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Transavanguardia: bel canto ahead, torture behind

Achille Bonito Oliva

T
(*Transavanguardia*)

Although for several decades art followed the long road to utopia, the radiant path of ideology, and therefore remained blissfully aware of its own marginal status, it has now finally reached a blind alley (although one that is infinitely expandable) and is forced to focus endlessly on its own circular itinerary - the penalty for having rejected the *ideology of linguistic Darwinism*, according to one interesting definition (1971). The artist of the Transavanguardia smashed the spectacles that protected his vision, the lens that unified everything, and acquired instead a frenzied, fragmentary lens, objective and indifferent, through which to model his own gaze.

Finally the artist has come down from his control tower and taken up a position on a more mobile lookout point. From here a view of the whole world is impossible, nor can models be used as a yardstick except of their own operation. During the 1970s the prevailing type of art was pure presentation: the artist exhibited materials and composition techniques that contained a kind of internal benchmark, an operative coherence, which themselves became the reason for the work. At the end of the 1970s, with the arrival of the Transavanguardia, we moved on to an art of representation in which the work of art renounced, voluntarily and with the greatest naturalness, the possibility of offering itself as a yardstick for itself and for the world. Representation became the instrument by which current art, with delightful humility, registered the historical exhaustion of pretence - of the pretence of offering one self as a project and a deliberately abstract unit of measurement, for every possible purpose: *Disegno/Trasparenza (Drawing/Transparency)* (1975), was the theoretical outline of a non-propaedeutic dexterity in the planning of a work of art. It was the avant-garde's tradition alone that had been concealing this hope.

The artist of the Transavanguardia has discovered a healthy uncertainty to work, a long way from superstition or from references anchored in secure tradition. He is therefore a nihilist, in the Nietzschean sense of the word, released from the centrality provided by references; since all references are now acceptable, he is freed of the traditional baggage of despair that accompanies man when he loses faith in reason, ready to explain all contradictions and to return him to the cosy security of motivation.

If the nihilism of Nietzsche is a situation in which man rolls forth from the center towards point x, then the artist of the Transavanguardia is the complete nihilist, who invests in his condition and is reassured by anyone who feels he is in motion rather than on the road to perdition. Movement is always a symptom of dynamism, of a healthy movement towards the unrecognized. In former times, the unrecognized was always the unknown, the dark part to be removed, the perennially insecure dimension. In this case the complete nihilist uses the energy of art and the oscillations of irony (inspired by the neo-metaphysical tradition of De Chirico in the 1970s) the better to roll.

In order for this to happen, spiritual ties or directions must be abandoned and a move be made away from the privilege of centrality, if necessary along byways or minor routes. The work of the artist today, rolling merrily along under the weight of his own work, is sustained by active movement; laden with painting materials, the artist is freed from the weight of linear, inhibiting beliefs. The unrecognized point x is the ill-defined goal of his many explorations.

As a complete nihilist, the artist of the Transavanguardia proceeds with care towards the particular, enjoying the pleasure of loss, the loss of a comprehensive personal vision through the revival of the narrative module, which proceeds in fits and starts, and is fired by tiny details. The image tells of a sentimental story related to extremely precarious historical conditions, that follows a path found in the *deviated quotation* of the mannerist traitor (1972). The exasperated one-sidedness of anyone looking at the world without accepting it, reacting only in his internal reserves of metaphor and allegory, within the mental enclosure of the "psychological space" of the image. A *sweet subject* inhabits the pictorial image of the Transavanguardia, already visible in *Tre o quattro artisti secchi* (*Three or Four Artists-Straight*) of 1978.

The sweetness in this case signals an identity without *strong affirmation* socially, eager to practice a non-declamatory style in art. The lack of a unified point of view, the subsequent conquest of the state of mind that manifests itself in an eclectic manner. Eclecticism is a further characteristic of a *sweet project* (1986), of the condition of the real artist who, with his work, tends to *neutralize the differences* for co-existence, to obliterate the overlap between the various styles and the distance between past and present.

