

INEFFABLE WORLDS

Michela Sena

This exhibition arose from a series of coincidences and unique circumstances. Like the majority of us, in the last year I was compelled to stop, to limit my travels to those most essential and to radically modify my work routine. I established a daily practice by working remotely with the gallery and with the artists that I follow on the other side of the world, and sold works to my client-collectors on Instagram. Most of all, I continued to curate exhibitions and conceive of new projects, developing them from intuition to practical realization. These projects were envisioned and born without the need of my physical presence: like test tube children, they have my same DNA, they resemble me on all counts but I did not carry them in my womb.

My last business trip before the world stopped saw me in New York for the Armory Show, precisely in the days when covid was rapidly spreading in the West. It was mid-March 2020 and the virus would explode in New York shortly thereafter. Suddenly, on March 12th Trump declared a state of emergency and in one fell swoop most international flights were cancelled. Miraculously, I managed to take the last flight to Italy, which in the meantime had passed from a state of complete openness to a radical and severe lockdown. Germano Celant, one of the greatest Italian art critics of the last century, who contributed to writing the history of Italian contemporary art, was on my same flight; he had also been at the Armory and like me, was on an emergency return to Italy. Sadly, Celant passed away a short time later, fatally crushed by covid, which he had contracted precisely in New York.

I decided to remain in Italy, in spite of the fact that I had been dealing with Asian art for the last twenty years; in Rome I would wait for the situation to normalize and for the emergency to end. From Rome, I continued to curate exhibitions of Asian artists, thinking, in the first few months, that the stop wouldn't last long. Evidently, I was wrong. The restrictions lasted much longer than I could have imagined, and I was able to board a plane only several months later. Yet, as is often the case for those like me, who are not easily reconciled, I treasured this new condition. Precisely because of this enforced pause in Italy, I had the privilege of experiencing what I would never have been able to otherwise: to discover the new generation of artists and the avant-garde that is coming to life.

The nature of Rome goes well beyond "the beauty of Rome". Even though the city is seemingly welcoming to those who visit it, Rome is much more impenetrable than what might initially be perceived. Rome's quintessence is almost inaccessible, the best art galleries in Rome are not looking for an audience, on the contrary, they must be sought out. Likewise, having access to an artist's studio means engaging in an experience that is unique every single time. For this reason, it is difficult to have an overview of the Roman artistic scene if not after in-depth research that, had I not been forced to remain in the city for so long, I would never have had the opportunity to begin.

My investigation began with the examination of the material of various artists, all pertaining to the same generation, with the intention of focusing on artists born after the 1990s, the youngest ones, the most representative of the contemporary scene. What interested me was understanding what was happening, at what stage was the local art scene, and what energy I would find, if any. I

organized my research in a way that left me complete freedom, following no precise direction, I took my first steps guided exclusively by the materials that I found online. When I found images that struck me, I dug deeper and if the artist looked interesting, I contacted them. This is how I came to know Giulia Dall'Olio, Marco Eusepi and Andrea Martinucci. Along the way, I made another key encounter. At an opening I met Giuliana Benassi, who showed me the work of Marta Mancini; I was very impressed. This episode was followed by a series of studio visits for which Giuliana Benassi was a fundamental guide. I owe it to her to have had access to independent spaces run by young artists. These consist of large industrial spaces now in disuse, converted by groups of artists in studios and exhibition areas. "Spazio Mensa", to name but one, is a former paper mill that today houses the studios of the young artists who repurposed it, among whom are Marco Eusepi and Alessandro Gianni. It operates as a public space, carrying out an exhibition program open to the community. Luca Grimaldi's studio is located inside a similar collective space, "Postex". There Grimaldi works alongside other young artists just like himself, each developing their own distinctive research that is absolutely unique. This coming together, rather than generate stylistic currents, represents a decisive reaction to the art system and to the structure, dominated by the market, that has conditioned the dynamics of Western art since the 1990s. Although very young, all of these artists already have a history of exhibiting in private galleries and at an institutional level, through projects in museums and public exhibitions. Hence, although not extraneous to the market, they simultaneously have the strength to impose themselves above the art system, far from becoming subjugated by dynamics that are beyond their control. The propulsive force that drives them and which emerges, powerful and unmistakable, from their art, is the element that clearly sets them apart from previous generations. It is the energy typical of young artists at a time when society is in a transitional phase.

Today we find ourselves in the cyclical recurrence of one of these fractures. It is unclear whether Western capitalism is coming to an end or whether it is evolving, certainly the way it works is changing. The natural consequence of this evolution is nevertheless society being readapted to a new economic context. From the illusory conviction that the Western model was the best kind of system, we find ourselves witness to the crumbling of outdated convictions. For all, or almost all, Western countries this instability leads to an increase in inequality and the regression of social rights. This is accompanied by growing tensions that create fractures and conflicts that politics does not seem to be able to contain.

