

Levitation, nostalgia, infinity...

During the past ten years the Istrian art scene has undergone its great ascent. In this context one cannot omit the name of Labin's painter Vinko Šaina, a man well acquainted with what others have been only secretly dreaming of making a reality. His strength of will, his vision and energy directed towards true things and values can be recognised not only in the bare facts deriving from the author's biography but also in the details of the construction heritage of Labin's "art republic". All this, in the same manner and with the same measure of authenticity, is present in his artistic cosmogony, landscapes from Icarus' perspective conveying a serene and nostalgic perpetuity which spreads endlessly and towards infinity as a clear and open vision of man's minute size and temporary time on the colourful artistic globe between eternity and historical permanence. If the statement "Style is the man" is still relevant or important today, then it finds its full definition in Vinko Šaina. At the same time, Šaina's style, even if it is characterised by a zero-degree identification, which makes superfluous every discussion about a possible mistake or misunderstanding when defining it, is far from being a sign of belonging to any kind of art or painting category. His art, if we need to define it, touches on very different areas and layers of the aesthetic experience, even though in its basic strokes it follows the traditional lyrical and abstract landscape. In him we can recognise elements of metaphysics and surrealism at the same time, but also an uncommon artistic syntax, which is completely unusual for this type of inspiration; it is a syntax that is, above all, built on an element of abstract, mostly gestural painting.

Therefore, Šaina's creative procedure is the total opposite of everything belonging to the framework of the so-called last naturalism. He does not abstract reality, but quite the opposite, makes the abstract real by transforming its basic morphemes, that is the blotch, stroke and gesture, into marks of an ultra-cosmic and hallucinating vision. The hasty associations with Gliha's painting dissipate and disappear in no time. Gliha built his painting on the calligraphy of soil and marks of history as human time. Šaina does this from within his own soul, as an exalted pantheist who feels nature to be a universal and transcendent value, not within the units of measurement for time and space and the narrow logic of human interests, but in the categories of eternity, rather than those of historical time. As a result, his paintings are much closer to cinematic visions of galactic wilderness and perpetuity, like those in the scenes of Kubrick's *Space Odyssey*, than to the layered and rhythmic microstructures of the Mediterranean soil and environment.

Šaina's landscapes are not factual representations of reality. Instead, they come into being during the very moment of their creation. In Šaina's paintings it is as if the artist is trying to find a mythical landscape through which history roared as a sudden accident, happened in a flash, leaving behind only clear vistas of water, sky and land.

This is a pre-historic or perhaps post-historic landscape without those sick Kiefer marks that open deep and painful surface wounds. As a result, it is not unusual that in Šaina's paintings we travel without a defined plan and mandatory goal, totally unencumbered by the narrative and cartographic pedantry which lessens the anxiousness and unpredictability of travel. Finally, not even the goal of his travel itself is limited to known and already seen places, to the popular list of favourite and heritage vistas which strengthen memory or encourage passion for the recognition or the loud acclaim of the painter's believability and skill. To this effect here there exists no time necessary for a thorough analysis and meditation; there is, instead, only the moment of decision and yearning for travel.

The stops on this unusual and exotic travel are, at one moment, the rough and expansive cliffs of Tierra del Fuego, and then the icy desert of Antarctica, followed by the Valley of the Pharaohs, lunar

and desert areas with azure ovals of water which evaporates in the heat of the desert sun, with yellow tracks of light stretching above the horizon as a symbol of some higher and metaphysical presence. Behind these landscapes there is always a basic common neo-romantic and mystical feeling of transcendence and unity, a feeling of reconciliation between man and nature, God and man.

Between the Kasparovsky-like silence of abandoned places and nostalgic expanse and frenzied Turner-like forceful water expanses, through his painting, Šaina brings us to a totally imaginary and unreal landscape, which even with its all-seeing eye creates a feeling of comfortable floating and levitation. At the same time, the fluidity of his moves and impulsiveness of his gestures develop without any constraint and with almost no limit. It is as if the edges did not exist, the painting spreads and closes us in its own space, which is elastic and fluid, formed by the gentle and calming rhythm of the horizontal lines which pulsate in blue layers of varying densities.

The wide and calm water and sky surfaces sometimes melt into each other or are separated by the sharp lines of the horizon. Šaina's dramaturgy is always moderate, without strong and overly expressionist strokes which could take one's attention into a totally different direction. Šaina does not have overly dimensioned plans, those playful and unbalanced layers which, step by step, take the viewer's eye to the centre of the painting. Even his gesticulation no longer seems to be so exclusive and extremely dramatic. Quite the contrary, here it seems reconciled in the gentle and discrete sfumato of the coloured field through which the wildfire spreads and dissipates like a storm in the calligraphic rhythm of his handwriting as a short-lived mark of existence lost in time and space.

In the end, all that remains is infinity, nostalgia, levitation...

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