Different cultural temperatures intermingle and create a composite image that pushes in many directions, according to a mobile system of spatial relations. A *constellation of signs*, open towards separate strong points, inhabits the space of the work and is built into the idea of a delicate project, the graded aggregation of elements which displace the image constantly towards a slip and a slide and a total loss of meaning. Because if the artist is such a complete nihilist, his product must be on a trip to the unknown: *Opere fatte ad arte* (*Works Made by Art*, 1979), demonstrates an awareness of living in a particular historical dimension, defined by the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka as the "gulf of transition".

F (fatherland)

Transavanguardia, its own main critic, and art is its portable fatherland.

C (communication)

The story of Western art, based on the principle of *techné* (or "art" in Greek), the myth of action and transformation, is the fruit of a linear evolution of language, self-regeneration at a highly experimental rate capable, through the renewal of materials and techniques, of developing surprises in terms of deliberate communicative "improprieties", anticipated by the Futurist imperative of Marinetti and Boccioni.

In fact art encourages, even obliges the public to participate, summoning them to work: a *working public*. The public may switch off and give contemporary art a wide berth, in its skeptical way, or it can accelerate and grow curious, enter into an energetic relationship, participate, work interactively at participating in the meaning the work is trying so hard to convey.

Hooking up with the meaning presupposes a distance that allows the significant to shine through, an

effective communication. The dematerialized work of art surfs the net, the phantom has substituted his own body. Released from the spatial permanence of the wall or the floor, it slides rapidly past the spectator's eyes, accelerating so hard it vaporizes the meaning.

Coupled with a circular movement in the art system, however, this distance reproduces the entropic law to which the destiny of our planet is subject, totally dependent on the solar system. "Since the radiance of the sun is without counterpart, since the sun gives life *for nothing* (in exchange for nothing) to the surface of the globe, there is generally energy *in excess* for the needs of living material. If the universe squanders itself in this way, man can only be *extravagant*, a "man of laughter, a dancer, a party giver". Only his strong desire to be *separate* separates him from this solar truth; he may deny it, but he is incapable of expending less: it is essential that a certain quantity of energy should be expended *as pure loss*" (Pierre Klossowski).

This vitality, the fruit of the to and fro movement of the energy produced by the sun, dissipates part of its power in this circulation and is therefore destined to be extinguished: the death of life. Nevertheless, in spite of this threatened entropy, season follows season, luxuriant and tremendous in fierce repetition. Nature, in her own organic profusion, seems to reject such a hypothesis and to stand out against the journey towards death. Art is just the same, with its relentless experimentation over the centuries; it battles against the entropy of meaning, trusting to the slide of meaningful renewal thanks to the driving self-sufficiency of language.

"We are all dead already", says Prigogine. In spite of such a definite assertion, humankind continues to feast, with a dynamism encouraged by technological progress. Lust for life ensures the continuity of history against entropic determinism; we are all invited to the "free lunch" described in a later statement by the ironical Prigogine.

The art of the Transavanguardia does the same thing: in its uninhibited, free flight it pursues a circular strategy of surprise, aiming at experimentation but citing from Duchamp and Picasso, stylistic ready-mades and formal elaboration.

During the progressive *rigor mortis* of communication the artist develops unexpected gaps which restore energy by exchange and vital attention.

It is the gratuitous nature of artistic production, and not free will, that responds to the subject's biological need to establish formal hypotheses; these condense meaning and take hold like fruitful, permanent clots in the inert fluidity of life.

Western art has put all its money on experimental acceleration, dominated by an attitude that has allowed civilization to transform nature into history, vital energy into a state of consciousness. Oriental art, on the other hand, paying respectful attention to the circular proliferation of life, has developed a strategy of repetition that continually reproduces the symmetry between the microcosm of the work and the macrocosm of the universe. Both, however, constitute a response of *opulence* to the progressive *poverty* of a planet doomed to certain annihilation.

Obviously it is optimism alone that lifts us from the condition lying in wait for us, the progressive paralysis which at present is scientifically irrevocable. But although until a few decades ago only art invited us to make a "free lunch" of its unforeseeable and unforeseen forms, now telecommunications with the kleptomaniac *blob* of its various languages seems to be developing a dazzling, astonishing spectacle.

This astonishment arises from the view of various artistic forms as pure surface, without the supportive utopia of art itself. Whereas art invites the public to take part in a moment of problematic awareness and discovery, information technology, with its ability to invade private space, exploits the spectator's immobility and domesticity.

