

A CONVINCING DIALOGUE

A painter and a sculptress converse in the fortress of Vicopisano Palazzo Pretorio. Two languages, with a certain originality, confront one another in an exhibition whose title "Collections of Life" is highly evocative. The visual and the object narratives both bring together emotions, reflections and suggestions that form the basis of their linguistic figures as well as revealing significant excerpts which in their own particular way penetrate the mysteries of existence. They do such, by starting from peculiar technical solutions.

Vanessa Thyres proposes a completely unusual way of doing watercolour. An intense work on form aimed at building images of remarkable plastic consistency. Her watercolour is not concerned with capturing liquid refinements, but tends to build volumes, to place compositions with balanced formal vigor in space. Essentially still lifes, but of a very particular kind. In fact in almost everyone, in a more or less conspicuous way, an animal skull appears. A skull, a sign of death, inside a «still life» composition which, next to it, presents things of evident everyday life: wood, decorative pumpkins, shells, stones and more. Irony in a way plays a role in the pictorial genre of "still lifes" because reflecting on the persistence of life one asks why use an object which is a sign of death? Both interpretations are possible, but I'm personally more inclined to believe in the second hypothesis. The skull often determines the compositional structure of the work and helps to underline the effectiveness of the relationship between the colours, juxtaposed and structured with clear skill. The artist invites us, with confident attitude, to reflect on the meaning of the persistence of life even in the most worn-out object which has always been used as an icon of the death which has occurred. Even when the skull takes on considerable proportions and is supported and shown by a female figure, it is not conceived as a trophy, but as a warning to think about the uncertainties that have been pressing for millennia around the relationship between life and death. It seems to me that the fixed gaze of the woman, lost in space, asking unanswered questions, proves it.

Iva Maria Mei's sculptures accompany us in that territory where history, culture, life experience enter into symbiosis, supported by constantly evolving technical skills, subjected to incessant verifications. The terracottas and ceramics, even in their raku version, reveal a continuous search for relationships amongst ideas, creative paths and formal outcomes. Female figures are captured in a liberating act, there are faces where the colour exudes from the material, all-round physiognomies crossed by the intense vibrations of the raku technique, sculptural compositions that seem aimed at conquering a place in space with suffering, mythological-dreamlike interactions between feminine faces and animal presences, birds caught in the moment of a clash. All these characters, stemming from a universe where contrast prevails, have relationships either within the same species or between different species and

they are regulated by a dissension and not an understanding. The element of balance seems to lie precisely in the dialectic of opposites. A dialectic inherent in the very act of being born; a natural state of being that is not necessarily destined, in itself, to generate conflicts. But if indeed, as many think, our era is experiencing the end of anthropocentrism, the celebration of a new union between human and non-human appears indispensable, enhancing the sense of affinity between different species and redesigning new forms of subjectivity and also new anatomy. Isn't this present in the sculptures of Iva Maria Mei? The answer for me is yes.

The prevalence of doubt over the baggage of certainties. Here is the red thread of the exhibition. And a disturbing question remains: how is the definition of «human» changing? Two artists ready to identify, with formal results of absolute value, every path that leads to the resolution of their questions, in the absolute awareness, however, that every truth must always be subjected to the scrutiny of a careful and continuous feedback. Doubt is uncomfortable but certainty is ridiculous, Voltaire claimed.

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