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Soriano nel Cimino

22 July 2008

Inside a Roman palazzo, one of those from the Umbertine early twentieth century, in a square more than Royal dedicated to Queen Margherita, second floor, I ring at flat 5, after opening the old lift with its black mesh outer door and its two little doors that must always be closed again as soon as you get out. There are two, three, ten, fifteen of them, one sitting on the floor with a cigarette in his mouth: the guests at the private view of an artist who himself seems to belong to the early twentieth century. I get my bearings, without much effort; on the right as you enter, beautiful, neat, clean, a white painting immediately attracts me. Soft forms, lines of coffee. What ostentatious nerve, to exhibit such a naked, poor painting with such difficult content. I ask: wonderful, a mysterious white is the ground of the large canvas, and those soft, continuous, unbroken lines open and close the synthesis of an image no doubt linked to a sign or to a false randomness. I ask where Bato is. Lanky-looking (he has a certain resemblance to Federico García Lorca), he welcomes me, truly happy with my visit. I tell him my impression: I am shaken by so much expressive courage. One line, just one, and the work is complete. Almost an affront to the various academic schools or to some new self-styled author. All the components of a painting that claims to deserve articulate criticism are absent. A single line of diluted coffee, a warm burnt sienna, captivating, restrained and silent. The painting is there. These young artists, what surprises they have in store for the emaciated survivors of the post-'68 generation! The artist has given it a title, trying to rein in that image or deliberately desecrating it to bring the boundaries of the dreams it provokes back into an immanent reality. "Asino" (Donkey) is the title, but I cannot see it. A doubt arises: perhaps I do not understand that light of the canvas and the musicality of that warm ochre mark with a few points of Van Dyck brown. Then I understand: looking again and thinking, it is yet another successful attempt by Bato to leave no room for the pointless digressions of art critics, condensing meaning into the pure line. And yet it is not a donkey! As an observer I respect that placing of the work inside a box where Bato perhaps gathers his intimate and sacred convictions about how and why a work of art should exist! "Hey, Daniele, I'm really shaken by your work, it moves me, it grips me, it unleashes emotions, I'm falling in love with your paintings," I tell him! He looks at me and lets slip an amazement that comes from the gratification of my words. We are both happy, and so are the others around us. I go through the rooms with him, one by one; I linger over the large paintings that contain conceptuality and art history, with Bacon as a guiding spirit, but I am drawn again to the many works similar to "Asino". Brilliant syntheses of Sun, light, spaces, movements, forms, narratives, documents, meanings, immoral hints and refined ethics. Bato seeks reason and release, up to the most extreme possible synthesis of an image. He has his own personal explanation of every work on show, but it is not needed. The viewer already has his reading ready, because every work immediately gives it to him. And yet there is a solid academic background, abandoned in an instant and never brought back. And yet his challenge, Bato knows it, is a difficult one, almost on the brink of certain failure. Bato also knows that he is a "borderline" painter, at high risk of being misunderstood, as the hermetic poets were.

Images reduced to the expressive minimum are a real entrance into the light and the glimmers of everyone's dream, with the risk of being underestimated. But entering Bato's creative world allows you – and that is no small thing – to reconnect with a myriad of cultural and social experiences of the twentieth century, from the refined cinema of Antonioni and Bergman to Vespignani's Grosz-like experiences of the 1940s and 1950s, right up to the most experimental syntheses with the whites of Castellani or Fontana. The whites, after all, enchant, leaving the canvas a merciless and infinite field of image, frightening and questioning. The bare marks in the colour of coffee and earth have given me an artist, a real one, whom until today I had been desperately looking for and not finding. Am I the victim of suggestion? No!

— Paolo Berti, Soriano nel Cimino, 22 July 2008