

Of symbolism, or of the surreal. The art of Adriano Pompa

This exhibition offers a unique opportunity to become acquainted with the art of Adriano Pompa, through a substantial selection of works on paper that aptly document the route and interests of the artist. An extremely varied collection of compositions provides us with an exploratory insight into Pompa's visual imagination, made of allusions to the past – a mythical golden age of painting, where lyrical references and erudite quotes blend and give life to dreamy, surreal scenes and landscapes.

Expansive bird's eye views are pierced by clouds, towed by taut sails that cross our visual field like ships fleeing past. In the distance, at the horizon of a solitary but humanised nature, a boulder stands out, like a modern-day Mount Olympus, with an intricate web of scaffolding harnessing and protecting it (as in *Ziehende-Wolken*). Menfolk do not feature in Pompa's work: his compositions are only inhabited by Nietzsche's *Uebersensch*. Idols, saints, prophets and literary characters are the creatures populating the artist's works. St George's image frequently recurs, for instance, imagined as a samurai, protected by discs that slash the pictorial space with extraordinary confidence, dissimulating shields or helmets. Behind the warrior saint, a viper (the dragon) curls his sinuous coils that become the pretext for an outlet for the artist's manual dexterity.

The drawing is, in fact, the undisputed protagonist of this group of works, on preview here in Washington. In the studies for *L'Orlando Furioso*, for instance, Pompa's incisive, calligraphic hand finds strength and rigour of expression. The power of his action on paper is such that even a few marks are sufficient to conjure up poetical and visionary images, as in the *Studio per Orco* on display here.

Classical mythology, beloved by both artists and humanists in the Renaissance, is constantly evoked by Pompa. The drawings for the *Furioso* seem to encompass all of these cultural references in a visual mix suspended in time.

There is, also, the use of gold leaf, that Pompa carves with virtuous skill in watercolours, drawings and oils on paper. The seductive lavishness of the material brings up further links with the pictorial tradition of the past: Italian medieval art, the fascination with the international Gothic style, the dawn of Renaissance as perfectly epitomised by the Masolino-Masaccio alliance ... and more, the Orient, religious icons, Venice and the Ottomans all the way to China with Marco Polo. Chimerical creatures and symbols accompany us in this journey: faceless owls, like mute oracles or divine signs, guard our passage as we proceed. (*Mago* and *Maghetto*, both 2005).

The strength of Pompa's hand and the insistent meticulousness of his action are particularly obvious in his aquaforte etchings. *Falco e Labirinto* (2003) is exemplary in this sense. The bird of prey and the twisted body of the snake about to attack are built with a tight mesh of marks, intersecting in impossible geometrical shapes, as smooth and as rough as in Durer. These images are so complex that one gets lost in them. They are like vertigo, as disorientating as being trapped in a labyrinth.

What Pompa's art demands is precisely the willingness to let go and get lost in his stories beyond time. If we prevent our anxiety and need to exercise control at all costs from dominating us, and decide instead to give in to the artist's graphic vagaries, blindly following him, it will be easier to fully enjoy his work in hedonistic abandonment. Only to come to our senses later on inside the *Castello di Atlantide* or an impregnable *Torre di Babele*. And it's here, where all the languages in the world converge and live together, that Adriano Pompa's art comes to the fore: understanding the stylistic crossover that permeates his work becomes easier, with the imaginative cultural syncretism that is an undercurrent in his work, together with the skilful confidence that allows him to jump from one technique to the next. From his dawn as an apprentice (initiated to painting by his father, Gaetano) Adriano Pompa has today become a master in his genre.

Lorenzo Fusi,
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