



Titonel: the object between symbol and perception (1972)

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His previous personal in Rome (in 1970, at the Ciak Gallery) already provided an opportunity to verify this for ourselves and we can do so all the more now today: in the extent to which the processes of mediation of thought (translation, analogical and metaphorical movement) have meanwhile gained so much terrain in the way he sees things. While the paintings he is now doing are more than ever the result of extremely acute, hard-headed observations (and operations using both eye and hand), the matter of their substance is quite another question.

To be sure, just as in the past, the first thing that will catch your eye will be the recognisance, the evidence, the sheer credibility that you experience in front of any of his paintings. But, beyond that, your ability to ascertain the value of the image (the value of the meaning) of the things, of the figures and of the environments he explores in his paintings – already quite a problem in the past – has become even more complex. The illusion of reality 'painted like it is' is thereby not only threatened, but literally overturned, in many of his recent works, by the strong allusive power of their chromatic fabric (which, although it is often neutral, is seldom monochrome) and by the distortion in the relationships that govern the analogies or conflicts between things.

The optical and mental routing forced on you by the painting's peremptory nature actually persuades you – here and now – to 'go back to school' and learn anew how to see objects and reconstitute the connections or the oppositions that determine or condition their functions. Even the recognisability of the individual images tends to disorient you more than it used to (although Titonel has never been a 'textual' painter) when you come face to face with the object, because the field of vision where they are offered up to your observation is so random. So that even when everything appears – at least at first sight – to be so very close to your optical language, it all ends up being so very far away, even as you are in the very act of considering the logical structuring of the reality in front of you. In other words, the object to be perceived is proposed simultaneously as a dual species, of the perceptive and of the symbolic, while the peremptoriness of the forms has increased as a direct proportion of the multiplicity of their meanings.

This is why the world you have right there, in front of your eyes, 'escapes' you at the precise instant when you believe you have grasped it, to be replaced by what your imagination despotically indicates.

What actually happens is that the surface of the painting is proposed to us everywhere these days by the author as a sort of sagely 'altered' mirror, placed in front of us as we fix our gaze on it, so that we can recognise ourselves for what we are and not for what we appear to be: as men among men; as integral parts who share responsibility for the twisted organization of social life in which we are involved.

It is no coincidence that this painter of urban reality has always, since his very début, manifested utter disdain for everything related to traffic jams, frenzy and so on that comes with the city. The idea of the proverbial 'loneliness in the crowd' is only one of the underlying components of his linear, centralized and static conception of the act of figuring. The other component (the main one, in my opinion) is his desire to bypass everything indistinct, occasional or transient to isolate an actual situation from its context. This idea of extracting the one from the other to then locate it in the centre of a rarefied (often indefinable) space, to place it in the midst of a large circle of emptiness and silence, is closely connected to the aim of channelling the artist's own thoughts and those of his observer away from every form of vertigo generated by the external aspects of the community lifestyle and towards a place where it is possible to be detached enough to make a lucid evaluation of things, a lucid identification of the relationships of chance that bring about the psychological uneasiness of today's city dweller (in other words that enable him to be swamped by the selfsame creations that have issued forth from his own hands).

It is to this desire to explain the meaning of existence to himself and to others, in close-up, as it were, that the 'metaphysical' profile that this painting is gradually assuming with increasing evidence in the history of both art and humanity (much like the increasingly frequent anti-academic pendants) ultimately refers.