However, it is precisely in this context that phenomena of positive reaction arise, what could be termed "social innovation". New forms of aggregation and identification coming forth from young people, of which this generation of artists is a clear manifestation, are a positive reaction to this structural crisis. In these new artistic phenomena a new type of participation can be discerned, one that is not motivated by the laws of the market, but rather by the acknowledgement that human beings share similar interests in defending their way of life. This attempt, which has proven successful so far, is equivalent in art to what, on a larger scale, occurs in the sharing economy, allowing even those with fewer resources to have access to goods which would otherwise be impossible to attain, and also to an expression of a renewed attention towards collective properties that had faded in the past decades.

As always, in times of profound social change, through its non-verbal language art prefigures a near future that history would not yet be able to decipher. If we observe the significant changes that

occurred in the artists born in the 70's and 80's and those belonging to the new generation, it becomes evident how the former adapted and inserted themselves in the dominant economic system of the art world in the last thirty years, and how the recent social crisis left them disoriented, inducing closure and an introspective attitude rather than an impulse towards the outside world. In contrast younger artists, those on show in this exhibition, began to emerge and work in a setting that was already apocalyptic. They knew, right from the beginning, that the context they were in was fragile; their reaction was opposite to that of the artists of the previous generations. Instead of turning in on themselves, they transformed the ensuing structural void into freedom.

These artists, free because left to themselves, express themselves in a completely authentic way, giving voice to an emotional charge and anger that are the other faces of vital energy. If we were to extract a formal element that unites them in a new avant-garde, this is to be found in the return to painting, that often, but not always (as in the case of Marta Mancini), signifies a return to the figurative. This is a reaction born from an opposition to the rigor and introversion representative of the conceptual that dominated the last decades, but this form of figuration differs from realism for the surreal and expressionist tones which it employs to describe reality. It represents the reaffirmation of pictorial values, the stroke with the intention of finding a language capable of greater openness and expressive freedom, restoring the primacy of technical intensity in painting.

Moreover, this phenomenon is not local, on the contrary, it is entirely in line with what has been happening in the rest of the world among artists of the same generation. The 2017 Whitney Biennial had already heralded the return to painting and to the figurative. In the United States, the movement of neo-figurative art quickly transformed into explicit social engagement and denunciation art. North-American artists often overtly touch on social issues such as racism, think of the boom in African-American art in parallel with the explosion of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, the flourishing of artists that tackle homosexuality alongside the strengthening of LGBT movements, and art exhibitions that bring together women artists as a claim to gender equality.

In Europe and especially in Italy, the connection between the new avant-garde and social commitment is not so evident. We must keep in mind, besides a different form of exasperation in the social climate, the fundamental peculiarities that separate Italian culture from that of the United States. In line with a tradition that has never been interrupted, contemporary Italian art is connected to the deepest roots of classical culture. The cultural foundations of Europe, and even more so of Italy, are so deep that they represent the distinctive trait of contemporary art. The absolute value of their rich artistic traditions implies that social issues can rarely be the main feature of the work and, when present, are in most cases subordinate to the aesthetic element. Nevertheless, the art elaborated by these very young Italian artists is charged with an explosive energy and is rebellious, in as much as it is revolutionary, without explicitly dealing with social issues.

This exhibition, which I strongly desired, aims to tell a story of transformation through the works of six selected artists. Their creative act is born precisely at the intersection between two systems: the one we know, that is showing its weaknesses, and the one that is yet to come. They speak of a passage, a phase, that cyclically comes back in history, and how art, if free from all constraints, has the propulsive and anticipatory charge of a prophecy. There is energy to be drawn from the works of these six artists, a positive perspective that is herald of new possibilities: a new phase full of vital force after years of stagnation and immobility.

INEFFABLE WORLDS

Giuliana Benassi

Imagine playing with a spherical globe, letting our fingers slide from Italy to Hong Kong. We depart from Italy because it is there that, scattered as if in an archipelago, a group of young artists are working in their studios, splattered in acrylic and oil paints, apparently abstracted from the outside world and intent on inscribing on their canvases that which otherwise is inexpressible. Hong Kong is the destination, the one which belongs to the traveler who sets out with a secret. In this case, the travelers are the works of art in lieu of the artists that, now more than ever, take flight from West to East. Thus, the trajectory of our fingers on the globe transforms into a new and almost imaginary magical bridge, built in this exhibition as an architecture, a cosmogony of the possible and underground channel through which the ineffable flows.

