

THE QUEST FOR IMAGES  
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Giovanni Robustelli's 'Saints' come from faraway. Saint Agatha, Saint Lucia, Saint Rosalia do not just come from, or remain in Sicily, they are in the churches, in the kitchens, in the wallets of sailors and emigrants that crossed the oceans seeking their fortune, searching for a brighter future. These Saints protected Catania, Siracusa, Palermo, from Etna's lava, from earthquakes, from plague. But Giovanni Robustelli keeps searching for them in the paper, among lines drawn with a lead pencil. I accompanied him into a shop in Brooklyn, where an old craftsman makes his own crayons and lead pencils.

The carbon comes from limestone and schist materials combined with clay in order to create a softer pencil. It stains your hands, leaving traces, signs, lines or shades on the paper based on the artist's passion, his sensitivity or the music leading his hand.

And Giovanni starts to glide that piece of mineral mingled with earth and to look for the volcano lava that veers off its path, for the flowers, the lilies and the palm trees, a skull and a dog that pauses to watch. Giovanni looks for the "Santuzza", the little saint who saved Palermo from plague and for all those who manage to see beyond the lines. The dark traces of carbon coming from New York hold in them all the colors of Sicilian soil and the desire to discover new things. In Giovanni's art there are the Saints, but there are also women able to express determination and fear, and above all, there is the Vision, his ability to search for the image concealed in a blank sheet of paper, to reveal almost magically the unknown image hidden among the fibers of the simplest and yet most real material: the material that language is made of, the substance of communicating without words. The drawing springs out of nothing, without a preliminary sketch or draft, but this nothing is full of stories.

It reminds me of a similar sensation I felt several years ago while visiting an exhibition of George Seurat's drawings, at the MOMA, located here at New York. I only remember one thing: I wasn't looking at the captions, dates, or titles...I wasn't looking at anything, I just looked and tried to imagine where those thick or thin pencil traits came from, wondering about the origin of those chiaroscuros that spoke about light. Not only is it art, it is a gift.

In their own way, Giovanni Robustelli's 'Saints' speak to us of the most precious miracle: life goes on.

Marco Steiner New York, March 6th, 2015