

GIULIO MALINVERNI  
The Sleeper in the Valley

text by Cristina Beltrami

Like the dove, we were sent out of the ark to see  
if there was anything alive on earth, even if only  
an olive branch to take in the beak - but we found nothing.  
And yet we did not want to return to the ark.  
(Giorgio Agamben)

Giulio Malinverni is an artist of Piedmontese birth and manners.

While describing his paintings, he uses a calm, composed but never boring tone, almost playing in antithesis with the vertigo of his perspectives: slopes that flee towards distant horizons and landscapes constricted in the cubature of a room.

For his second solo exhibition at the Marignana Arte Gallery in Venice, his city of choice, Giulio Malinverni recognised himself in the verses of a poem by Arthur Rimbaud - *The Sleeper in the Valley*. The 1870 poem evokes the contrast between the tepid torpor of an ideal and enchanted nature and the cruelty of the Franco-Prussian war: "It is a green hollow where a stream gurgles, Crazy catching silver rags of itself on the grasses; Where the sun shines from the proud mountain: It is a little valley bubbling over with light" but where "A young soldier, open-mouthed and bare-headed" lies on the ground.

This image is as visceral as a painting that takes on the features of a journey into the oneiric. It refers to impressions that are recognisable and elusive at the same time, suspended between the abyss and the sky, between enchanted evocations and luciferous atmospheres. The dreams narrated by Giulio Malinverni draw from the great masters of ancient art, from a classical visual baggage, which is immediately recognisable and therefore shared among the viewers. At the same time, it is recounted in a personal manner: the historical fragment is shifted into a sort of subjective vision where quotations, whether from everyday life, tragic, ironic, idyllic or grotesque, abound.

As in a track between heaven and hell, Malinverni's painting is a gesture of revelation: it uncovers the world of references, both visual and literary, with which he builds his own universe, which is dreamlike and real at the same time. Dreamlike because it is clearly the result of an impossible vision. However it is real because it elicits an emotional impact in the observer. A reality that can be felt on one's skin, an effect that is the result of a very calibrated painting that alternates almost lenticular passages with rapid and instinctive backgrounds. Sometimes, the painting measures itself against pre-existing backgrounds. In *Natura viva (Living Nature)* realised on flamed paper and in a new series on marble slabs, Giulio Malinverni's stroke makes the most of the geological nature of the support. In *La parabola dei ciechi (The Parable of the Blind)* and *Il trionfo della morte (The Triumph of Death)*, in fact, the natural veins of Iron Grey and Lagoon Green trace the path on which to reinterpret some details from Pieter Bruegel's masterpieces.

Malinverni is pure pictorial instinct devoted to the narration of an imaginary tale. His narrative is built between borrowings from the great history of art and the everyday brought to the paroxysm of a forest of chillies. The agility of his brush gives shape to a

universe, recognisably suspended above reality, to the point that it can be said that he is a modern surrealist. He is so in his choice of subjects, in his dreamlike and ironic play, in his desire to divert the eye of the observer and lead him elsewhere.

I do not mean Magritte's algid and ruthless Surrealism, but a Surrealist attitude that has an almost South American vibe and which is perhaps even more literary than pictorial. A chromatic immersion such as *Sogni Piccanti (Spicy Dreams)* (2024) has the subtle allusiveness of the verses of a Jorge Luis Borges, an author who, due to a blindness that seized him at the age of fifty-four, spent the second half of his life in an eternal night, illuminated by the great masterpieces of painting that still inhabited his memories.

If the path in this exhibition by Giulio Malinverni moves its steps from Rimbaud's mournful landscapes, I believe it can in fact close with Borges' *Heraclitus*, verses dedicated to the obscure thinker *par excellence*:

Second twilight.  
Night that deepens into dream.  
Purification, forgetfulness.  
First twilight.  
Morning that once was dawn.  
Day that was morning.  
Overflowing day that will be a spent evening.  
Second twilight.  
Night, the other costume of time.  
Purification, forgetfulness.  
First twilight...  
In the dawn, the secret anguish  
of the Ephesian.  
What weave is this  
of will be, is, and was?  
What river  
lies under the Ganges?  
What river has no source?  
What river  
drags along mythologies and swords?  
Sleeping is useless.  
Through the dream, through the desert,  
through the cellar,  
the river carries me, and I am the river.  
I was made of delicate substance, mysterious time.  
Perhaps the source is within me.  
Perhaps the days emerge,  
fatal and illusory,  
from my shadow.

(Jorge Luis Borges)