



Presentation to the personal exhibition at "Complesso del Vittoriano" (Rome - Italy)

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... Studying the various phases of his work, it is clear that the idea is firmly rooted in the maestro that art is that attitude that enables us to find a form that could be defined 'primary', yet is such as to be able to take on different forms as time goes by. In this sense, Titonel treads a path that was followed in the twentieth century by other artists who oscillated uniquely between a strong emotional-ironic component and a contemplative-meditative component, such as Campigli. There is no evident stylistic influence of this kind in Titonel's work, but there is a way of tackling art that is both systematic and chaotic, typical of a particular tradition in Italian art that enjoyed an especially lively phase in the Pop Art phase at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. That is where Titonel comes from, as we know, and that is the origin from which he developed all the preconditions for his painting, which takes on the appearance of a perpetual variation on the theme of the base of a formidable draughtsmanship, which has reminded some of his very early work as a graphic designer working in advertising, oriented, of course, towards the communication of a brand.

No doubt Titonel is an artist distinguished by a tendency to reiterate his sign, almost regardless of the meaning of the sign itself. And yet a closer look at the series of the Winner (which is actually a series only as far as a certain point) recently published in a monograph edited by Luciano Caramel provides a good understanding of what it means for the maestro to construct a sequence that takes its underlying tenets from a basic form. The variation is of the kind carried out on a model whose immobility, i.e. – paradoxically – whose impossibility to change, has to be remarked. The keystone is discovered when the outline of the Winner is twisted around playfully to become the logo for the swimmer because, once the image is turned around but otherwise left absolutely identical, the impression is that the gesture of victory changes, yet without altering, into the gesture of a swimmer's overarm movement in the water. Nevertheless, the gesture is still a sporting one, so the figures multiply on the basis of the new interpretation that the artist himself has given to his image by dropping it into a swimming pool.

The result is that the observer perceives even better the archetype of the outline which, being an archetype, cannot change but can only be subjected to a series of multiplication and disintegration that eats it away from within. And yet it is never lost, like the twentieth century idea of the musical variation in which all the permutations and combinations around the original theme never cancel it out, but make it into the producer of a range of openings and closures that act as a narrative substance. Titonel's variations are like the jazz of Thelonius Monk and Budd Powell, where the race towards the disappearance of the original fulcrum is the very justification of its existence and that fulcrum is never done away with, because it keeps us anchored to reality and because it is beautiful.

Titonel's art has always been profoundly true and always profoundly nourished with emotions: in fact a certain overload with a sense of reality is always latent throughout his career, and here the problem is not so much one of hyperrealism or of the particular wisdom of the maestro's hand, which is beyond question in any case. The interesting problem is the extremely high degree of recognisability of the image intended as a generating nucleus, which acts rather like the Pole Star as a guide for travellers. The painter sometimes scrutinises the image from very close up; sometimes he identifies the absolute immobility of space and time and exploits his mimetic skills to the very last drop: sometimes he thrusts immediate recognisability away. On occasion, he prefers wandering around desolate, solitary stations, with paradoxical echoes of the machinist Futurists, but negative in sign; or again he mingles with sportsmen, whom he observes with the amazement and complaisance of an Umberto Saba of painting on a reconnaissance for estranged images, uncertain whether to submit to the weight of the sleepy provinces or of a deafening city.

One thing is certain: the cult of art as the sovereign exercise of form permeates throughout Titonel's opus with an increasing accentuation of disenchantment and detachment from the excesses of emotional involvement which, on the

other hand, he chooses repeatedly as content, in particular in the case of sweeping popular emotion, such as the emblematic personality of Padre Pio or the above-mentioned case of the winning sportsman, also an emblem of a general situation of enthusiasm and illusions.

But the idea of the outline that remains uniform and recognizable, even in the extremes of figurative combat, conceals a conceptual certainty that may admit to the two levels of the most profound philosophical discussion and of the most amusing colloquial punch line, as found in the opposition and distinction between the fact of variation and the fact of change. The logo that presides over the entire aesthetic operation varies continually – but never changes. The theme never admits to variation, but expects changes, such as the continuous shift of the observer's viewpoint. It looks as though, in the day of the frantic movie image, there has been a revival of the old idea of the magic lantern, where figures ran through, appearing and reappearing, apparently telling stories but always remaining the same yet, for this precise reason, firing the imagination of the audience. It is something of this kind that happens to the observer of Titonel's work when he finds himself face to face with a mature, complex maestro, yet still finds it substantially simple to approach his work as though the truth of all things were within easy reach.