Yet consumption of a spectacle of this sort echoes the entropic trend, rather than contradicting it. Hence the need for productive activity - new ideas and progressive amazement. Amazement is not

the fruit of surprise. It is the effect of an artificial construction, a cage that puts the spectator in a horizontal, incurably passive position.

For symmetry, the artifice (not random) is reinforced by the use of *Ecstasy*, a chemical which develops physical resistance to the repetition of sounds. Young people avail themselves of such drugs, their theater is the vast discothèque in which the sum of those solitary lives is enclosed.

The spectacularization of the media industry requires consumption without surprises; there is a need for secure passivity to guarantee the return to such experiences, all lived as a kind of catharsis.

Catharsis corresponds to entropic movement, navigation without obstacles which expands life's potential in purely quantitative terms. The art of the Transavanguardia on the other hand combats the emptiness produced by technology, introducing a spiral movement of verticalization that emphasizes individual creation and difference.

The quality of difference as contrasted with the quantity of repetition. The *ecstasy* of creation as contrasted with the *ecstasy* of repetition. The spinning of one's own imagination, the natural fruit of individual necessity and moral responsibility. An unequal struggle between the craftsman-like solitude of the artist and the *collectivization* (production and consumption) of industry.

The art of the Transavanguardia, divested of its utopia by technology, confirms the etymological need for the word, its *non-locus* status. This strategy, and the deliberate lack of anywhere stable to stay, ensured by constant wandering, places the artist in a happily possession-free condition, at the same time causing understandable anxiety.

The ecstasy of the work of art guarantees the artist the opportunity to affirm his identity as an artificer every time. This identity has the delicate peculiarity of being socially intermittent, confirmed by the sight of the work of art but also attenuated by the interval between one creation and the next.

The *techné* which has always characterized the visibility of art is now being subjected to loud public discussion because of the brutal comparison between it and the spectacular products of industrial technology. Its problematic gift, the work of art, is contrasted with the product of industry, which also goes straight for the heart of collective desire. The danger of the second gift lies in the dematerialization of the spectacular gimmick, the assumption of the abstraction that always accompanied artistic production in its phantom-like representations. The exemplary, highly individual phantom of the work of art is contrasted now with an army of similar phantoms, a hybrid host of images that invite infantile, effortless consumption, interactivity supported by the prostheses of technology.

The art of the Transavanguardia, on the other hand, offers no assistance for instant fruition; it offers an alternative to the current codes, encouraging individual effort rather than collective bliss, even when it employs reassuring techniques validated by the test of time.

The collective, instant hedonism of the spectacular *plot* camouflages the contemplative pleasure of the work of art.

To the Pokemons of the masses, the art of the Transavanguardia opposes the *awkwardness* of a well-chosen monstrosity, achieved through the unpredictability of forms possessing within them the intentionality of duration and the attempt to construct a density of meaning not immediately reducible to vapour. An admirable reversal of the tendency of a trend of our times marked by what Zygmunt Bauman terms "liquid modernity".

J (journey)

Transavanguardia is a journey of ideas about a family of artists unrelated to each other.

A
(artists)

Depth of surface: Sandro Chia.

Sandro Chia operates in a broad range of styles, supported by intense technical expertise and a notion of art which finds the reasons for its existence within itself. These reasons include the pleasure of a painting finally withdrawn from the tyranny of novelty, and thus capable of using various "manners" to achieve the image. References are innumerable, none are excluded: from Chagall to Picasso, to Cézanne, to de Chirico, from Carrà the Futurist to Carrà the metaphysical painter and the twentieth-century painter, to Picabia.

Stylistic considerations are fast overridden by the quality of the result, some where at the crossroads between technical expertise and a state of grace. Painting has become a field in which manual skill and mental concept have at last reached a balance. In the work of Chia the image (even at the outset, when it was decidedly post-conceptual) is always supported by the dictates of the title: *The Shadow and Its Double*, 1971 and *Immobility, Various Aspects*, 1976, plus a didactic verse or a short poem painted directly on to the picture, which serves to reveal its internal workings. The pleasure of the painting is accompanied by the pleasure of the pleantry, by the ability to combine the frenzy of making the painting with the prophylactic detachment of irony: *Paradox of the Unforeseeable Conference - Moonlight* of 1974, on the inexpressibility of art. The work of art becomes a mobile circuit of inward and outward references, all serving an image that offers itself to view with a double valence: as a pictorial substance and as a mental form. In the first case the image is satisfied with the material that constitutes it, in the second case the image is the stunning embodiment of an idea: art only exists when embodied in the fabric of art. In Chia's work the image is always crystal clear.

