



Reflections on human solitude (2001)

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When Titonel debuted as a painter, we were already in the years of the Pop Art explosion, those fated sixties that witnessed a revival of figurative art, which means art in a more easily legible current, even though its meanings may have been varied and complex. In Italy, it should be pointed out, the neo-Realism of the fifties had blazed a trail that was to link into international Pop Art seamlessly. Titonel had actually trained in what might be called the trade, which gave him an expressive mastery that he was capable of using in whichever direction he wanted. Alongside his clear but cold, hyper-realistic hardness, he immediately also showed an orientation towards a certain plastic bodiliness, shot through with shady effects that he was to develop with enthusiastic preference at a later date.

I think this much needs to be clarified immediately: like every artist who does not want to restrict his own imagination and verve to a standardised formula, Titonel at a certain point changed his means of expression and iconography, devoting himself to a form of painting that we can define conventionally as abstract, although for a certain period it is possible to identify a camouflaged matrix of reality within his compositional outlines. Among the various features that differentiated this type of painting from his previous manner was the type of brushstroke he used: previously, it had been smooth and dry, almost as though suggesting the observer draw a comparison with photography; now it was pasty, even clay-like. The opinion that we critics expressed about this evolution was unanimous: the artist had passed from a general approach, whose intention had been to put his finger on the sense of technological civilisation and the way it freezes human relationships, to an emotional introspection that saw him probing excitedly into his own conscience; in short, he had undergone a profound transformation.

But that is not exactly how things stood. To be sure, there is a difference between the sensitivity of his Informel work that is reminiscent in particular of Fautrier and the lucid painting of those exteriors in the manner of Hopper, with violent dynamic angles where the topic of solitude looks explicit: the solitude of the railway station, a place where you wait on your way to going somewhere else; the solitude of the inability of the people in the waiting rooms to communicate with each other, as they do not constitute a community; and the solitude of the trains themselves, powerful machines depicted aggressively as they advance towards the observer. But if we only stop to interpret these scenes in the sense of their formal structure, leaving their narrative meaning to one side; if we put them close to the compositions that were gradually adopting a more abstract physiognomy, then pass from human figures that can be interpreted naturalistically to the outlines in the subsequent paintings, which look like archaeological figures, artefacts from ancient times so long past that they gradually lose all referential connotation, we eventually realise that the artist evolved his formula of expression without any sudden breaks. In point of fact, at an even later date, he actually came back from these elementary symbologies to new representations of interpretable realism: he also came back to his topics, to iconographies related to the everyday current world, and he also embarked upon a commitment to a physiognomic attention of penetrating potency.

If we were to look for a symbol to represent this entire creative process that delves into the inexplicable – and also always into the sense of existential and intellectual solitude – we could opt very well for the iconographic theme of the hand: an open hand makes an appearance as an underlying model in many of the abstract type of compositions, both of the geometrically inclined kind and those that take the form of mythical sculptures with a curved structure, surfacing to re-emerge as it goes. Less evidently, but not yet completely obliterated, it can also be identified even in the artist's Pop Art phase, in those extraordinary sequences of people who are at once painstaking portraits and transfigured metaphors. Lastly, the hand is raised in the gestures of defence and at the same time of victory, enthusiasm and prayer.

Titonel's entire opus is pervaded by a desire – and an ability – to tackle the current day, in its technologically evolved characteristics, and the primitive absolute: society's emptiness and the desolation of the individual. And if, at a certain point, it mimes a sporting event, so that the idea of victory seems to be associated with the human figure, the very fact that the theme is repetitive makes the situation mechanical rather than resolved, while cracks (in the artificial wall or the natural rock), splits and crumbings gradually devour the person and the gesture of triumph becomes a gesture of farewell. Man is on his way back to his cave.