

Inverosimile

Interview with Giacinto di Pietrantonio, 1990 Castello di Volpaia (catalogue)

*The exhibition this year is based on the participation of artists from various expressive disciplines... And which one do I come from?*

*Introduction to the canvas; decadence of the fresco. The invention of oil painting attributed to Jan van Eyck until the testimony of Filarete (1451 -64). You have been invited, in fact, as an artist who expresses his poetics through painting.*

My operation begins with the reinterpretation of already existing images, in this case details of the still lifes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Naples, reproduced by imitating, through painting, the technical abundance of artists like Recco, Ruoppolo, Forte, etc., where the surface is saturated: a horror vacui. In order to achieve a result that renders the philological analysis of the image explicit.

*In the historiography of the 17th century the term "naturalist" did not take on a clearly negative and polemical meaning. It connects back, on the one hand, to the idea of the imitation of nature (both through a 'choice' and through the exact reproduction of the ideal archetype of nature), and on the other especially in contact with poetics, to the idea of the "stupendous deception" or counterfeiting of nature at the hands of the artist. We know from Vasari and Condivi about the extraordinary imitations of antiquity made by the very young Michelangelo, and of a sleeping Cupid which, with an appropriate patina added at the advice of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was later sold in Rome for 200 gold ducats as a classical sculpture, purchased by Cardinal San Giorgio. Not that Michelangelo was an intentional forger but in those days of archaeological enthusiasm and strenuous stylistic experimentation the imitation of classical art taken to the limits of forgery became, for the protagonists of the new figurative culture, an exercise of formal grammar and, at the same time, conscious proof of an achieved emancipation from the ancient models.*

*What do you have to say about this perhaps excessive taste for copying?*

To copy to invent, I don't know I think that in art nothing has ever been "invented" in terms of content, but maybe only in terms of form. Just consider the concept of mimesis or "imitation".

*Reproduction and production of images Platonically opposed to that of the things themselves, whether Human: painted, or Divine: dreams. Figurative: faithful copies of the model and divine production of the cosmos as perceptible copies of eternal models; Fantastic: art of simulacra, imitation through illusory copies that exploit the deception of perspective and the unfavorable position of the spectator.*

What interests me most in an artwork is something else, for example the message that is concealed behind the chromatic research. The training of the artist is important, his technical capacity and style, to say something others have already said in another way.

*We're not looking for a theory of colors (nor a physiological or psychological theory) but for the logic of the concepts of color. And this manages to give us that which, often erroneously we expected from a theory. Imagine that someone were to indicate a point in the iris of an eye painted by Rembrandt and say: "The walls of the room must have been painted this color".*

*Does a "natural history of colors" exist, and to what point is it similar to a natural history of plants? Isn't one of them temporal, while the other is atemporal?*

*In everyday life we are practically surrounded by utterly impure colors. And it is even more noteworthy therefore, that we have constructed a concept of pure colors.*

*So what is the difference between your way of working and that of other artists who have recently revisited the past, like Mariani for example?*

I try to use the past without gratification. I don't make still lifes "like those of the 17th century in Naples", I simply borrow the wrapper, the wrapper in which to dress my ideas. Therefore my work is a reflection on "Beauty in Art", a cool analysis of a burning issue.

*It is the principle of "choice" and of "ideal beauty" Starting with the premise, of Neo—Platonic origin, or a superior or noble nature and an inferior or vulgar nature, the simultaneously moral and aesthetic duty of the artist is to intervene upon nature, making a choice of elements in order to correct the imperfections, to get closer to the archetype of perfect nature.*

*And then you modify your copy falsifying its colors, for example.*

I study the actual work that is my point of reference, but in its reproduction filtered by the photographic image (in catalogues or art history books). Let me explain: at the origin there is a composition of natural fruit, real fruit.

*That of Francis: Fire (beauuul, merry and robust and strong), water (very useful and humble and gracious and chaste), earth ( that sustains and governs), air ( by which to your creatures you give sustenance).*

Then the painter depicts it transforming it into pictorial material. The photograph gives us the pictorial material in printed form, and going a bit further I include, in my final product, both the historical sensibility of the painter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the more modern sensibility of photographic reproduction with its altered light, inevitably diverse proportions, etc.