Chia's productive mobility is born from an impulse to avoid geometry belonging to an object fixed to a particular idea of the world, frozen into an ideological scheme. Comic figures, highly dramatic figures, strong and light tones run incessantly across the canvas, according to the dictates of a sensibility which, like a peacock, parades its tail, flaunting its ability to change styles continually. The individual works become little transit stations, silent stopping places in the artist's style, his great style, the style that allows him to find his identity through the making of paintings.

Chia's "mannerism" rests on the volubility of his style, on his ability to gather up objects as they pass rapidly by, with their canny hidden correspondences. Care for detail and tiny scenes denote an awareness of the precariousness, the lack of binding pretexts, which allow the artist to operate contentedly, without hysterics, on the mobility of manual skill, on the transitory use of painting. The painting becomes the slope over which the stylistic vicissitudes of an imagined world jostle and flow, far from heroic fixity. Chia's expressive opulence rests on the free fluctuations of his creative impulse, uninhibited and open: language and its articulations bring no symbolic forms into the work of art, forms which would correspond historically to their use. The temperature of the work allows no fidelity, Chia manages to transfer and transform some of the heroic language of the historical avant-garde and other artistic movements, for example the twentieth century, into the more domesticated tones of a painting style which holds every parameter and every genealogical tree to have been dissipated. Art means leaving the semantic catastrophe in which not even the avant-garde were spared, taking advantage of the loss of meaning in order to produce a healthy creative drift, ready and willing to stop off in any place, public or private.

Many cultural climates are concentrated in the work of Chia, but he avoids becoming identified by their use. This is the consequence of the outflow of languages, historically pure but contaminated by the process of art. A drift of pleasure influences the nomadism of Sandro Chia: he brushes past so

many cosmopolitan languages, from the Fauves to the Symbolists. Yet an acute *genius loci* accompanies all his work, gathering all his sources into one stream, into the state of grace of a robustly Italian style. The Italian artist's move to the United States in no way changed his creative trend. "Everything disappears, everything speeds up in the rear-view mirror of the memory... It is difficult to keep admiration alive, the brilliant flash of surprise, difficult for objects to keep their full significance. Things never last much longer than the time of their happening... Even the contingency of the Eternal Return becomes precarious" (Jean Baudrillard, *America*).

Frontier of images: Francesco Clemente

Francesco Clemente has always worked at gradually dispensing with style, and using many techniques indiscriminately: painting, photography, drawing, fresco, mosaic. His work is accompanied by a nomadic, eclectic idea of art and this makes him a protagonist of the Transavanguardia. His image plays with repetition and difference. The former stems from the intentional use of stereotypes and stylization, which gives his art an appearance of conventionality. In reality, this conventionality is nothing more than what first meets the eye; it awaits subtle, unpredictable variations which create a dislocation in the object reproduced, the suspension of time and a slowing down which carry the spectator towards imperceptible differences.

From the post conceptual works of the *Untitled* paintings of 1973, to the *Ornament Room* of 1975, *Couple of Deceit* (corner mural of 1976) or to *Couples at Work* of 1978, gradually until the portraits and self portraits of the 1980s, Clemente has always worked on a chain of assonances, visual analogies that free the image from any need for reference. This creates a new contemplative state and a sort of quietude. The image is removed from its traditional frame of reference and repositioned in a different direction, imbued with an oriental discipline to be encountered in the void surrounding the figures hanging in space in the painting.

Clemente was born in Naples but is a nomad by vocation; he has traveled through history and geography with his many trips to India (and one to Afghanistan in the company of Boetti). These served to develop in him an admirable shortcircuit between East and West. Alighiero Boetti and Luigi Ontani were transgenerational friends, as Clemente remembers so clearly: "Alighiero taught me to reason (in terms of painting) even though he did not paint. He thought the game played before anything was physically produced was important. I learned from Ontani to impersonate a painter. Thanks to him I learned that 'the painter' is a mask" (2002). He has now been resident in New York for twenty years, with regular stints in New Mexico, and continues to practice his art; in addition to the opulence of paint, he carries on with the "minor" arts of drawing, watercolors, fresco and mural. His iconography is the fruit of a sparkling language, intense and illuminating, the bringer of light which directs its brightness towards the excesses of the image.

