



LACATENA FINE ARTS

presents

*ANTEPRIMA VITIELLO*

19 - 30 October 2021

Palazzo Sannino

Via Vittorio Emanuele II 10, Torre Annunziata, Naples.

Pasquale Vitiello (1912 - 1962) comes onto the twentieth century art scene in 1955 with two successful solo shows, first in Milan at Gussoni and soon after in Rome at Galleria il Vantaggio, making a belated and in many ways unprecedented trajectory among his artist peers.

Between the 19th and the 30th of October, 2021, the noble floor of Palazzo Sannino will host an exhibition of 23 paintings and five sculptures produced by Vitiello between 1952 and 1962.

Vitiello's operational context merges with the ancient Roman sites of Oplontis: Torre Annunziata is a spatial background that is investigated intimately in its harshest, wet ravines. It is a space capable of welcoming a series of interior and social experiences, which he catalyzes throughout the work of a lifetime. In fact, by approaching Vitiello's work chronologically, we clearly see that the continuous, formal experimentation he pursues, becomes more and more rigorous and tenacious over the years. A parallel crescendo in his skills adapts his painting technique to scenarios crossed by deep anthropological and urban transformations.

The cosmopolitan gene coming from the Gamen - maternal side of his family, of French origin - does not counter the attraction that Vitiello feels towards the territorial specificity of the immediate surroundings he encounters outside his studio. As Alberto Abbruzzese argues in the seventies, in order to access Vitiello's work in an exhaustive manner, it is necessary that we frame it not only from a formal or existential perspective, but also within the geopolitical context in which it expressed itself.

Many southern Italian painters, once they were inserted into the cultural and bureaucratic life imposed by fascism, embraced the solution that the regime suggested to the problems of artistic research. Some felt they had finally demolished the boundaries of provincialism and to have acquired, for their art, a broader

diffusion. The cleverest adhered unreservedly to the new aesthetic approach advocated by the regime, choosing the fastest way to enter the country's official organizations and collecting circuits.

In Naples, there was the effort of Paolo Ricci, Guglielmo Peirce and Antonio D'Ambrosio to break with the official nature of the 1930s and to connect with the greater European movements through the manifesto of the "Union of Destructivists and Activists". The Destructivists set for themselves the need for a new objective realism, which would assert itself on a materialistic conception of history and society. Unfortunately, this movement, precisely because of its marked political inclination, produced only scarce results, insufficient for an effective change of course in Neapolitan art.

Ricci himself was among the most attentive readers of Vitiello's formal developments. His preface to the 1977 catalogue, together with the text by Abbruzzese, and the critical work later carried out by Mariantonietta Picone Petrusa and Massimo Bignardi, are acute testimonies, today at our disposal to best contextualize the work of this solitary, separated artist.

Looking back, it can be said that the advent of twentieth-century painting created fractures, but it also offered opportunities to those artists who were more intellectually curious to experiment. If it is true that in the course of his life, Vitiello goes as far as possible in experimenting with new solutions - as Abbruzzese emphasizes - it is just as true the void that inevitably surrounds such operations.

Pasquale Vitiello is in fact among the very few artists who chose the province and experimentation, arriving much later than many others to the major institutional events: he took part in the XXIV Venice Biennial in 1948, followed by the XXVIII Biennial in 1956; in the fourth, seventh and eighth editions of the Quadriennale, respectively in 1951, 1956 and 1959; in the 2nd International Biennial of Sao Paulo in Brazil in 1953; and in the two Brera Biennials, in 1953 and 1957.

After the war, in the Spring of 1951, Vitiello set up a studio-shack in Villa Filangieri, close to Punta Oncino, a site that soon became the subject of many of his landscapes. Solarized glimpses painted with a spatula in a feverish and repeated manner: Vitiello would capture his subjects and transfer them onto canvas, paper or masonite cut-outs, in an almost serialized way, describing a distinct fascination with Informal Art.

