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## INTERVIEW

«My precision and my obsessions»

A discreet banner sketched on the glass, with the artist's name and surname identifies Giovanni Robustelli's atelier, in Vittoria, at the ground floor of an elegant building in Art Nouveau style, a light and fresh Art Nouveau example. Our conversation starts here in an extremely tidy space, where the different rooms seem to highlight the various creative sides of this artist.

We begin talking about the painting on the easel, still to be completed, with its rich smell of oil colours and enamels. It represents a feminine figure filling the canvas with colour and light, with a strong presence of brushstrokes rendering the subject even more intense.

«It is one of my paintings on Pasolini's Medea. I'm preparing an exhibition on this movie work. I liked the idea of Medea because Euripide's myth has always fascinated me. And I like paintings where you can see the paint».

Pasolini's Medea is a theme that the artist has presented also during the current collective exhibition "Arte per Kamarina".

«It was a sort of trailer of my current work. I wanted to see the impact these paintings had on the public. I wanted the paintings I am currently working on to respect the idea of icons, but keeping the full value the icon as signifiers. My study focus on the signifier and I chose Pasolini's Medea because I consider it the most symbolic myth, firstly at empathic level and secondly, as it also expresses clearly the importance of word, the value that language has».

The specific terms Giovanni chooses, belonging to the linguistics science, his reference to mythology and to Euripides through Pasolini's filmography, his cooperation with Marco Steiner... all these factors lead to a question on Giovanni's relationship with literature, with ideas that are both thought and written.

«I always find intriguing the usage of words as a sign, and therefore as a symbol and a token of conscience. And above all I love the moment when the sign succeeds in going beyond conscience, when an author manages to empty it from a given meaning – what De Saussure called "signified" - showing the instrument behind it - its "signifier". I'm particularly attracted by Pizzuto's literature, that I keep studying, as well as Carmelo Bene's theatre, both authors helping me in looking differently at the whole reality. I love deeply Bufalino, the austerity of his language, and I enjoy opening his books at any page, focus on the first word I read, and from there I keep reading».

I find emblematic Bufalino's Pagine disperse, where each fragment of his lavish prose is sufficient to itself. Robustelli talks about austerity, a trait that seems to be his own style, together with his reliability.

«Yes, it depends on my work not having a specific planning, that is images do not come from preliminary sketches or studies, but directly from the free creative action. When I'm drawing or painting, the action itself absorbs me completely, it's all that matters to me in that moment. Some of my works appear very precise, such as those where I use the bic pen, but they are never planned. What they are rooted on is a deep study of literature, music, art. I worked on the Magic Flute : once I understood the author's intentions, I started working directly but unconsciously. I try and magnify the signifier, to bring it so close that it becomes blurred. It is like in Bernini's Saint Theresa: the saint doesn't see anything, she is not just ecstatic, she is the ecstasy herself.»

How do you place yourself in respect to the Iblean art and its many important representants? Where would you place yourself in relation with the great Iblean tradition?

«I love Gerhard Richter, Anselm Kiefer, artists that are always contemporary such as Antonello da Messina. And Piero Guccione. I keep this postcard from him since when I was 14, together with few others of him that have obsessed me for years. They helped me in creating my own path, especially since they are works containing definite, precise signs. Guccione's sea seems to look at the sensorial nature, and this is misleading. Guccione's d'après is not Michelangelo's Pietà anymore, it is something different: it contains a deep symbolic value; the transition from language to language interpretation is more evident and abstraction is magnified. Usually artists tend to overlook sensorial reality, focusing on cultural reality instead. But Guccione's d'après have always moved me deeply, as they taught me how to look at art history.»

## INSIDE THE ARTIST'S ATELIER

Robustelli's art from Sergio Toppi's lessons to his own original virtuosity. From drawing to painting, heart and fantasy.

Two steps above street level. This is the necessary distance from the reality level where Giovanni Robustelli chose to open his atelier, a place where each element reveals the special trait of this Sicilian true talent. A vintage taste in the early 20th century décor, the green velvet sofa in art nouveau style, the floor in Sicilian ceramic style are all coexisting with the tidy rationality of cabinets and bookshelves, steel lamps that bright up the canvases, in the painting studio where the visitor's eye is suddenly captured by the evocative display of the artist's engraving matrixes. The artist works at several desks, thus combining drawing, heart technique, and painting with his chromatic fantasy and fairytale flavour.

At one of the desks, we follow Giovanni's expert hand, while it holds a simple "bic" pen. On a white sheet, out of nothing, a warrior's head appears, suddenly alive and powerful, especially if we consider that it has been created without the reassuring coordinates of a preliminary sketch, without any structural line delimiting the subject and its proportions. The drawing itself is the structure that rules over the work: this is Robustelli's specific style, he leads the drawing with a secure trait, with a precise virtuosism of the sign, with a refined miniature technique. Both the sign and the drawing carry within themselves the lesson of the artists dear to Robustelli, such as Sergio Toppi, master of illustration, and Piero Guccione, his ideal master and a living legend, but they also show a specific tension that leads each of Giovanni's work to a sharp yet delicate expressivity, rich of dreaming vibes and with a strong personal character.

Moving from the bic sketches to the water painting and to the oil canvases, Robustelli's gallery is populated by several figures coming from fairy tales, literature, classical music – from Spoon River Anthology to The Magic Flute – following inner paths related to codes, but pursuing at the same time a light yet constant distortion that leads the eye away from objectivity.

The new collection inspired by Pasolini's Medea suggests an atmosphere that is almost sacred, while from such evocative suggestions a new language breaks through, Robustelli's language that guards inside it a whole world, both cohesive and consistent, made of Chagall's surnaturel, of the overlapping bodies in Freud's brush strokes, of Max Ernst's incredible and surreal imagination. And Robustelli schive this by steering away from globalization accidents.

## FROM THE DEGREE TO FIGURATIVE ART

Giovanni Robustelli is born in Vittoria in 1980. He graduated in Art History at the faculty of Letters and Philosophy of Genova University. After specializing in Contemporary Art in his post graduated studies, he focused entirely on figurative art, starting from several exhibition experiences with various art galleries. In particular, in 2006 the Rebecca Container Gallery in Genova hosted his first serious artistic project called "Atlante Anatomico – Macroscopia Organica" (Anatomic Atlas, an organic macroscopy). In 2009 he began a strong working relationship with Eduardo Simone, curator of Spazio Papel gallery in Milano.

In the following years, Robustelli's works were displayed in several solo exhibitions and he began interesting conversations with important authors such as Sergio Toppi, that lead to thematic exhibitions. Today, Giovanni Robustelli's works can be found in several private collections in Italy and abroad, and in public and ecclesiastical institutions, for instance the two altarpieces he created for the Church of St. Anthony of Padua in Comiso. Among the different artistic projects in which Giovanni is involved, it is worth mentioning his various painting performances realized in collaboration with musicians, above all jazz players; particularly interesting is "Il Quinto Elemento" (The fifth element) together with jazz player Francesco Cafiso, the master chef Ciccio Sultano and the film director Vincenzo Cascone.

*Elisa Mandarà*