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on 'Jungle: Bato's solo exhibition'

Opening the Tonino Guerra museum in Santarcangelo to images other than his own is the sign of a soft and mysterious conversation that the great writer and artist continues to have with a variety of figures different from himself. What happened throughout the screenwriter's career with the most dissimilar directors, in soul and in cinema, is repeated here, in many ways and yet in an intimately similar fashion. What could the inner thread be, the 'fantastic alphabet' that unites, or brings together, the mental universe of Tonino Guerra and that of Bato? I would almost say that universes are born in the same way as encounters and as the drift of continents. Who could plan them in advance? And so a precious improbability seems to tie together the figurative Eden that Tonino Guerra opens before our eyes with watercolour, with pastel, even with plaster, and the fragmented, barely feral Jungle that Bato sets loose through the rooms of the museum, answering the flute call of the poet's imperfect, allusive creations. Bato's mark, his line, his 'language of water', as Tonino Guerra would say, spills entirely into the kinaesthetic act which, after a long apprenticeship, condenses the short circuit of animal being into a sharp and precise synthesis, repeating itself in various ways in the sculptures too. For Bato, animal being reveals itself in a circumstance, making the most of the core of nature, 'bare', grasping the body within the body and fixing, almost in a dazzling, intuitive instant, the open space in which that capacity for movement becomes a great rhythm of the universe. In this way the serenity of the eternal impulse, or the coexistence of the animal world with the state of emergency at the origin of its being in the world, speaks to us like the Kipling book that Bato loves so much. There is indeed, as in great virtuosity, perhaps a fundamental intention of celebration in these meticulous and essential images, whose liquid touch aims at a 'finish' that is practically the negation of 'volume', and defines a body by using emptiness. Yet Bato's Jungle has nothing bestial or violent about it. With these unstable figures, resting nonetheless on a carefully weighed balance, Bato means to show that the Jungle is not the world closest to conflict, but to 'measure' and harmony; whereas human civilisation, the so-called 'second nature' that we so pompously boast of against the 'brutality' of the first, is entirely given over to 'excess'. It does not matter how long it takes the artist to distil this truth; the observation of animals, reproduced in series upon series of sketches, scrupulously worked down to the smallest details, may last hours or days. What matters is that the singular event is born after all this process: when the creative act breaks out all of a sudden, unanalysed and spontaneous. Bato's watercolours are therefore 'sumi-e' in colour and, in this sense, they resemble not so much Tonino Guerra's drawing as the poetry on silk scrolls hung on walls that Antonio Baldini liked so much that, in one of his "Tastiera" columns of 1950, he declared it more Chinese than the verses of Li Po. The poet's approach to painting is quite different. The emptiness, the innocent, childlike space he seeks passes through the swiftness of the volumes of air he captures in the 'full', in his bottles, sustaining a living communion with colour that does not exist without the layers and filters of memory. Everything is memory in Tonino's painting. Behind every pastel

lies the lesson of Morandi and De Pisis, clashing without a fight and sometimes, in flashes, reaching the true eloquence of a sumi-e painter. But there is no doubt that Tonino's authentic water painting is embodied in his poetry of 'air', in the childlike breath of a weightless speech. In another way, the painted figures always reproduce the great book of poetic and narrative images; the final outcome of the dialogue between the arts that Guerra explores aims at the interdisciplinary erosion of all the fences that have been set up between the "genres", turning towards a total idea of poetry long pursued. Not by chance Tonino Guerra once declared that he did everything 'in the same way': screenplays, poems, paintings, stories. So, on the level of 'making' (which is also that of thinking, *Verum ipsum factum*), it is as important for Guerra to circumscribe with a 'closed' line that sense of refuge which, for Bachelard, awakens our original bond with the house (as the basis for every later measure of the world), as it is important for Bato to 'open' the line. Tonino constantly thinks about what he gives shape to; he paints with a film in his piece of chalk. Bato thinks about nothing. Despite his wonderful naivety, Tonino Guerra is a sumi-e painter only with words. And it is on this poetic bond that the encounter with Bato's Jungle takes shape. Some years ago a great psychologist spoke, in a fascinating book, of the 'breakdown' of the ancient 'bicameral' mind in our present psychic life. Although we know broadly what happens in the two hemispheres of the brain, the three great areas governing language are concentrated in only one of them, the left. In practice, we do almost everything with one hemisphere. The other, the 'heart of darkness' of our spirit, is for us a hemisphere that is – as Jaynes says – "mute". The origin of consciousness wiped it out. And yet, like a drifting continent bearing down on us, with tectonic thrusts that cause tremors and earthquakes, it speaks to us as the atavistic, acoustic memory of our deepest and most remote life. Today Harari writes about it in *Homo Deus*, with regard to the ancient animist hunter-gatherers, that is, us: "The world belonged to all its inhabitants", its rules "involved continual negotiation between all the creatures concerned. People talked with animals, trees and stones, as well as with fairies, demons and ghosts. Out of this web of communications emerged the values and norms that were equally binding on humans, elephants, oak trees and wraiths." So meeting, or making art, means precisely negotiating with the 'heart of darkness', entering the other chamber, being 'bicameral' as before the 'breakdown' and the silencing by consciousness. We talk, and we make art, because we feel a deep nostalgia for our 'mute', arcane, ancient hemisphere, for our Jungle. I therefore believe that the true reason for a personal and artistic encounter is to have none at all, searching for the hemisphere we do not remember. Indeed, one can say of true encounters what Goethe wrote about poems: they are always born of an 'occasion'. And what could be less premeditated and occasional than the encounter between Bato and Tonino Guerra? To be truly worthwhile, an encounter must serve no purpose; it must be accidental, aphoristic, contradictory. The most important encounters always happen by chance. Or, as Tonino Guerra writes in the beautiful long poem *Quattro giorni laggiù*: "It is precisely with the greetings that the encounter begins."

— Luca Cesari, Giungla, 2019