The opulence stems from the sliding of his language, which breaks the impoverished resemblance of merely representational figures, as in the work of Schiele. Art here is not competing with reality. It avoids comparison, withdrawing to the secluded recesses of an imagined world which takes no interest in conflicts with the real world, remaining anchored in its own interior matter, the filaments of a language played out somewhere between figuration and decoration.

For Clemente, art is also the product of catastrophe: in 1976 he produced examples of catastrophe which shortcircuited normal procedure, they were the product of movement inside the implacable silence of language. No noise exists as a resonant background to the combustion of the image. It is a blinding flash, allowing distance without time, contracted into the second in which it appeared, in the contortion of the material which is paradoxically full of surface.

Comedy and the grotesque are endemic marks of his style and produce peculiar shapes. In the work of Clemente, all is laid on the surface, well clear of any psychological idea of depth. Art is a system

of combinations that extols the value of affinity. The system is extolled in a work like *Comic Ornament of the Archaic Man*, from the early 1980s. The comedy arises from the ambiguous use of conventional elements, from the commonplace which is so delicately and explicitly overturned: this can be inferred from the large output (during the 1980s) of erotic images, natal and prenatal, of the artist and his wife Alba. During the 1990s Clemente gave further evidence of a sense of variation, the feeling of a style open to changes which alter it constantly. Also constant are the fragmented bodies and a slackening sense of space.

All Clemente's styles benefit from the presence of tenderness, barbarity and Eros in his particular utopia: the desire to avoid the enemy.

The curved glance: Enzo Cucchi

Enzo Cucchi accepts movement, inscribes the mark of his concave personal language under the banner of inclination, literally the *clinamen*, where falls are never vertical, where *pondus* does not exist, where there is always movement anchored to the curve of a slow fall, in which the paths of microcosm and macrocosm cross and *chaos* and *cosmos* find fire for their own combustion: from *Enzo Cucchi ex Enzo Cucchi* of 1974, a short circuit between handwriting and image, to the *Home Portrait* of 1977, the foundation of the artist's practice of drawing, and *Montesicuro Cucchi Enzo giù* of the same year.

In the work of Cucchi, the image is the fire that determines the temperature of the work, bringing different materials and techniques to burning point until finally they blaze in a blinding, searing apparition; this is the basis of the artist's particular eroticism, the consequence of desire ruled by a very different economy to the one we are familiar with in daily life. In fact art alarms an economy set in motion by an imagined world which fulfills an explosive function, blocking the eye of the spectator in this long wait, in the stupefaction of contemplation; the spectator is thus precipitated into the image. This marks the threshold, and its strength resides in presenting itself without exertion, in donning this pompous attire which betrays natural abandonment.

"Art is an aspect of man's search for grace: its ecstasy, sometimes, when it partially succeeds; its rage and agony when it sometimes fails" (G. Bateson, *Stile, grazia e informazione*).

Ecstasy takes hold of Cucchi, the artist, it is a necessary state for him to be able to bring his disguising of the image into the condition of *epiphany*. The image bears, on one hand, an imbalance between itself and those external to it, on the other hand it produces (once having displayed its own difference) a state of integration through ecstasy which modifies the relationship between man and reality. Art possesses within itself a corrective nature, that encourages it to correct the irrepressible gesture of its initial appearance and to establish a social relationship at the moment of contemplation.

Many skulls inhabit the landscape of Enzo Cucchi, displaced in an airy heap, rolling and fixed to boats, tree trunks and cascades of color. Thus the imaginary expresses the weight of its totality, its need in its unruly movement to pull up the root of life which is death: "A great region revealed in sickness", the Mannerists used to say. To ratify the breadth of vision perceptible beyond any phenomenology of the living. To be alive, for Cucchi, means to broaden the field with an iconography of ordinary life that removes death and sickness, and guarantees control of the extant.