"Ineffable worlds" is the title of this exhibition, and it brings together the work of six artists who, although characterized by different researches and approaches, share the language of painting. This is not inconsequential, as these artists entrust painting with the answer to their way of being in the world today. We live in a historical time condemned to be lived under the guise of crisis, from economic collapse to the constant and threatening issues related to climate change; and then there is pollution, the digital drift and all of its contradictions which allowed the world to be described as a "new dark age" (Bridle 2018), together with the recent pandemic that put everyone's backs against the wall, in front of a mirror or in isolation. Yet, in this landscape of contemporary ruins, the work of artists - Giulia Dall'Olio, Marco Eusepi, Alessandro Gianni, Luca Grimaldi, Marta Mancini, Andrea Martinucci – springs forth as a lush source from which to elicit new answers. Each attentive to their own research, the artists withdraw into their own studios: some in solitude, others by founding shared spaces with the common intent to allow painting to reveal the journey towards a new world.

Placing the artwork at the center of the attention is therefore a subtle message that transpires from a globalized world that has lost its luster, and which enables its overbuilt mesh to fall like an empty and sagging net. It is certainly not by chance that the decades of a new century, or a new millennium, are always marked by strong changes, transformations and new beginnings. In a perspective in which everything needs to be rebuilt, artists are carriers of a new force, an artistic doing that acts in complete freedom with the spontaneity of those who, following no pre-established constrictions, seek to tell a story of unexplored possibilities.

The pictorial medium that brings together the works on show is first of all a sign of an artistic process that symbolically represents the inclination of creating something ex novo, moving between the immateriality of thought and pictorial materiality as if in a continuous dance. The canvases are the real windows of the studio walls that look out onto new imaginable worlds, leading the observer down uncharted territories, related to reality by traveling down the secret path of the inexpressible.

In fluctuating fashion, and without the pretense of reducing or containing in words what is here entrusted completely to the works of art, the variety and diversity of languages that arise from the exhibition wants to give back a variety of answers to the current moment. The exhibition is a crossway between the different points of views of the artists, each aimed at grasping the magmatic

flow of time: whether it is yesterday, today or tomorrow doesn't matter, what counts is the slow pictorial gesture on the canvas as opposed to the speed of thought. In this eternal battle that only painting knows, no artist lays down their weapons if not in that mysterious moment when the brush decides to touch the canvas for the last time. The artist's famous "golden touch", capable of transforming matter into a precious image, is no longer an illusion here (Gentili 1980), but intended as a possibility.

In the works of Alessandro Gianni, the possibility of reinstating a work of art with its original aura enters preponderantly, in spite of the flow of digital images and the struggle for visual supremacy between memes and sharing on social media. Playing with the concept of an artwork in the age of its mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1936), Gianni draws images of historical artworks from the web through an artificial intelligence system, allowing them to re-emerge in a vortex of faces and erasures in a new pictorial agglomerate.

The artist Andrea Martinucci also departs from the world of digital images, and names his work after different numerical series marked jpg. In the universal archive of the immaterial, the artist imagines the future memory of images that have survived, superimposed, in a stratified world where the reading of various levels is lost in favor of a totally new image that never existed in the past.

Proceeding by stratifications, albeit in a completely different way, also belongs to the artist Marta Mancini, who addresses the canvas as a big meta-pictorial space. The wide and overlapping brushstrokes almost recall the chaotic magma made of filled and empty spaces that precedes the creation of order and balance, where the blanks are what is erased and the filled are what remains. That which endures is precisely the metaphor of painting: it is the work of art that remains to express the ineffable.

Always in an attempt to provide an interpretation to the answers that arise from the works of the artists on show, the works of Marco Eusepi provide a sign of re-appropriation of the intimate dialogue between painter and nature. Taking a tree as visual interlocutor, the artist prepares to restore the canvas to its pictorial possibilities; a tree marked by monochrome signs or otherwise fused with the sky. The natural elements are pictorial pretexts to approach the investigation of matter on the pictorial surface.

In Giulia Dall'Olio's works, nature is instead depicted as a disruptive force that envelops the anthropized world as if in a large cloud. The frothy presences of graphite narrate the soul of things, protruding as a sudden jet from the preset grids of a drawing that, fleeting, seems capable of evaporating at any moment.

Rooted in the globalized world, the artist Luca Grimaldi departs from the mesh or net that we imagined collapsed. He does so in the preparatory drawing of a painting, erasing it or harnessing it depending on the chosen pictorial image, whether it be an airport bathroom, a refrigerator replete with bottles or a fashionable haircut. The objects captured by the artist seem to decry with subtle irony the drift of a globalized era that erases its own pre-constituted networks through the stigmatization of icons of a world that can no longer be defined as such.

Returning to our globe, let's retract the finger left in Hong Kong, and allow the works on show in the spaces of Tang Contemporary Art to continue their journey, the magical journey of the ineffable.

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