

The force of symbols

The first time I saw Andrea Benetti's artwork, I was struck by how much energy that kind of bas-relief painting produced, as it intelligently and carefully manipulates the very origin of painting, that is, cave painting.

The figures on the canvas can act as isolated symbols; items in an archaeological catalogue, or they can be included in a dynamic context that brings them to life, as if to animate them and give them meaning that goes beyond their symbolic value.

Andrea Benetti was remarkably insightful when he pointed out that we live in a society that doesn't read anymore and people barely manage to continue their studies, so like the populations that have no common language, symbols take on momentous importance.

Andrea Benetti amuses himself by mixing old and new symbols; he combines universally understood signs with bizarre ideas and inventions, that he sometimes instinctively employs and other times runs them through extensive study to see what they can achieve. Animal figures borrowed from prehistoric art, horses, bison, mammoths, rhinoceroses and many others, are depicted alongside various geometric figures, bonded together and depicted in colors that are never obvious. They seem to evoke something that goes beyond a mere chromatic perception of the figures, and become a sort of ritual of shapes, that celebrates some ancient pagan spirituality.

One of the most fascinating characteristics of Benetti is his ability to create neo-symbolism that mixes the geometries of abstractism with the stylization of existing shapes, adding shadows and bringing them to pure figuratism. He plays with shape and color, as if creating a puzzle, whose first result is harmony, through which he can communicate a message, often accessible only to those who know how to grasp it.

As I gaze upon Andrea Benetti's New Cave Art, I sometimes think his figures are "mythograms", a set of symbols that are animated by a story. Julien Ries wrote about mythograms in his book "Men and the Sacred in the History of Humanity", edited by Jaca Book: *"Its symbolic meaning, tied to the story, disappears precisely when the narration disappears. There is no connection between the figures; the translation of what makes the figures move is gone, there is no linear link: the connection must be provided by a narrator. The figures have no reference to space and time. In the Upper Paleolithic era this phenomenon is omnipresent. In a mythographic context the figures were used to give a visual reference point to those who understood the characters of the myth."*

Having read Ries' words, I tend to think that for many of Benetti's works, there must be a story behind them and that without it. The figures who should be the main characters of a story or a thought, end up losing the force of those words and are frozen in a timeless condition outside of space, wrapped in mystery, just like cave paintings.

In conclusion, I cannot forget to praise the chromatic research that Andrea Benetti has used in his works. In some cases his colors can only be defined as unrepeatable, born empirically from a combination of paints, that stretch the limits of the repeatable further and further. Colors that would look terrible together are brought together and perfectly harmonized by a third color and a fourth ... and so on, until he reaches symphonies of chromatic factors that are inseparable, because they are compatible only if seen together.

Many symbolisms can be perceived in Andrea Benetti's painting: in the colors, shapes, stories and cryptic atmospheres that he manages to evoke, as if he were seeking to recreate that magic, the mystery of those very first paintings, and he transmits them to us, his audience, when we experience each new exhibition.

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