The function of art, for Cucchi, is the opportunity it affords to be able to *corrupt* this barrier, to open it towards the decomposition of other images which contain, like Chinese boxes, unforeseen, unplannable dynamics, wide open to an economy of waste and not guaranteed in any form, polluted by a *cupio dissolvi* which overturns all the vital functions of art. "There is a joy in art which carries within it the pleasure of destruction" (Frederich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*). Constitutionally, the artist takes off from a landscape with ruins, but is able to depart from it with

constructive intent. For Cucchi, art requires a prophylactic catastrophe that reduces living things to zero, then amidst the smiling ruins he works with what is left to create a work that moves freely between painting and sculpture.

Creative power cannot create nothing from nothing, but wielded by humans it can assemble disparate elements: "...To be able to exceed even ethics: not simply to stand impaled above them, with the anxious rigidity of someone who fears he may slip and fall at any moment; but rather to dance and play above ethics!" (Frederich Nietzsche).

Seen in this light the work of Cucchi moves in the shape of an internal wave which dismembers his landscapes, subjecting them to a combusive force that ignores the laws of gravity. He creates an admirable synthesis between the fluidity of Licini's sign and the figurative density of Scipione, with additions in other materials.

Gravity implies being anchored to the norms of moral security which art does not recognize and does not wish to recognize, since it refuses to be underpinned by any pre-existing value or by any *status quo*. The work of art is like the burglar's jemmy picking amongst the ruins, rearranging the shards according to the laws of *perpetual flux*, fitting no conventional model of order.

Cupola painting: Nicola De Maria

Using abstract language, Nicola De Maria breaks through the frame of the painting and invades the architecture of lived experience. The result is a painting that has the spatial cadence of the *concave*, a curve that embraces the spectator's gaze and his sensory complexity. This kind of art does not demand frontal contemplation, it demands a movement of the body experiencing the aesthetic transfiguration at no distance. De Maria's *cupola painting* perfectly interprets the Italian *genius loci*, in which "*vita brevis et ars longa*" becomes the visible emblem of the stratified traces of a great culture, one that touches the architecture of everyday life. Baroque is the style which best interprets the desire for absorption of the artistic sensibility, in all circumstances.

A discreet, filigree cupola comfortably covers everything pre-dating the painting. A musical phrase of abstract lines, in various colors, crosses the walls and the ceiling and bunches around some small squares superimposed on the newly painted architecture. The cupola makes silent vertiginous movements, abandoning its concave rhythm to bounce from one wall to another, from inside to out, into the streets in which men and objects scurry about in distracted pursuit. Like paintings facing the windows, the painting takes over the frames of the windows giving on to the street.

To the city's mass festivities, De Maria responds with a selective festival of painting, constructed from carefully considered (yet uninhibited) bands of color, presaged as early as the beginning of the 1970s by a very personal use of photography. The color is never aggressively bright or competitive, it sends us back to a *nostalgia for totality*, one of the artist's defining characteristics with regard to the purely gestural hedonism underlying the recovered creativity of his generation.

This painting does not weigh man down, although its intention is to cohabit with him, accompanying him through the ins and outs of everyday life, like the embodiment of an existential state, insinuating itself silently into the unadorned dimension of existence.

"Never bring shame on others," Nietzsche taught us. The art of De Maria stands well away from the logocentric pride of Western painting, which is almost invariably based on technical bravura and bold execution, on the superiority of process and on a simplistically stupefying product.

The *cupola painting* is protective, never invasive or frontally challenging. As a result it produces no sense of shame or inferiority in anyone unused to the techniques of art. The artist is the creator of a *construction of morality*, involving painted architecture without the authority of the Baroque which was designed to influence society. The almost lyrical delicacy of the painting suggests a different way of contemplating, consisting of progressive absorption rather than full frontal amazement.

Abstraction becomes the linguistic operation of a creative will keen to cross man's sensual field like music, challenging his initial inattention. The *architecture in slow-motion* begins to move, never denouncing its own beginning and end, knowing no spatial or temporal boundaries.

Abnormal, like painting itself, silently brimming over the frame as noiselessly as a liquid spills over the brim assigned to it, with the chromatic ineluctability of a Poliakoff crossed with Klee.

The skin of the painting is flexible, De Maria's tattoo of signs and colors impressed on the Roman walls. Expansible and elastic, indestructible and luminous. Impervious to decay. Strong is the industrious hand of the artist who works on the ancient architecture to transfigure it and at the same time to protect it.