Precisely in those years, Francesco Arcangeli was carrying out some decisive replacements in the theoretical field - the essay *Gli Ultimi Naturalisti*, appears in *Paragone* in November 1954. His naturalism chose not so much Caravaggio or Courbet as precursors, but J.M.W. Turner (romantic, pre-informal.) Nature was closely examined, as a place of burning and upsetting interactions, a vast web of relationships with the environment. Such a broadening of horizon was also reflected in the developments of our Torrese painter, unbeknownst to Arcangeli, who did not move his eye beyond the borders of Emilia.

Vitiello's painting is a fantastic and tragic apparition that brought with it an anticipatory and sometimes disconcerting accent. The paintings selected for this exhibition are hasty and dense, there is an increased presence of chalky whites, turquoise green, acid yellow, and deep blue. The very fine coloring of Vitiello condenses his last years into startling, acute compositions, which penetrate the contemporary discourse around painting with unexpected freshness.

In light of the notion of orientalism (Said 1978), historians and anthropologists have highlighted, in recent years, the relationship between the construction of an exotic difference in the South and the formative processes of an Italian national identity. The reinterpretation of the "southern question" as "orientalism in one country" (Schneider 1998), has underlined its undeniable character of cultural construction, revealing the complex selection processes necessary to make the South the object of a specific discourse: the focus on reading in terms of "misery" and "backwardness"; the termination of the connections between phenomena

found in the different areas of the country; the invention of a homogeneous South that overlooks the many internal differences in southern Italy; the attribution of a "peasant" and "traditional" character to the South and the correlative "industrial" and "modern" character attributed to the North as a whole.

Uncertain of their full belonging to Europe, the ruling classes of post-war Italy found support for the construction of a modern European identity in the exotic difference of the South. Today, the norm of Malinowskian fieldwork has been deconstructed and the field is free from rigid ideological contrasts. Yet, the missed meeting between those scholars and artists who found themselves sharing places and frequentations in post-war southern Italy, remains an open problem, which deserves further investigation.

Vitiello is a fieldwork painter, an intimist one, irrevocably obsessed with studying the light that falls on the bodies of those who rest after work, or those who get up next to a bedside table full of books left in abeyance. Folklore is transformed into speculative potential for the production of the imaginary.

According to Lombardi Satriani <sup>1</sup>, the entire popular culture must be read in an oppositional key. He recognizes and denounces as early as 1968 the existence of a tendency towards the folklore of cultural data (rituals, dances, music, parties) once functional to the society that expressed them, and now subjected to the logic of profit. But, beyond these negative outcomes, a popular culture that continues to bear the signs of a radical, oppositional otherness with respect to the dominant culture, would live and persist.

Abbruzzese observes: "Vitiello begins the path that leads to the contradictions of the avant-garde, that is to say to the awareness that art is dead, without however ever confessing it. In his notebooks, Vitiello writes - *I understand abstract painting but I don't want to do it* - as it keeps repeating itself - *Abstraction from reality while remaining in the figurative*. It is a revelation inherent to the defense of the figurative."

Vitiello's defense of figuration is the defense of an antagonist cultural data, one that is vernacular and inextricably involved with a regional habitus.

The posthumous publication of the works of Antonio Gramsci offered post-war Southern Studies new tools of analysis and a new hermeneutic perspective, which found its best-known synthesis in the *Observations on folklore*, 1950. Folklore, in the Gramscian conception, is not an autonomous product and cannot be studied and understood outside the historical relationship with the culture of the ruling classes: it is a dominated, disintegrated and fragmentary culture, an incoherent deposit of materials of different origins, stratified over time. However, its understanding is of fundamental political importance. It has been stressed by many that the knowledge of the culture of the "instrumental and subordinate classes" was inserted for Gramsci in the broader political problem of the relationship between intellectuals and the people - as well as in the construction of cultural forms that could be called "progressive" and would bridge the traditional gap between "high culture" and popular culture - identified as a specific problem of the Italian reality (Urbinati 1998; Crehan 2009.)

The limit of historical Southern Studies, as Ernesto De Martino argued, lies in the fact that "it does not include the world of people as cultural units in movement, with a cultural history behind them, and above all, with a desire for history and emancipation." The limit of folkloric research lies precisely in "considering popular ideologies and the cultural life of the people, outside the material conditions of existence". Between these two specular limitations Pasquale Vitiello's practice takes place.

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