

## - société interludio -

ENRICO TEALDI

MANIFESTO

Critic text by Davide Ferri

From Turin to the countryside around Cuneo, where Enrico Tealdi lives, the journey on the highway that afternoon took a little longer than expected. At one point it started to rain harder and harder, then it began hailing, and it was impossible not to slow down abruptly; many cars halted in the emergency lane waiting for it to stop, which made me think that as I got closer to Enrico's studio, human presence was visibly thinning out. Moreover, the green of the landscape seemed to me different, more exuberant and intense, but also darker, a quality I seem to find in his work, in some of his most recent landscape paintings, where different shades of green, a liquid and unstable green, seem to expand until any trace of figure disappears (a green whose diffusion on the surface makes the painting tend towards monochrome, I would say, if I were not afraid of exaggeration). Or the range of greens conquers almost the entire surface to erode it from within, to dematerialise it, to imprint it with a blanket of diaphanousness and immateriality. In any case, this expansion of green seems to stop at the point of allowing a patch of sky to resist as a visual datum, some clouds, or, on the ground, a plinth, a statue, ruins of the ancient that are garden ruins, small epiphanies of the landscape, signs and shreds of a memory which seems to belong only to the landscape. There is no doubt that Tealdi's work has to do with memory.

I like to think that it is also a personal memory. The memories of a child who explores the landscape, the countryside around where he lives, abandoned houses, uninhabited places, old aristocratic villas with parks and, indeed, remains of statues. Who stops to observe for hours in front of a closed gate. Who, driving past a votive shrine with his father, is captured for a few seconds, but indelibly, by the image of a cracked Madonna. Tealdi's studio, carved out of the barn in the family's farmhouse, seems to mend this time between childhood and adulthood, between childhood and painting. Time seems to stop, that is, in front of furniture, chandeliers, around the objects stored there that have belonged to the family for generations, around the tools of painting.

And here lies the first problem. Tealdi is one of those painters who seems to be moving on, moving forward, with his eyes turned to the rear-view mirror, to a deep past, or to a more or less recent past. I know others (Michele Tocco, for example, who cultivates the ideality of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century itinerant painters, of grand tour painters, who painted from life; Nicola Samorì, whose paintings repeat - only to destroy them - images that come from a dark and misty Baroque), and they are among my favourites. But to what extent can we accept this retrospective gaze, precisely because we know that there is an irrepressible self-referential side to painting? What strategies do these painters, and an artist like Tealdi, employ to break out of this cage of self-referentiality and bring their work back into the present? And what does it mean to bring a work back into the present? And is this trajectory, this re-emergence (when it happens, but also when it remains at the stage of intention) not one of the most suggestive aspects of this kind of work?

Figures almost never appear in Tealdi's paintings, figures in the sense of bodies and people. When they do appear, they are, as I said, ruins and statues; or, in a less recent series, goals or lines of football pitches,



deserted, abandoned, elements and signs that the landscape has finally absorbed and integrated, as in Ghirri's photographs (one in particular comes to my mind, in which the goal is a white rectangle silhouetted against the thicket of a forest, and two shades of green divide the image. No sky, by the way, in that photo).

Yet that afternoon in the studio, Tealdi showed me other paintings I was unfamiliar with, his most recent series, which is not so recent after all (it started in 2016), and which forms the backbone of this exhibition. Paintings with figures, this time. But not really. He showed me a series of faces. Which derive from enlargements of some of the plaster crèche figurines that the artist has kept since he was a child; plaster figurines of the kind you used to find in shops around Christmas, some time ago, and that you don't find anymore, except plastic and roughly made ones. And along with the paintings, there are the statuettes, placed on the large worktable (worktable, because Tealdi paints horizontally) in the middle of the studio, and it is a fact that in his studio it is not strange to see these things, seeming to come from another time. I could say then: portraits, but of statues, that is to say inanimate objects, hence still lifes. Or, even better, faces poised between portrait and still life. Incidentally: I wonder why I persist in assigning this series to one genre or the other. Why do I have to give this series a name. Perhaps because there is the other part of Tealdi's work, that I could so easily trace back to landscape? But is it not better to call those landscapes simply 'green paintings'? Paintings of a green that almost wants to expand into monochrome? And is not the face itself a landscape, the most difficult one to paint, as Cezanne once said?

The faces - to which the artist has given proper names (Ada, Lia, Dalia, Tobia and Giosia, to name but a few), names of saints, blessed women and prophets, based on hypotheses of vague resemblance derived from the statuettes, yet chosen with philological refinement, sounding out sacred texts - have soft features, a velvety skin, caressed by light that illumines their sensuality. It is the skin that invites the viewer to approach these figures that painting has transformed into living presences.

The viewer is thus close, but their gaze - gauzy, rapt and dreamy (as figures in the crèche they turn it not frontally but downwards, towards the manger) - excludes a reciprocal relationship with the onlooker. It is as if Tealdi's attempt to give life to these figures through painting pushes them in two directions: on the one hand, the flesh, on the other, a dimension of dreamy and ecstatic otherness, something I do not know what else to call other than 'the territory of the sacred'.

