

Chiara Baima Poma

Mirrors for larks

curated by Clara Sofia Rosenberg



**opening:
8 June 2023**

6 > 9 P.M.

**exhibition:
9 June >
21 July 2023**

**opening hours:
Tuesday-Saturday**

3 > 7 P.M.

MORNINGS BY APPOINTMENT

CSR Looking at your paintings, one senses their inspiration was travel. How has this passion driven your production?

CBP Yes, it's true, ever since I left the Academy of Fine Arts in Turin I have followed my migratory instinct, which has led me to combine artistic experimentation with travel: a source from which to draw mysterious and fascinating elements to compose the scenography of my works. These elements are culturally external to my daily life, not yet assimilated; they stand out in the landscape and tickle my aesthetic curiosity, to the point of wanting to include them in one of my paintings.

Travelling is for me the beginning of a way to create a new language, as well as a form of possession – the possession of an experience. I am interested in the interweaving of lives and knowledge, I feel like appropriating the language of others to mix it in the cauldron of cultures.

CSR More precisely, how have your travels been integrated into your work?

CBP Having moved between countries quite a bit, I have settled in the Canary Islands for several years. Finding myself facing the African continent, I have had many contacts with those lands and I have developed a fascination for the arabesque elements, as you can see in my work *Mettere il dito nella piaga* (*Putting your finger in the wound*)¹, which recalls an architectural structure that I saw in Senegal. What remains from my travels in Asia, on the other hand, are landscape elements and jewels, such as the rocks in *Dormire con un occhio solo* (*Sleeping with one eye*)² or the adornments of the protagonist of *Chi dorme non piglia pesci* (*The sleeper catches no fish*)³, with her sparkling Indian earrings.

CSR I understand that in your paintings the characters are mostly women. Why?

CBP As a matter of fact, the protagonists of my paintings are often “me’s” who long to be part of the world I create by means of interweaving various cultures, as if, through story time, I built a place that allows me to take refuge.

The characters in my paintings are all women because through the painting I talk about myself, and it's easier for me to put myself in women's shoes rather than in men's.

Women are my medium of storytelling.

CSR If women are not the protagonists but only a medium, what is the real subject of your works for you?

CBP The theme of my works is a nostalgia for everything that is past or distant, that can still be desired, dreamed of or idealized: everything that is not solid or tangible and that can still be interpreted according to one's imagination. It is a dreamlike world, but, more importantly, a refuge from reality, since reality has already been written, and, as such, it is predictable, whereas the world of ideas never disappoints, as it is perfect.

CSR The construction of your images suggests a strong relationship with set design and theater. Do you agree?

CBP Actually, in my research I do not look so much to the world of the theater, as to storytelling. In both cases, however, it is a matter of framing scenes through visions of places, architectures and lights, supported by the suspense of acting. However, in the theater there is too much movement as compared to my paintings, where everything is very static, as if it were the frame of a story where the characters pretend to stay still, like immobile actors in a pedagogical story, a religious passage or a novella with morals.

References to Italian Gothic and religion can often be found in my oeuvre. I like to imagine that the structure of the stories in images that used to be told in churches to engage with the people (such as the stories of Saint Francis painted by Giotto in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi) can be interpreted and performed once again today. An example of these references are the angels' wings in *Pueblo pequeño, infierno grande* (*Small town, big hell*)⁴ or in *Chi ha il pane non ha i denti* (*Those who have bread have no teeth*)⁵, as well as in the flattened perspectives that serve as a tribute to the Middle Ages, a period very rich in history and spirituality from which I draw voraciously to pursue the creation of my worlds.

CSR Coming to this specific exhibition *Mirrors for larks*,⁶ what is it about?

CBP The theme of this exhibition is proverbs: popular phrases that recreate a place where my characters can find an *escamotage* to do something in the world where I would like to live.

Proverbs are sayings that originate from a cultural heritage that has always existed and that feature in all civilizations; at times we can find the same proverbs in different languages.

This tradition represents for me knowledge from an untraceable source, pure wisdom, the memory of which is free from presumption.

One day, while thinking about the proverb "avere una bella gatta da pelare"⁷, I began to wonder what its origin was; it seems that, even before the eighteenth century, in England, there was the idiomatic expression "there are more ways than one to skin a cat", which sounds more or less like this: "there are many different ways to do a difficult thing" and that it was referred to the fact that, according to a terrible old English custom, the coats of cats were used to obtain fur. Upon reflection, it was really bizarre to imagine the saying devoid of its meaning, in a purely figurative way: it was funny and gross at the same time. This started my proverbs project, a path that can even turn into a life project.

CSR The world you recreate is a world for everyone, but in which you rebuild your own interiority. However, the settings of your works do not so closely resemble the "perfect" world, there is realism and at the same time fantasy...

CBP There is an element of adventure and of the unknown above us: mystery, the true protagonist of my works. They are dreamlike and cutesy, but they also have disturbing and crude traits.

In fact, by creating a fantastic world, I do not try to hide reality, but rather to bring it to the surface, as a refuge from the disappointment it generates; an idealized alternative.

The setting of my paintings consists of a pre-scientific world, where humans do not think to be able to assolve everything, but rely on a greater force greater, in a life where everything is still possible, where one can still have faith in the unknown. It is an ante-progress world that no longer stands, arising from my need to experience a life that is neither desirable nor truly possible: both realistic and imaginative, crude and heartbreaking, yet magical, that can only be relived through the use of myth, metaphor and the far-fetched.

Clara Sofia Rosenberg and Chiara Baima Poma

1 The English proverb is "rub salt in the wound".

2 The English proverb is "sleeping with one eye open".

3 The English proverb is "the early bird catches the worm".

4 The English proverb is "small town, big gossip". The Italian proverb is "il paese è piccolo e la gente mormora".

5 The English proverb is "to have the means but not the know-how".

6 The English proverb is "to lead someone up the garden path".

7 The equivalent in English is "a tough nut to crack". The literal translation of the Italian proverb is "a big cat to skin".