

THOUGHTS OF A LAKE PAINTER¹

Valerio Adami

A painting is the recording of a precise reality, even through its contradictory acts: men reviving their own existence at each single moment.

“This is a sorrowful landscape, you can feel it” (p. 47) [We are sitting on the couch in Adami’s house in Paris, we are looking at some pictures of Stella’s paintings on his computer. There is also his loving puppy, Ego, with us].

The painting is a complex proportion, where previous visual experiences mix in unpredictable combinations, imagination proceeds through continuous associations, a picture melts into another and its primary shape is constantly transformed.

“This is a study of clouds with a tie” (p. 77).

Due to its temporal quality, a proposition defining painting as an autonomous object absolutely determined within itself, would be false, because its value is shaping a time which is infinitely open, a globality etc.

“This advert within the landscape looks like a flowery ad to me (p. 76), and it reminds me of a huge wall in a small garden in Place du Tertre where people in love left their signatures, a large wall, maybe four metres by nine, bursting with signatures”.

Contingency enters even the most rigorous composition. It is hidden behind each single movement of the hand. Painters are constantly faced with surprise. If, while they are painting, a drop falls onto the sheet, they do not rule out they might use it. In any case, they have to deal with it, whether they erase it or draw it.

“At the beginning, these palms looked like flowers to me, I immediately saw these trunks as stems (p. 39). There is a small black and white cross, but maybe it is not part of the picture [on the screen there is the small cross of the computer cursor] but if it was perfectly fitted in this very point, on top of the palms, it would look like a star, the morning star”.

How can you represent the sadness of a landscape, when sadness is a human feature? Thus, painting turns to allegory. The image has two roots, one in the reality we see & one in our own state of mind...

“There is a strong contrast between the illustration of the palm and the intromission of

¹ This article comes from a couple of meetings between Flavio de Marco and Valerio Adami. This is when de Marco showed on a laptop the pictures of Stella’s paintings, thus recording Adami’s comments. To these comments (in inverted commas), some thoughts on painting have been added, by selecting them from Valerio Adami’s book “Sinopie” (SE 2000). Images contained in this catalog are shown in parentheses

this space conveying a different state of mind (p. 57). There are several contrasts, like in a patchwork, like in editing”.

The space on the painting is quite limited in the end, only the meaning of the image can extend it into as many other dimensions as its layers, and if reality is not enough to reality itself, the image will turn to metaphors, and if the sign shows some signs of hermetism, the image will be built through the lines etc.

“The sky itself is a never-ending space (p. 53), an empty space, until maybe a helicopter goes by, then something changes. But it is also true that the sky is more of a musical space, with the sound of the bells, of a piano, having its own infinity, while the rest of the landscape is completely anecdotic.

I would say that the sky is maybe the element most largely present in the landscape, it is there hanging on everything, and then, when it changes, the whole landscape changes, or it may remain the same, artfully the same, but things at the front, for example a tower-shaped waterworks, change, sometimes they disappear, or they become states of mind, those we give them.

Now, for example, [we both are looking outside the window] we could assign it the state of a cold winter sky, but then this would change too, like some landscapes in Hockney, which have different states of mind. The sky seems to be the element that cannot be left out of the landscape, you can try not to see it, but then a cloud goes by and you notice it, even if you could make a landscape with no sky, you would simply need to turn the painting upside down and it would become the surface of a lake, or through perspective, you could put a vertical line and the sky would become a room, and if there were objects inside, they would be immediately redefined to another meaning”.

I secretly fell in love with the lake...

A two-headed animal, consciousness is simply the geometric becoming of the unconsciousness, the line goes beyond itself becoming contours, the point moves and, by following one single slow growing process, the idea gets built. Even sight is a line between the object and the eye, it tangles up like a skein inside us, and the drawing unfolds it, untangles it and sorts it out on the paper etc. The truth of a painting is owned by the language, this is where lies what the author would like to hide.

“It is hard to say that these writings, these graffiti may damage the landscape, because they perfectly blend in as ruins (p. 67), becoming also letters of the alphabet. Even those who destroy posters along the roads, for example, through this act, they add something to them, and they do not destroy them in the end. It is true that in this painting the writing remains at the front, you can see that it is quite violent, between the sky and the sea, but it is not disruptive, rather it highlights something, reducing the landscape to a postcard in the background. The endless sky and the sea horizon are no longer there, thus preventing the dream of such a landscape, and revealing a beautiful landscape wasted by a vandal”.

