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Mirabilia

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Mirabilia is a journey, an exploration of forms and colours in a fantastical key, a dimension in which visions, ideas, memories, stories and mysterious creatures express themselves freely, arousing curiosity and wonder. Medieval cartography, the adventures told by Rudyard Kipling, Emilio Salgari and Herman Melville, the biblical Genesis or the Letter of Prester John are the starting point of Bato's works, the start of a journey towards distant lands inhabited by animals both real and imaginary which, between the 12th and 13th centuries, gave rise to the Bestiaries, anthologies of an imagination that still fascinates us today. Heirs to a very ancient tradition, friends, antagonists, allegories of human vices and virtues and therefore bearers of a strongly symbolic and moralising charge, animals become the protagonists of the contemporary bestiary traced by Bato: unstable figures, with negated volumes, born of a quick yet meditated gesture, emerge with essential elegance and harmony from the white surface of the canvas; here there is no room for adjustments, overlaps or second thoughts, because everything rests on a weighed, measured balance in which the immediacy of the gesture is only apparent. Pictorial lightness gives way to the concreteness of matter in the sculptures of bears, lions and crocodiles: volumes are recovered and called to inhabit space through the essentiality of supple, elegant lines, echoes of their painted counterparts. Going beyond direct imitation and the simple recognition of the subjects, the concreteness of reality becomes for the artist the occasion to create compositions of colours and marks that intertwine, in order to give new forms back to that animal world, the object of an ancient imagination and culture in which fable and fantasy, religious and popular beliefs, scientific and naturalistic knowledge mingle, creating an idyllic, mythological world, at once distant and fearsome, which Bato subjects to a sharp and precise synthesis capable of bringing out the core of things. An essentiality that does not rule out the possibility of travelling, of getting lost in a story, of choosing whether to take it in as a whole or to linger over a detail, a stain, the brilliance of a colour used in a non-realistic way, while being certain that the Mirabilia observed will not only tell us something but also show us the way to another world, weightless, full of life, in which real time and the time of the story are suspended. Indeed, the essence of the forms, made visible by Bato's darting, sinuous strokes, gives back the possibility of stopping to listen to the story those animals tell, accompanying the viewer on his path just as, in the Middle Ages, the *Mirabilia* guided travellers among the wonders of a city. *Mirabilia* carries a new, contemporary vision of the journey into the present, makes visible the essence of nature and its inhabitants, and offers the chance to explore distant lands, a microcosm on the border between the human and the animal dimension, between fantasy and reality.

— Marta Spanò, Mirabilia, 2022