*Put in this way your work appears not only to be a simple expression of painterly technique, but something with conceptual motivations.*

I don't know precisely what you mean, but I believe that artistic work should be freed as far as possible from definitions, especially those with many connotations.

*In your view does art coincide with technical knowledge of painting, or can it be found in other expressive disciplines? For example, in the world of music, with artists like David Byrne?*

Leonardo said that painting was the first art. It seems clear to me that we cannot talk about technical knowledge, if anything we can talk about "Wisdom". As for the rest, I enjoy listening to David Byrne, but I think it would be more appropriate, in his case, to talk about creativity rather than creation. Pop music is born and grows with the market, which by definition is a mass market, while art would seem to be something else.

*Wisdom, or Wisdom of Solomon, a deuterocanonical book of the Apocrypha in the Old Testament. Written in Greek in the second century BC, in Alexandrine circles, this is a small theological treatise, written for the Jews who suffer alienation and persecution in the Diaspora. It is divided into three parts. I (chap. 1 -5) polemicalizes against the philosophical viewpoints of pessimism and materialism. II (chap. 6-9) develops a sort of reflection on wisdom, attributing it with a cosmic function; III (chap. 10-19) is a meditation on sacred history up to the exodus of Israel in Egypt, in which God has revealed his power and wisdom.*

*You have studied architecture. How do you think this has influenced your work as a painter? ,*

My work is quite project-oriented. For the most significant pieces I still have hundreds of preliminary studies, sketches, notes. I perform trials with colors with all the nearby percentages, in order to reproduce the right tone. This phase, which comes before the painting itself, is also influenced by my architectural studies, and I consider it the most fertile phase. Little room is left for chance, and therefore chance is maximized. My masters include certain great architects such as Leon Battista Alberti, for example. I always study his texts and works with great curiosity.

*I say the work of the painter is thus: to describe with lines and paint with colors, on a panel or wall, the visible surfaces of any body so that at a certain distance and certain position of center they seem to be reliefs, and very similar to having bodies; the aim of painting, to bring grace and benevolence and praise to its maker much more than wealth...*

*Technically how do you make your works, what are the secrets of your craft?*

I'll leave it up to you to discover the secrets. What I can say is that it requires time and much concentration. I believe in daily work, continuous training, an obsessive dialogue... a sort of stylistic exercise.

*Man gives laws and measures to all things, but he derives these principles from the study of nature ("God, that is", says Leon Battista Alberti); he himself is the image of truth and it is revealed in his miraculous conformity to geometric laws of superior regularity (the square, the circle of Vitruvius). The optimal proportion of man must be reflected in that of edifices, which so will increase in beauty. The recognized measures of the human microcosm and the macrocosm of the universe spontaneously connect in simple relationships equal to those that determine the musical chords, and this is the superior guarantee of their perfection, in harmonious consonance with the divine laws that govern the world.*

*Do you, instead, reproduce the same measurements of the original paintings you "copy"?*

No, in fact it is a coincidence if they are in the same scale, but this is not a fundamental point. More than anything else they adapt to the format of the piece, which is decided on the basis of other factors.

*Can you explain what you mean by the first coat of the painting, the second, etc., something you once mentioned to me?*

The first painting usually refers to the application of the masses of color and shading them... to correct the design (when the paint is dry), defining the shadows. One continues by reinforcing the dark tones and then the light tones, to give better definition to the volumes, all this by shading them into the preceding layer. In the final phase one proceeds with the use of rubbing and glazing to achieve maximum values of highlights and tones, utilizing a dry brush for the former, and a brush soaked in the medium for the latter. Then you have to give the whole painting the same light, the same atmosphere, which is obtained by further glazing, but over larger portions. As you know the manuals make it all sound easier than it really is.

*I've been watching you for some time now, and I see that you always work on still lifes: are you planning to go on like this for the rest of your life?*

Certainly not, but for the moment I am still making still lifes, until the cycle wears itself out. In the meantime I am gathering ideas, in private.