A drawing is made simply of the lines sketched, the observer should not complete it by referring to what it depicts. Fixing a shape is something that happens in your memory. A painting is a representation in the plural form.

“I don’t see those elements in the centre of the painting as trees (p. 82), mainly the one on the right, hanging. I rather see them as some presences, as everything your imagination can bring, presences that might be phantom-like and who might be going up to some ancient Greek God. I know *Lo studio rosso* [The red studio] by Matisse very well, but I don’t remember exactly what paintings are in it, I don’t even remember what you are referring to, the one standing on the floor... well, you are a dreamer, in the positive sense, in the way you look at Matisse’s painting, choosing something that was abandoned in his studio”.

I believe that painting, in the end, means only representing. Representing an idea becomes an ideal. I draw from my memory more than I want. If you take out memory and the ability to remember from the art of painting, the latter stagnates in a comatose body, the will to see is compared to the will of the idea, and through such a comparison, your hand draws.

“I think my work and your work start from almost opposite points. I start from a point that I move and develop in what the line allows me to. It can be a closed or an open shape, it can be a body silhouette or simply a square. This beginning from a point is a journey which becomes itself the *maître à penser* in the end. As an author, after all, I only follow what another *maître à penser*, I am not saying suggests, but rather compels me to through a space. The *maître à penser* is something mysterious that occurs every time the point starts moving, creating a line or a shape, always in relation to the states of mind experienced”.

The authenticity of the pictorial language can be demonstrated through its adherence to reality. With the possibility for the language, coming from reality, to go back to the latter.

I wonder if there are “ultracolours” that the eye cannot see, as the ear cannot hear ultrasounds...

Colours are the source of light in the objects of a painting, they have their own aura: the harmony of colours, etc. Around them, there are minor colours, with a lower intensity, but still source of light, combining harmoniously, etc. Objects in the painting do not get pervaded by light, but rather they create it, and their light turns to things and any distance from them to the eye disappears. Some colours, in fact, with respect to others on the same surface, become shadowy (but never without light): so, at the beginning, any colour is shadowy when compared to the white mass of the canvas still untouched.

The North taught me that colours are a graft of light etc. Landscapes become violet and yellow if the sky is on the horizon, etc. From the South, I learned the tactile notion, where colours are artful elements of the objects, etc. Within the most colourful painting, the will to get rid of all colours may hide.

“Here, for example, the white of the image deleted was already extremely crowded (p. 85)”.

Memory is a model to look at as you look at a landscape.

Memory already holds any image the eye, by seeing, simply has to retrieve. Through this time variation, the shape is processed and, once finished, it separates from us and does no longer belong to us. So, the only right to possession lies in the originality of the seed we have inside etc. The life of a painting starts when the painter’s life disappears...

“What’s this (p. 88)? It looks like a head, there is a silhouette here on the right... the head, the eye, the open mouth, it’s an impaled! These overlapping signs, instead, are complex signs, I see them as some signs which have deposited some substance, they are not erasing anything”.

The painting starts where the words end etc. The subject becomes painting when words are not enough to represent it.

“I really like the idea of something that is not finished and becomes the content of the painting (p. 49). Frangiflutti nella baia di Napoli [Sea walls in the bay of Naples]... I remember when I used to have a house overlooking that same bay where every day I saw a smugglers’ motor-boat chased by the Carabinieri who were shooting and trying to reach them and it looked like they were playing cops and robbers”.

I do not deny that, when you take paper and pencil in your hands, you already have a clear vision in mind. But if I try to copy it as it is, I know the image in the painting will be naked and deceiving. Our knowledge of shape should offer us the first framework. Thus, by sacrificing the “vision” the first impulse remains, the reason generating the experience of the language etc. As light makes things visible, the vision will be revealed by that same impulse. The meanings of the shape are giving us the rules; learning them and being able to use them freely is the painter’s apprenticeship. Knowing the art helps us “understand”, and thus you can create your own grammar, where lines can hide in the rags of our experience.

Painting is a journey of corrections, you set your “ship’s position” as sailing with the stars.

The small universe of painting, where colour stands to water as the origins of life.

A.R.T.E. Amore, Ragionamento, Tradizione, Estasi (in English “Love, Thought, Tradition, Ecstasy”).