And here is the second problem with this text. Manifesto, this the title of the exhibition, juxtaposes a number of sacred figures. This is no small thing. I do not want to dwell on this point, but the sacred is a complicated matter, a great absentee of contemporaneity, a dimension that only a few artists, white flies in today's panorama, continue to frequent, albeit in a crooked, awkward, sometimes incidental way (among Italian painters of the latest generations, for example, Alessandro Pessoli comes to mind, who combines in his portraits pop, naive faces with those of sacred figures - as Luca Bertolo notes in the afterword to James Elkins's book *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*). Doesn't one feel the thrill of a strange risk in front of the visages in Manifesto? (That must be why Enrico has kept them hidden all these years. And he kept asking himself, right up to the last moment, whether it would not be better, instead of showing them all at once, to thin them out, to exhibit them next to the landscapes, the ceramics, the most popular areas of his work).

The faces emerge from a kind of depth and their presence in the picture seems to be sculpted: by the black background (an apparently mobile, grasping element, capable of releasing and reclaiming, of swallowing again that part of the face that is visible); by the light (which seems to act in contrast/synergy with the black); by the (many) dots and brushstrokes on the surface. The strokes of white, now more defined,



descriptive, now more fleeting, punctuate the image in many places and seem to me to have an ambiguous role: when more mimetic, they are an indication of a referent - the statuettes and the material they are made of, plaster, a cracked, chipped, broken material - and at the same time, when more indefinite, they are simple spots and brushstrokes fluttering across the surface.

So much, in these faces, speaks of materiality. The visage that is flesh and living presence. The black and the light that seem to release and shut again this presence. The stains that lead back to the referent, the plaster statuettes from which the face comes. But there is more: there is the way Tealdi makes his paintings, through a process of 'priming'. Starting, that is, from a chalky background (how can one fail to notice that, in this way, the painting partakes of the same substance that the statuettes it represents are made of?), it is applied on panel until a smooth surface is obtained, eliminating cavities and cracks, onto which a layer of rabbit glue is applied, hot and in successive layers (eight in Tealdi's case). The point here is that all these things lying beneath or within the picture - the board, the chalky background, the rabbit glue, the black - seem to me to be part of the representation of something transcendent (just as in icons, the golden background is only the last stage in that slow process leading to appearance).

The faces of Manifesto: epiphanies of the painting as object.

Enrico Tealdi nasce a Cuneo nel 1976, vive e lavora a Cuneo e Angers.

Il suo lavoro è presente in collezioni private in Italia e all' estero tra cui **Collezione del Quirinale**, **Collezione Fondazione Bartoli Felter**, **Collezione MAR** (Museo Arte Ravenna).

Le sue gallerie di riferimento sono Francesca Antonini Arte Contemporanea e Société Interludio.

Tra le sue mostre personali ricordiamo: *L' Accordo*, presso la galleria Francesca Antonini Arte Contemporanea a cura di Giulia De Giorgi (Roma, 2022), *Halos*, presso la Palazzina Pia, Firenze, a cura di Serena Trincherò (Firenze 2022), *Concerto per carillon*, galleria Francesca Antonini Arte Contemporanea, (Roma, 2019), *Transfiguration Mode*, a cura di Antonio Zimarino, Palazzo Acquaviva, (Atri, 2019), *Si cercano parole che nessuno dirà*, a cura di Davide Caroli, Museo MAR (Ravenna, 2016), *Diagonale diffusa*, a cura di Veronica Liotti, presso Spazio Yellow, (Varese, 2015), *Golfo Mistico*, Francesca Antonini Arte Contemporanea (Roma, 2014).

Tra le sue mostre collettive si segnalano: *Il tempo della comunanza*, a cura di Olga Gambari, La Castiglia Castello di Saluzzo (Saluzzo, 2024), *Come in un giardino*, a cura di Federica Terone, galleria Francesca Antonini (Roma, 2024), *Nocturnal Ballads*, a cura di Lorenza Boisi, CHASSIS (Torino, 2024), *Pittura Italiana oggi*, a cura di Damiano Gulli, Triennale di Milano (Milano, 2023), *Volti. La pittura italiana di ritratto nel XX secolo*, a cura di Luca Beatrice, Villa del Balbianello, (Como, 2023), *I dialoghi della Luna*, presso la galleria Raucci Santamaria Project (Milano, 2022), *Citéra*, a cura di Simona Squadrito, galleria Société Interludio (Torino, 2020), *Milky Way*, presso la Galleria Franco Noero, (Torino, 2020), *Nero Fortissimo, Antichissimo Rosa*, a cura di Lorenza Boisi, MIDECA, (Laveno, 2018), *CBM Art Prize*, a cura di Area creativa 42, Galleria Chemistry, (Praga, 2018), *Studio Freud*, a cura di Fabio Carnaghi, (Milano, 2019), *Osmosi*, Museo del Territorio, (Biella, 2017), *Dehor*, a cura di Claudio Libero, Pisano, Cisterna romana, (Atri, 2016), *Empatema*, Studi Aperti, (Milano, 2016), *Koffer Kunst*, a cura di Veronica Liotti, Atelier Nele Waldert, (Düsseldorf, 2015), *At Work*, a cura di Katia Anguelova, Fondation Fondation Donwahi pour l'Art Contemporain, (Abidjan Il Plateaux, Costa d'Avorio, 2014), *Italia Ora*, a cura di Achille Bonito Oliva, Museo H.C. Andersen (Roma, 2011), *DOC, Denominazione Origine Contemporaneo*, a cura di Lucrecia Vega Gramunt, Centro Culturale Borges, (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2011), *Once Upon Today*, a cura di Teresa Iannotta, *Hommes Gallery*, (Rotterdam, Nederland, 2009), *Italian-Restyle*, a cura di Barbara Fragona, Arthouse Tacheles, (Berlino, Germany, 2009).

