

*Every exhibit encompasses – especially for those artists that have made experimentation the keystone of their action – an internal dualism. On the one hand, one is at the finish line in his own search that involves *aphánesis*, the unveiling on the outside and the comparison; on the other, one is again at the starting line, for a new wager against himself.*

The current one-man exhibition by Clara Ghelli is not, therefore, only proof of the validity of her most recent works, as much as an occasion to critically reflect on the long creative season that has recently reached a turning point, that will surely signal results even in the near future, given the intellectual coherence that characterizes the artist. Herewith, this ideal dialogue with an artist whose work I have followed for a long time, having the pleasure of retracing 'together' the creative pathway.

Monica Miretti: *By now, the period of your first one-man show in 1992, entitled, significantly, "Clara Ghelli. Natura naturans", has long past.*

Clara Ghelli: *In effect, it marked the first important stage of my artistic path, after a long period of incubation in which I had developed my first experiences. That initial phase of my work was certainly characterized by an attentive and passionate meditation on a few of the exponents of contemporary art, like Kandinskij and Franz Marc, therefore strongly connoted by an expressionist*

component. I gravitated toward these first "instructors" instinctively, satisfying an empathetic concordance and then transferring the visual input that I received onto the natural forms from which my approach to painting originated.

The naturalistic theme of the trees, on which I then concentrated my attention, permeated by the fauve inspiration lent by the artists mentioned, thus continued changing. The result was a mutation of their essence, all of which was filtered by what was even then my great attention to color.

M.M.: *What you have recalled now invites me to place the accent on a founding element of your research, that is, the choice of painting as a privileged means of expression – and I would say unavoidable – in all of your artistic activity. Of course, the years in which you undertook your 'adventure', following the explosion of the Transavantgarde, are characterized precisely because of the privilege accorded to painting in antithesis to the forms of the conceptual art of the 70's. But beyond the reference to related situations, I believe it is necessary to emphasize the pictorial foundation of your research because I'm convinced that it is absolutely the means that is congenial to you, mirroring an intimate and profound expressive need that would not find as effective answers elsewhere.*

Thinking again about the themes confronted by you, it is evident that the initial interest for the real constituted nothing more than a "gymnasium" to get you started on your path, as it has happened for many contemporary artists. In reality we are never, in your work, in the limited field of the mimicry of the real (having nothing to do, in short, with what the legend of painting narrates, that tells of birds intent on pecking grapes on the canvas, believing them to be real!). The necessity of mimetic illusion does not reside in your panels that will soon come to drift apart until they fluctuate in the soft limbo between reality and imagination. An imagination, yours, that has known how to adopt suggestions

close to you in space and in time – I think, in particular, of the influence of artists dear to you, like Mario Nanni – that have left an evident mark on some of your moments of research, for example your “Fluttuazioni” or the contemporaneous series “Proiezione spaziale” and “Verso lo spazio”, making another important element in your work emerge and focus: space.

C.G.: Actually, the special component was already present, if only in a larval form, in my first compositions, devoid, however, of the awareness that I would acquire starting from the mid-90's. And I remember what you said at the time of “Frammenti di spazio” – a more than emblematic title! – precisely in 1995 when you emphasized “a spacial-metamorphic flow of the forms, animated by dynamic tremors of a futurist memory”.

Then, in fact, every reference to the real had been abandoned, or, perhaps it's better to say that it was interiorized in the name of a more and more marked adherence to the spacial rhythm of the forms. No narration, no story as the key to approaching the world, but a mobile dislocation of the forms in which to shatter and essentialize the real, where I gradually revived the primary structures already exalted by Cezanne and filtered on my panels through two fundamental experiences of the 1900's: the breaking down of the cubist matrix and the acceleration of a futurist stamp, which activated the dynamic dimension intrinsic to my work and still very present in the latest results of my work.

M.M.: Undoubtedly, space and dynamism are two of the threads that run through all of your work and even the production from 2000 to now is constantly drenched in it. But in these very last years, your research has opened up to new horizons and it has characterized itself in a totally new manner.

