

## ***Human nature or natural man?***

Text by Sabina Spada

Human beings and nature. We are used to thinking of ourselves as independent creatures acting against the background - once green and bright, now increasingly grey and dull - of a planet that is home to us and provides us with indispensable resources. On one side, humans; on the other, nature, which we can exploit, plunder, respect, protect. The worldview, built on this dichotomy and the consequent idea of a nature separate from us humans, is entirely Western. It has its roots in the opposition between *physis* and *logos* elaborated by the philosophies of ancient Greece, an opposition reinforced by Enlightenment scientific naturalism and carried down to our day, shaping our way of knowing and inhabiting the planet. Man forms societies, organises himself through conventions and rules, and elaborates cultures - all in opposition to natural phenomena, to the laws of 'this great book that is continually open before our eyes', in the words of Galileo Galilei. Nature becomes the place outside our technologically advanced communities, a distant and faded memory, lingering in the background of our biology.

Anthropology shows us that this view, based on the opposition between man and nature, is the child of the West and is by no means shared by all the inhabitants of the planet: each culture produces its own representation of nature. There are therefore many natures, that is, many different ways of interpreting the relationship between humans and the other organic or inorganic beings that share our habitat. The populations of certain areas of the Earth, such as the Amazon or Polynesia, illustrates this well. The French anthropologist Philippe Descola highlights this in his enlightening work *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2005), which invites us to rethink our relationship with the environment in terms of an ecology of relationships.

Animals, stones, rocks, clouds, oceans, forests, savannahs, rivers... Perceiving all this as 'other than us' is both the origin and the result of a utilitarian vision of 'nature', which allows its exploitation and destruction. Rethinking our existence in the world in terms of a network of relationships with the other creatures- both organic and inorganic- means, on the other hand, breaking free from the nature/culture dichotomy, which is potentially harmful to our very survival. Animals, stones, rocks, clouds, oceans, forests, savannas, rivers are with us and are connected to us. The Achuar of the Amazon and the Kanak of New Caledonia teach us this: we are bound by a network of relationships that we cannot do without, even if we often ignore them. We are profoundly interdependent, not only with each other but also with all that is non-human. Every second breath we take, in Milan as in Stockholm, brings oxygen by Pacific Ocean algae into our lungs.

# Marignana Arte

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Why do we consider ourselves outside of nature when, in fact, we are entwined in a web of interconnections with every other form of existence, both organic and inorganic? Are we not nature? The gaze of art, as well as anthropological thinking, opens up these questions.