The artist's intervention is of great value. De Maria covers the dumb wall with the chromatic sound of a wandering, nomadic painting, touching the space of many countries without ever losing its identity or its cadence. As music can be played anywhere, with its stainless flexibility and endless capacity for dialogue. In fact the artist is working on the typology of the cupola and the frame, absorbing into the exhibition the surroundings around and outside the exhibition, visible in the street in a different dimension from closer things, the dimension of distance. Thus an aesthetic extension of the painting is produced, capable of survival inside or out, social attention and distraction, viewing from the front or the side.

This expansion becomes the painting's ability to possess a body that is organically growing, or is at least ready for contraction and expansion. Naturally not a figurative body, no definite members are outlined. Stopping places are represented by six small squares which sometimes inhabit the walls, places where the painting can slow down and condense, a scattering of *precious centrality* which enclose and synthesize the creative process.

To conclude, Nicola De Maria produces *frontier painting*, between art and life, a hinge for the social gaze which oscillates between the inertia of the everyday and the intensity of the aesthetic field, in delicate perpetual motion. This is the secular aspect of incessant, febrile labour, in large and small format, keenly aware of the excellent, magnanimous gesture which creates a shortcircuit between the *I* of art and the *we* of the world.

Forms of paradise: Mimmo Paladino

The painter Mimmo Paladino adopted Baudelaire's nature as a metaphor for painting. In general, this is connected with the principle of inexorable development and growth, the exuberance of organic forms intertwining with no obvious motivation.

As Western culture has developed from the Middle Ages to today, it has assumed a dual identity: *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, the generative principle of every genus, governed by inscrutable norms and the product of transformation by man, capable of definition and memory.

The figurative image of art could be said to confirm the definition of *natura naturata*, a linguistic construct defined within its confines. A representation that tends to reduce the forest to the size of a garden.

As a painting accepts the surrounding frame, thus nature accepts the limitations put upon it by man: the cultivation of flowers, trees, waterways and thick vegetation. The garden implies control and possession, contemplation of the whole and of a detail. Man accompanies organic growth by attention to a selective and dialectical project: the garden designates the desire for power and the awareness of limits, the need for development and planning.

It is the fruit of an organic plan, which combines liberty of growth and the intention to control. Paladino's creativity combines both polarities, producing a painted garden in which organic and symbolic forms intermingle, as do natural and anthropomorphic figures, in which the archaic nature of the sign and the modern informality of the image coexist in a kind of reconciled representation.

Oriental culture sees the garden as a paradise, a place for delight surrounded by a wall, hidden from the eyes of the uninitiated; the infidel comes from the territory beyond the wall.

Undoubtedly this integralist vision of the garden as paradise has its source in a culture dominated by religion.

In the Western garden there is no separation between art and religion, and the figure of the infidel does not exist.

Here there is simply the figure of the artist creating the miracle of the paradise-garden, in the sequestered silence of his studio, painting for the contemplation of the crowd and eager to confirm the principle of beauty.

In his Transavanguardia mode, Paladino pursues cultural nomadism and stylistic eclecticism, admirably evidenced in the early 1970s, but the narrative use of a photograph defiled by scribbles.

With the first he integrated the horizontal concept of *natura naturata* and the oriental idea of paradise. With the second he constructed a garden of figures and images, devised with the sense of continuity and the exuberance typical of a garden.

The artist becomes the fertile soil which produces a language linked to the nature of the soil, to its *genius loci*, a specific inspiration emanating from the anthropological territory inhabited.

This give rise to a Gothic iconography combining human figures, animals and plants, typical of the art and culture of Lombardy, of which so many traces remain in the birthplace of the artist, Benevento.

In the work of Paladino, as in the poetry of Baudelaire, "forests of symbols" develop under the "familiar gaze" of the artist, in a peaceful equilibrium between nature and history, organicism and memory, between Roman and Gothic, avant-garde and tradition, legitimating the familiar, imaginative gaze of the artist who weaves in quotations from mediaeval frescoes by Giotto and the sculptural purity of Arturo Martini.

A purity of intent which puts artistic creativity on a par with the growth of the garden. The transition from the garden to paradise is dictated by the construction of a pictorial space which is "beatified" by a temporal murmur, blocking artistic periods into a single image, a miraculous synthesis evoking Gorky and the hygiene of the twentieth century.

