

The Strange Cheerfulness of a Sad “Cansùn”

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There is a strange and sad cheerfulness of shipwrecked people in the long story written by Philippe Pastor on paper stained by a hand soaked with clotted color that was later spread with a steady hand in order to depict wavy bodies, axial directions, dots of shade and the agitated movement of glances between pantomimes of fleeting emotions and prehensile faces and traits of a legendary morality.

I think that such sentimental effect is the product of a poetic “desdichado” mood full of irony and disillusionment and yet able to represent visually a strong act of love for life in all its manifestations. At the beginning there is a place (the bay of Saint Tropez, as it was and as it is now), a musician-poet (Leo Ferrè, “que sont mes amis devenus”) and the human passions of someone who created a fairy tale with lines and colors which is narrated with the strength of a public diary and of a heart that was laid bare. Pastor creates his own personal visual “cansuneta” of which he created the songs and the music (in other words shape and color) in a modern way, however with stable roots in an Occitan and melancholic free fantasy full of love and temperament. In this way painting, like poetry, can free itself again from good manners saving the world with bad words that can reveal the truth. Philippe Pastor represents a mixture of lyricism and aggressiveness, love and anarchy sinking in the chaos of color without surrendering to the fascinating power of a motionless and elegant contemplation, he projects his original ghosts in a visual fight against the traumatic experiences of human condition that surrounds him and of which he is witness.

This shows a position of strange poetic distance that, by means of comparison, creates parables and allusive paradoxes that can include reality with a synthetic figurative metaphor.

The smile in a lucid glance placed off-screen observes the shipwrecked people of human existence and shows with its gesture the rhythm of emotion with various and spurting shapes. The effect of an imaginary scornful and painful world that came out from such a “frémissement contrôlé” cancels the silence of the white page and creates fetishes of the soul, images of the spirit, types and duplicates, stereotypes and models, according to an executive procedure that never loses but strengthens the intensity of the expression.

As efficient result of a multiple manual art the primary color signs consisting of circular and wavy lines are the metaphor of human circumstances and accompany their drama, so that they become intermittent images with an elementary biological polarity. The couples of males and females, the warriors, the fishermen, the toreadors, the “connards”, the sad lovers, the smashed faces, the “salopes du port”, the gangsters, the “co-pains” and the other interpreters of the visual show created by Pastor are symbols in the desert in the zero level of life.

The effect of it is a flux of harmony and contrasts, vertical falls as the eye and the hand of the man-artist retain in a fixed emotional snapshot. The poetry of Pastor is halfway between instinct and reason, it is not part of a dream but of a real hell in the space and time of matter and nature.

Even for this reason his painting is made of liquid and spread pigments, stains characterized by a changing subtraction of color, transparencies and impressions on paper and then diluted or warmed by primary

elements such as water and fire. But the long experience of the season in hell is not based on strange landscapes and fantasy but represents the chaos of pulsating particles of the human element that avoids any literary projection. The image by Pastor rises with the holy energy of a vegetable fed with the salts of earth it was born in and the humid warmth of the tension of nerves and feelings: the India ink spreads in winding lines along the sheet of paper, in the dark of the asphalt, with the oil, the mixtures of red that becomes purple and pink, evoking strange memories of North-African fabrics or sunsets and the smell of burned tar.

These are the ingredients of an alchemist of the shapes that for one second are freed from the impulse of feelings and are modelled according to the figurative intention. . Two faces and two bodies usually look at us from the picture: a man and a woman, both in conjunction and conflict, a strip of blue, a hint of a reddish mouth, the mute contraction in the scream in the heart of an absolute silence with the contrasts of black and white, drips that define outlines, shades and ornaments with approximate hairstyles. Sometimes the imprint is on glued cardboard, sometimes the head carved in the head of a woman has convulsion movements of disarticulation in a process of evil self-destruction that shakes the shapes and goes through the vital space as an intimate dissolving vein.

