

## NOT ALWAYS DOES THE DREAM OF PAINTING PRODUCE MONSTERS

There is no great artist who has never had his dark period.

Alberto Burri dedicated an entire cycle of cellotex to black, starting from the work *He doesn't love black* (*Non ama il nero*); we admire Francis Bacon's so called *Black Paintings*, from his last years and possibly an extraordinary prelude to the fateful passage; not to mention Mark Rothko's paintings for the chapel designed by Philip Johnson in Houston, without light and installed *post mortem*. It would take too long to list all the artists who, like the ones before mentioned, turned to black as a fundamental colour in their mature or very late works, as well as those who employed the colour black regardless of the stage of their life.

Gabriele Arruzzo's cycle *Third Purgatory* is undoubtedly a series of black works more than he has ever done to date (and he has done little in this sense, if we exclude a certain *noir* taste in many of his previous works, often circumstantial evidence of misdeeds, murders or unsolved crimes). However, unlike the illustrious cases mentioned above, this is not a late work, since Arruzzo is still far from his final style (we would rather call it a jaunty mid-career one). But it is precisely for this reason that the black motif of the cycle (almost a muted nocturne) is interesting.

The works, painted between 2023 and 2024, emerge, perhaps not accidentally, after a year of important changes in his life. They are paintings of existential transition, but also showing a new stylistic imprint, rigorous, coloristically drier and technically more demanding, iconographically more "bad" and precise than anything the painter had ever done before. They are undoubtedly more mature works, which mark a change, open a door.

Meanwhile, let's start from the title: *Third Purgatory*. The time in which Arruzzo places himself is a time of expiation, purgatorial in fact, of waiting before the doors of Paradise which will welcome the expiator in due time. This cycle was actually painted in a suspended time of his life, and in this non-idle limbo, unlike Paradise, time exists and has an expiry date.

After all, Arruzzo's art itself is an enormous dormant archive of images of all kinds, collected with the same passion as a fussy guardian of *Mnemosyne*, images of our time and of times past, classified in scrupulous files in which it is possible to find anything (human anatomies, saints and madonnas, children's games, weapons, street signs, gears, educational, scientific or technical drawings and engravings, illustrated magazines from the late nineteenth century and the list could extend over many more pages).

From this bottomless well come the images which will subsequently be modified, cut out, stitched together, dismembered, as if a Doctor Frankenstein had put his hand to the scalpel to recompose an "exquisite corpse" and give it new life. From the warehouse of surreal memories dissected, taken, cleaned, juxtaposed, integrated, dried, sorted into genres and typologies, complete works emerge, the meaning of which, however, escapes any attempt at explanation.

In the wake of Max Ernst's collage method in *La Femme 100 têtes* or *Une semaine de bonté*, Arruzzo surgically composes what appear to be visual puzzles and riddles. The ultimate meaning of these paintings, however, is an

iconographic and semantic purgatory, [where] everything is postponed from image to image and the meaning is never completed, as if it were waiting for a solution, which is obviously never preconceived. In Arruzzo there is no unveiling of any truth in painting but rather a concealment *en abysme* so that the truth remains within the painting, in a play of mirrors that make the images kaleidoscopes of themselves.

Paintings within the painting, curtains pulled aside or covered, painters' easels with canvases, backdrops, veils and curtains at the same time, attempts to outline the thicket of a forest with elements that are abstract spots of Pollockian flavour, white canvases that act as blind mirrors or dividing walls: Arruzzo's pictorial project unravels as it is being done, because, although it proceeds and is thrown forward (literally *pro-jected*, i.e. planned in advance), it does not follow rational associative logic. We might think that the truth is hidden, in physics we would call it a "hidden variable", even if in quantum physics the process is based on randomness and probability, and therefore there are no hidden truths: the truth is in its being superimposed and indeterminate.

In some ways Arruzzo's painting possesses this aura of indeterminacy and overlapping of gazes and walled perspectives, to depict situations full of dark omens and mysteries, with painters at work on canvases who however also become violinists, esoteric doctors and anatomists or bearers of magic lanterns in a continuous transmutation of the same into another.

It could ultimately be a single theme developed in many different fashions: the allegory of painting and painting in the contemporary era, nothing more. The post- or anti-narrative plots and the complex representations are nothing more than covers to hide the fact that projection screens, canvases, frames, memories, hallucinations, stages, curtains tell us about the fiction that is at the basis of the pictorial process. A distorted mimesis, with artificial colours (with visible silver enamels and glitter), in which shadows take shape from the darkness, dull, intimist and absorbed lights are fixed, bricolage of fragments appear which do not find a meaning except precisely within the painting, as if the artist had taken Paolini, Adami, Ernst, Magritte, Polke, Rauch and, in his own parlance, had "put them in a blender". The result has no equal in the contemporary Italian pictorial panorama and is not a shapeless mush, since the accumulation of images in Arruzzo is in its own way scientific, obsessive, accurate, classificatory. In fact, there is no pure chance underneath, as if everything were unconscious or a roll of the dice. It is a truth in watermark, which does not exceed the watermark, as it coincides with it. The moment we observe it we lose it as such and fix it as an image. Rather, we could think of it as a form of revision of the unconscious reduced to images of memories taken from impersonal archives.

It seems like the elements of Arruzzo's works must coexist in superpositions but cannot be isolated, measured, recorded (and therefore interpreted), lest they disconnect, fall and collapse, and the work itself goes lost. At the base there is obviously not the postmodern poetics of the slogan "everything is fine", but a type of logic that is undone and, in its own way, decadent, with a nineteenth-century and very current flavor, because what has been undone on the avenue of a *melancholic* sunset is the plot of meanings of our era.

Marco Tonelli

Simóndi

OPENING  
November 14, 2024  
6—9 pm

EXHIBITION  
15.11—21.12.2024

OPENING HOURS  
tue—sat  
3—7 pm  
(morning by appointment)



Gabriele Arruzzo, *senza titolo (autofraintendimento)*, 2024  
enamel, acrylic and glitter on canvas, 75x60cm

# GABRIELE ARRUZZO

## Third Purgatory

text by Marco Tonelli

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