Paladino's image is instantaneous, and admirably static: a garden surrounded by "living columns", the response to the need to give life to an architecture defined by vision, emanating from the subsoil in complete, well calibrated shapes.

"Long echoes" define the images of Paladino, produced by single sounds and individual apparitions which finally achieve cohabitation: "they mingle in a shady and profound unity". The correspondence between Baudelaire and Paladino arises because both are modern artists, living in cities that provide both spleen and separateness.

Painting and poetry, sometimes sculpture and drawing, are the languages confronting the negativity of modernity, sometimes also taking on stylistic effects connected with the transition from modernity to post-modernity: contamination, reconversion, recycling, deconstructing and contextual memory of the whole, the latter typical of the telecommunications era.

Paladino's manual telecommunications produce a stylistic memory, and at the same time an ability to combine figuration and abstraction, geometry and ornament.

All condensed into the formal unity of the work, like a garden seen "from afar", full of corresponding scents, colors and sounds, constructed by hand, in the scale of the "near". Paladino's paradise garden needs to be contemplated from a "distant" scale, so that the formal balance of the whole can be appreciated, the difference of the "long echoes" and the "forest of symbols".

The symbols were installed as the image grew, in the creative flow which makes no distinction between past, present or future, nor between tree, man or animal. If the garden represents

specialized cultivation, paradise implies the place where everything is in harmony, where detail is suppressed, the transition from the specialized identity of the city to the simple indistinct quality of paradise based on apparition.

N
(no global)

Transavanguardia is a theory of confrontation, *non global* and *versus*: against the globalization of art and homologous languages of art. In favor of: the identity of the subject, the affirmation of the *genius loci* as an anthropological but never a territorial value.

E
(ethics)

This is where the great battle in art begins, the battle to give form to the image, whatever it may be: this provides the ethical tension. The Transavanguardia reconstructed the temporal ethics of artistic creation, not viewing the making of art as purely process, but as the means of working towards the final solution of representation.

If Pop Art is an apologia for artifice and for the world of products, and if it made a fetish of the details of life, this means that it did not and could not possess the ability to judge the world except by being a pragmatic, optimistic part of that world. With European cunning, the Transavanguardia worked on families of details that had no relationship to one another (as in the work of Giorgio Morandi), on the universal impossible, avoiding isolated presentation even while crowding the surface of the painting with tiny events. Whereas advertising has to isolate the product it is describing, in order to confirm its existence more positively, the artist turns this attitude on its head and multiplies presences, creating a multiple and simultaneous communication.

The artist paraphrases the claim made by Cage that all art is a material, of which one can be a kleptomaniac as well as a witness. Not a cool detached witness, because it is impossible to distance oneself from a world that permits no serene, contented contemplation.

The world is what it is: a state of permanent tension, not only produced by the natural movement of things, but also by the disequilibrium and economic and social tyranny, ruled by an effective globalization of the system.

The art of the Transavanguardia therefore bears *anti-global* witness to aesthetic forms that affirm the individuality of the subject and the difference in the *genius loci* (1981). At the same time it succeeds in recognizing the chaos existing in the world, where disorder is not the overthrow of order, it is the degradation of reason on purely economic grounds, which lives according to a separate and separating order, placing man in a state of solitude and thus rendering him asocial and unfit to fraternize with other men.

The Transavanguardia adopted a tactic and a strategy. The tactic was the organization of the operational space for art (the painting, the wall of the gallery or the museum), and mobile and variable shapes that were simply appurtenances of the art system. This firm support contains mobile maps of sensibility, the fruit of unusual iconographies on which the elements of the composition vary. The fluid nature of these visual groups has an intense mobility, the strategic possibility of multiple and easily modulated relationships with the outside world.

But variations always turn up in the same field, which is the field of historical violence, even when this is accompanied by the lightness of development and change. The strategy pursued by the artist is to produce an awakening of consciousness, plus a positive affirmation of life and of the aesthetic

gesture simultaneously. For if art lives on the contradiction between its own affirmation and the negativity of what it affirms, it is also true that this duplicity cannot be individually reduced, it can only be used as a contradiction.

L
(labyrinth)

Labyrinth of art: bel canto ahead, torture behind.