However some faces and tangled images can be seen in the chaotic flux of color, those images can be hardly recognized in the confused shapes, pierced eyeballs (fire that perforates and models the color) that give the impression of looking at the image externally from the plane and in a projection that is external from the picture.

Those are our companions and these elves-humanoids imagined by Pastor and repeated infinitely talk about us, they are masks of our soul and our life, meaningful witnesses of the erotic space, of pain and of human incomprehension.

If the devil has a hand in every part of the world, the biomorphic and quick painting of Philippe is a portrait of the devil, who can be seen on the background of each face and of each immediate situation.

The simplified lines, the syncopated burns, the fracture of the profiles and the gestures characterized by sudden movements show clearly the temperament of a strong drawer who is able to choose the right stroke with a perfect connection between hand and mind.

The big eyebulbs, that are wide open as those of some small Mesopotamian statues look like colorful traffic lights that separate the scenario of the world from the limitless space of pure light, but the abstraction does not involve the intentions of the painter, who does not want to lose even one gram of his expressiveness and of the emotions that generated it.

The visions of Pastor are the product of love for instinctivity that is always in his aesthetic idea: every image is created by an experience of life so that "what has been seen" means also "what has been experienced". Thus each picture contains a part of reality that is shown by means of the materials used and by their union. First of all Pastor depicts personal emotions and is in a strange symbiosis with the silhouettes that derive from the chaos of the creation process. The phonemes of the language of gesture are the stain, the dripping and all those creative processes that lead to the balance of composition.

It seems as if those were music pages where even one drop of liquid tar can indicate the change in the harmony in the score: chance and necessity create the best compositions and this is proved by a painting whose aim is to show the most intimate emotions of the artist. Philippe Pastor is always playing with natural space and time in a way that is adequate to the emotional intensity of the look and of the invention. Every painting means an action so that every image is immediate but goes through time transitions and is characterized by different layers of color by which the image was created.

The creation of the image by means of gestures is a meaningful experience which transforms the observer who looks at the web of the interconnected emotions and images, this divine "mania" due to instinct shows

that the artisan-painter no longer has a “ni Dieu ni maitre” and that he is a courteous virtuoso, a rough attitude which however is elaborated with grace, with a sensual and rhythmic musicality that sometimes is “sur le mode mineur” and that shows behind sarcasm the shy mark of melancholy. “Hand-kissing does not create tenderness”, as Leo Ferrè once wrote, the last troubadour of our times. The images by Philippe Pastor -who depicts embraces, stolen kisses and various confusions in the vortex of human self-destructions are a visual counterpoint, they show to a careful observer a confused and obscene exhibition of the fragile human comedy. According to this humiliating and mutable Vanity Fair the painter gives a new meaning to his works that is not only on the white paper, at the same time he depicts the impressions of an environment -a stage of objects carved and painted as if they were trees- totems burned by the big fires that devastated the Bay of Saint Tropez surrounded by the hills of Maures and Esterel- “We were men and now we are dry twigs” shouted the damned suicides, violent against themselves and against their property, in the Hell of Dante. As they shout even the dumb branches of the petrified forest shout -umbrella-shaped pines, cypresses and Provenza plane-trees – which Pastor celebrates ideally in the smooth trunks that were shaded off by the blowlamp, with just a hint of monochromatic lines and rectangular stains.

Here the painter’s inclination towards sculpture, both in taking away and giving – shows the rigidity of a vegetal “dead class”, and the stele of each tree shouts in silence destroying the apparent bright atmosphere of an unchangeable Mediterranean sea. The spontaneous abstraction of color diluted on the surface represents in a plastic way a rebel melancholy based on a very personal point of view.

When Philippe Pastor throws color with his hands or when he carves the wood with fire and metal, he involves himself in an aesthetic experience that is superior to the cold and cerebral taste of today.

As in some ancient and noble poetic arts – the Oc-celtic “cansun” that were populated by death, flesh and the devil, he joins the most profound tension of life with the rhythm and the composed formal energy that indicate the features of a style.

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