

Madaudo the persuader

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They say that Ilaria del Carretto was beautiful even before Jacopo della Quercia immortalized her forever in cold marble. Art and death, which are even closer than you may think, preserved her beauty. And the issue that remains is beauty, because we can avoid dealing with death, as Quassim told me after having seen to the burial of his children killed during the U.S. bombings in Baghdad. So we will deal with the topic of beauty: this is an absolutely modern issue being that the vanguards of the last century, just to name one artistic current, have submitted beauty to many trials almost beyond endurance from which it has emerged “più bel che pria” (i.e., even more beautiful than before).

We can very well say that the extremist art of the twentieth century searched for beauty in intensity and in paradox, in war and in boredom, up to the point of disguising it as its contrary.

But if it is true that those with fine taste compete for Picasso and Picabia, Malevic and Burri instead of some Madonna artist latecomer, isn't it because more than all the others their works re-establish the essence of beauty? Modern art has exalted its screaming and its pain, revolt and disgust. This is the reason why vanguards have dealt with it as if it were another style from the past, and maybe even more so; so much so that the prostitutes that Picasso called “Damoiselles d'Avignon”, who probably in real life were no less beautiful than Ilaria from Lucca, although their faces were transformed into slanting masks, compete with her for charm contiguous to death.

He who does not understand the beauty in vanguard art will likewise not understand the beauty found in ancient art; at the most he will be like a belated bookkeeper (the fact that most art historians are such is exclusively their own problem).

This was my line of thought as I looked at Beppe Madaudo's works, in which the quest for beauty and even a sense of the sublime and marvelous make use of all the tricks of modernity: heterogeneous materials, specially treated images such as photographic solarization, and anything else that he retains or will retain necessary to use, knowing fully well that every technique is nothing in and of itself. He uses the traditional techniques with expertise and likewise he makes use of each type of material in a totally modern way. He has also had to do with completely different modern art forms, such as comic book strips.

Nevertheless his paintings have nothing in common with technological defiance nor is Madaudo a “dog gone loose” with the belated Madonna artists. If one must place him into a category, it would be that of eccentrics, of those who stand out of line. The content of his works also seems unusual since the beauty that he's in search of is of an exotic type: an “Orientalism” which penetrates into Africa or into the East purged of desire and memory, of literary influences and myth or fairy tales. Each image is so full of influences that it seems like a story in itself, a novel of a multitude of events that resurface, hint at things and then they turn back into the liquid state of mystery.

Nonetheless, that which remains at the end of these multiple tales, which are whispered or sung by evocative colors, is always a powerful icon, a strong image that impresses itself upon whomever looks at it.

The organizers of “Umbria Jazz” did well by commissioning him the making of the poster for its 2001 edition, which is the most beautiful one ever designed for this by-now famous Festival.

The saxophone, which takes up the entire space, becomes a magic object containing all of music's spells. Deeply imbedded in the surrounding red color, full of substance and gold, it tells stories that music would never be able to tell, because music tells stories that painting cannot illustrate.

And in these paintings, that which we used to call “the search for beauty”, is a long story. The tigers, the cranes, every type of phantasmagorical bird all seen together is its tale. It is the story or its fabric of tales on which Asia and Africa, Esopo and Salgari have been woven into, and only Madaudo knows who else has been, too.

So this story, which is as long as man's imagination, turns into an Icon, into a powerful image, but also into an image which has been captured during a miraculous split second: that moment which is mostly filled with beauty and mystery.

Madaudo's illustrations are not heraldic. They look good on a poster, but not on a banner to be taken around in a procession or a parade. They come from far faraway in time and in space, but they are loaded, they are full, they are even at the limit of something that soon after, just after a few brush strokes too many would have been transformed into something else, maybe into pure (or impure) color. Thus beauty is a point of extreme saturation which collects influences and stories almost until the image itself disintegrates, blocking it just a moment before it disintegrates. In these works the image is like a very narrow ridge between the abysses of influence and of legend. And as regards to stories and the art of telling them, Madaudo knows what he's doing, being that up until ten years ago he was a famous comic strip author; at least until he got tired and he abandoned this art form without regrets. Is there anything more contradictory to the multiple stories and scansions of comic strips than these fiery icons that come quickly to the point? It is obviously very difficult for them to live side by side, and furthermore the art of putting together a story during a certain time period must have taught much to these images that eat up time giving it back to us all together.

Madaudo remains a great persuader in recent trials just as he was in his comic strip stories, which certainly were not lacking in their persuasive capacity if in one version of "Caso Moro" (The Moro Case) he had even convinced real-life judges, who had put out an arrest warrant for the author accusing him of knowing the true events of the case, which is like accusing him of an "excess of realism".

And it is precisely an "excess of realism" that we find in one of his most fascinating works: a golden haired black woman who is lying down, tapered and with a sumptuous backside on top of a multi-colored Kilim, of the typical style that I've always referred to as "energy bands" or if you prefer as "electrical bands".

Realism in sculpture is due to its disturbing position, above all dealing with a realism, or rather a hyper-realism of desire, being that the form appears to be more classical than natural. It is so in the perfection of its dimensions and in its model of beauty, not wanting it to be too detailed and meticulous like American hyper-realists expected it to be, careful that even each strand of hair didn't betray the effect created by the original real hair. Nevertheless the African beauty of the golden hair is more real than the real one, placed on top of a Kilim which gives body to that sumptuous body, full of all the energy of Asia. And the golden hair? Ask Beppe Madaudo, the persuader.