato più volte e direttamente discusso con l’artista. È evidente che il disegno è più aderente ai meccanismi del suo pensiero, in relazione tanto all’arte quanto alla scrittura e alla matematica. La pittura ha però introdotto un ulteriore elemento di interesse, in particolare, procedendo nella direzione di un’inevitabile interferenza fenomenica che scompagina la razionalità dei pro- posti. Sono dunque perfettamente d’accordo con Barilli nell’apprezzare le “inoculazioni del caso” che Saffaro lascia filtrare nel suo lavoro. Casualità, sconfinamenti, scostamenti dai canoni, che in pittura sono accettati come eventi connaturati alla tecnica impiegata, ma nei disegni sono più consciamente voluti e ricercati. Il caso, in particolare, ricorre spesso negli scritti letterari, è una presenza appunto che apre sull’imprevisto una dimensione probabilmente angosciosa per l’artista, ma sicuramente tenuta in considerazione e giudicata ineludibile. I numerosi fogli di cui ho precedentemente accennato, nel Laboratorio, in ogni modo, eseguiti come prima concretizzazione di un’intuizione che si teme di perdere, non si richiamano direttamente al caso, ma certo a una dimensione sospesa, fluida, entro la quale le idee affiorano senza ancora una precisa determinazione. La stessa immagine riprodotta sulla copertina di questa pubblicazione ci mostra un Saffaro senza squadra e compasso (fig. 5), ma attento a dare corpo a una figura che è immediatamente un pensiero; pensieri e figure che mostrano (vi sono altri schizzi su questo stesso tema), per poi divenire la china definitiva Il Graal di Düer e, ancora, l’omonima litografia.

L’opera grafica di Saffaro è, quindi, il luogo della sua esperienza, prima di tutto intellettuale e, naturalmente, artistica. Esperienza intellettuale perché, nell’elaborare un’idea che si compie come figura, si sommano e interagiscono competenze storiche e matematiche, estetiche e letterarie, in un’articolazione su più livelli di conoscenza e, in realtà, su più livelli di significato. Così questa che accade anche che, in modo provocatorio, una dimensione che si oppone a quella che si richiama come più superficiale, come più facile interpretazione. I [tre, N.d.R.] testi inediti che sono presenti in questa pubblicazione spesso possono contribuire a leggere in maniera più profonda la figura di Saffaro, comprensibile e distinguibile dai suoi contemporanei. In questo modo, queste stesse pagine possono essere lette come una sorta di introspezione e una riflessione profonda sulla esperienza di altri che hanno conosciuto la pittura e i disegni. I rapporti con i colleghi interni erano radicati nella matematica, ma erano sempre intensi e coinvolgenti, e non sempre conosciuti e apprezzati separatamente, da studiosi diversi nei diversi campi del sapere in cui ha lavorato. In Saffaro, però, i collegamenti interni erano radicati nella matematica, ma non sempre conosciuti e apprezzati separatamente, da studi che sono presenti in questa pubblicazione spesso possono contribuire a leggere in maniera più profonda la figura di Saffaro, comprensibile e distinguibile dai suoi contemporanei.