

## “Glimpses Toward the Imaginary”

In art, fascination with the past is nothing new. This is witnessed by the exploration of movements designated by the prefix “neo”, which in some cases have resulted in a revival, in others, the adoption of old values expressed through contemporary creativity. Andrea Benetti, in his two decades of work as a painter, and especially since creating the “Manifesto of Cave Art” (2006), positions himself in the middle of these two movements.

His art, since 2006, leaves no doubt as to its link to archaic forms, such as those of the Paleolithic era, while introducing an interpretative veil which modernizes, with a certain irony, past concepts that without contemporary sensibilities and viewpoints would be rendered meaningless. Benetti creates a sort of “metapicture”, the nesting of an image within another, that in this case is not the splitting of one medium into another one, but a transposition that must in some way be decoded.

One must overcome the deliberate recollection of the past emerging in his Manifesto, and even go beyond the macroscopic evidence of his paintings to discover the most vital link to the past, both in minute symbols and modern iconography. For the Exhibition that Benetti proposes at the Palazzo Turchi di Bagno, the chosen title, not by chance is “contemporary pre-history”. Benetti will display several drawings on paper and canvas alongside casts of prehistoric works on grant from the National Archeological Museum of Ferrara.

It is a dialogue that should reinforce the opportunity to reflect on the documentation of time, on the values that history has the capacity to transmit, if one knows how to read and reinterpret a sense of modernity that lifts above plaster and pedestals, and that can render it fluid, malleable and ever present. I had the impression by observing various works, such as the drawings *Lo sciamano di Garing, Uomo e cavallo*, both from 2012, in charcoal, sanguine, and chalk on Montesanto paper, or pertinent to this exhibition, canvases *Ominidi con spirale, Ominidi paleolitici I, Animale paleolitico* dated 2015 where he uses sediments left over from cleaning the artifacts found in the Fumane Caves circa 40,000 years ago, that the artist himself by creating a visual short circuit.

The presence of the past is so strong as to be felt both as matter and memory (the remains of earth and dust) or the medium (the Montesanto paper), fortunately without being lifted from the present condition. This combination is strengthened by the simplicity of the plane, and the figures in their flatness, deprived of depth, floating as if on a screen.

His interests for primitive territories and the significance of signs reduced to symbols of universal code, transfer themselves into paintings that search in symbols for the meaning of life. With a lightness, Benetti lets the image migrate, challenging the boundaries between the past, present and future. In this way, the figures, removed from the Paleolithic, as if from the sphere of the contingent such as boats, scooters, flowers or animals encountered in numerous recent works, weave a thread of fervid conscience that is neither ignorant nor naive of the possibility

that progress allows. He uses this method to steer his images, not his paintings, as per the distinctions created by William J.T. Mitchell, between image (true image) and picture (the material object), by which the first is that which is illustrated by the second; as per the expert "that survives beyond destruction, in memory, in narration, in copies and traces preserved in other media." The value of an image is not its similarity, but in being the vehicle to pathways of fantasy, perception, memory and even the imaginary.

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