C.G.: The breaking point, on a thematic level, must be placed in relation to the elaboration of the series “Biancaneve” which I exhibited in 2000. I recuperated, in those works, the memory of

my old childhood passions that, in reality, I had never cancelled and that resurfaced on the formal structure elaborated until now. This is how interventions characterized by a marked bi-polarism originated, in which extracts subtracted from the most classical of the Disney cartoons were placed dialectically in comparison with lines from an essentially futurist imprinting. In substance, the theme of the double emerged, which still accompanies me.

M.M.: *And the painting changed within every single work. The plot of a futurist ancestry maintained a more vibrant modulation that tended to flatten in the fragment subtracted from the cartoon, more 'poster-like'.*

Two ages of painting compared, in the end, that represent two different conceptual realities in which you found again elements congenial to you: of futurism we have already spoken, but here the most evident emergence is connected to Pop Art, of which you adopt the American 'tradition' from Lichtenstein to Warhol to Adami, as has been evidenced. Then, in 2002, a new, specific attention still within the formal structure described now: the face.

C.G.: *The theme on which I am still working was taking form and has been amplifying in these years. The fleeting nature of the compositive approach integrated more and more overpoweringly onto the polarity of the first works based on the cartoons, while the imaginative reference changed: from the characters of my childhood to the present-day Dylan Dog and the Japanese Manga.*

M.M.: *Some elements, I am convinced, must be emphasized regarding these most recent works of yours.*

In the first place, the originality of the choice with respect to your initial path, that has brought you onto the wavelength of a most rigorous contemporary nature, in which there is a very striking allusion to the world of photography or of cinema. Despite this, at the same time, you lay claim to the modernity of painting and do not abdicate to the use of new technologies, if not at the

initial phase of the project.

This last aspect, the constant presence of the project as founding moment of the work, deserves a moment of further reflection. The new does not come from the creation, from the invention tout court as much as from the capacity to make existing images live again through simple semantic shiftings. The studied construction of the intersecting faces or of their details with spacial bands that enwrap them (think of "Sequenze") determine disorientations and new references. Furthermore, the focalization of specific details - especially the eyes - create a direct relationship with the observer who feels, on the one hand, penetrated, investigated, naked, on the other, involved in this spiral of plots that draw him inside. Even in the de-personalization of the comic strip face that you propose to us - beautiful, smooth, perfect, with turgid mouth and eternally youthful - the impact on the observer is complete (thoughts run to the Freedberg Il potere delle immagini). Perhaps because the 'mask' that you show us can be worn by each one of us.

C.G.: *Certainly, the face fascinates me, and even more, its expression. A place of emotions but also of thoughts. Of communication without need of words. Of essentiality and, at the same time, profundity. In which everything that we see, but also that we live, is impressed. After all, my faces with intense eyes, in an epoch of recovery of design and of painting in the field of art and of the re-launching of the portrait, translate into universal portraits in which each one can, if he wants, recognize himself. The same paratactics of the work that I carefully plan out de-personalizes the final result in favor of the pure compositive rhythm that has always been of fundamental significance in my work.*

M.M.: *Space, rhythm, dynamism. Certainly, cardinal elements of your artistic activity. However, I would like to add, in conclusion, one further comment. The allusion to the great American Pop-Artists mentioned before is immediate, when your latest*

works are observed, but one thing must not be forgotten: the completely European matrix of your elaboration (and the choice of the eyes, even in this case, says a lot!) that is also revealed in the choice of the chromatic scale that never abandons itself to the stamp-like, joyful and luxuriant color of Pop, in favor of more sophisticated, refined tonalities. And perhaps even more 'meditative' and almost shadowy. What remains in your works is a subtle and vaguely melancholy note that, I believe, derives life from your ancient 'loves' (artistically speaking). After all, when you cut the compositive structure or actually physically take apart the fragments that, at first, existed side by side on the surface of the work as happened in the very recent "Scissioni", you are searching for dialogue. You don't limit yourself to stigmatizing, perhaps even laughing, the reality that surrounds you. Starting with the eyes, you are searching for words.

Monica Miretti