



ROBERTO LUCIANI

SUBCONSCIOUS

A CONVERSATION WITH HERMAN NORMOID

UEEA/Press

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by ROBERTO LUCIANI

I met Herman Normoid, not really him, but his work, on the occasion of his solo exhibition “Croci & Delizie” in Rome in 2010. At that time I noticed the presence in the gallery, alongside some bichromatic works, of a small series of 50 x 50 cm paintings that seemed to mark a transition from pure abstract art to a kind of black and white abstract landscape painting, which suggested to me the vision of a dream world: in an anti-didactic way, they accompanied the eye and the mind of the spectator towards a personal reading, free from formal obligations.

Interested, I decided then to contact the artist to meet him and have a chat, despite having been told by the art-dealer that hosted his exhibition that he was a painter reluctant to appear in public, never present at the “opening” of his own exhibitions or award ceremonies, and that he had decided to show himself to the public through a logo, as if he were a brand, designed by the Argentine graphic designer Alejandro Fernandez Vales. In fact, doing a quick search on the Internet I noticed that his face never appeared, just his logo next to his name. However, to my surprise, when I called him, he proved himself to be open and indeed, he suggested we meet the next day to buy me a coffee which then, given the time of year, turned into an ice cream. It was a pleasant conversation that gave me the opportunity to understand that in fact I was in front of an outsider, an “author” (I do not use the word “artist” because I know that Herman does not like this word, claiming that artists have been, and always will be, very few. He does not feel to be among them, neither among the “masters” because, laughing, he told me that he had never, to his great sorrow, taught in a school). A little isolated, although with clear ideas about the contemporary art market, a connoisseur of artistic techniques and with a keen eye to the contents of the works of his colleagues. Visiting his website I realized why: the impact from a sort of slogan that accompanied his logo was immediate. “Proud to be obsolete”, with which he stressed his ties to the “old” painting, and perhaps an ironic and slightly veiled criticism of the world of the installations, the coup de theatre and, as he himself has admitted, the “... pieces of horses coming out of the walls.” I must confess that I was liking this character, in his conceptual minimalism, in its crystal clarity, in his courage to demolish what he himself had done; I felt sympathy for that sense of “divertissement”

which pervaded even his most disturbing and extravagant works, for his irreverent way of admitting not knowing how to paint, but loving what his hands and his mind could “place” on a piece of MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard). After exchanging telephone numbers and addresses, we decided to meet again at his studio for a longer interview, but between my commitments and his, we were not able to meet earlier than a year later. In the meantime however, he sent me a book with a white cover titled “Volumism is freedom. Herman Normoid ‘s work”, by Stefano Liberati, which gave me the opportunity to explore issues related to his art and to the concepts founding the way of thinking that pervaded all his works: Volumism. I decided to do a sort of interview with him, which I report in this short essay, to examine the circumstances and reasons that led Normoid to produce dreamlike paintings, starting from the abstract expressionism that characterized his works till the exhibition of 2010.

As is my habit, I did not prepare all the questions but just a kind of plot, then I would improvise, letting the conversation guide us in the most smooth and fruitful way.

I arrived at the meeting with a slight delay, delay that later would give me some of embarrassment: Herman was always on time. More than a Roman born in Cairo, he seemed to me like a Japanese born in Lausanne. However, when I arrived he seemed to be organizing his studio which was a mixture of house, studio and workshop in a basement in Piazza Bologna area (Rome - [translator’s note]). At first I was a bit surprised by the lack of light, the little space, the odd old paintings on the walls, but then I faced facts and stopped trying to pigeonhole Herman into a stereotype of the artist, because obviously he was not. We sat in the kitchen-living room having a glass of beer with pretzels and peanuts and he asked me if I had received the white covered book by Liberati and I told him that it looked a very well produced publication both in content and in graphic design, by the Argentine Fernandez Vales. Herman emphasized that Volumism was not an artistic movement but rather a philosophical thought that put the spectator at the center of the creative process in a kind of virtuous circle of intimate readings and interpretations between author and observer.



Inspired by what I had seen I asked him where he had got the inspiration to paint those paintings which later, in the in the white covered book, I had read that he himself had defined with the expression “ fantastic views”.

It is now 5 or 6 years since I started experimenting with a system that would allow me to get a glimmer of expression coming from my most intimate self.

A path that has led me to overcome the barriers of painting techniques, freeing what was conceptually most difficult to conceive: that the subconscious can express itself without moving from its natural and hidden location, a structural foundation of our conscious being. So my purpose was to be able to express messages from the subconscious without bringing it to reality: a task more senseless than arduous, irrational and contradictory. But then I could not suppress a sense of anxiety due to the absence of something that I felt as fundamental.

...I had the impression
that my subconscious
even inhibited, or at
least acted as a brake
on my creative ability...

So rather than an inspiration, it was the anxiety that has motivated you? The need to satisfy your creative thirst?


For me it was exactly that: a sense of dissatisfaction, almost an aimlessly searching, an instinctive journey toward something unknown and perhaps for that reason so attractive.



#0257.Non esitare.2013



Herman Abbat 13



But the subconscious is not an object whose existence you can scientifically prove; when you use this term what do you imagine? What do you think the subconscious is?

I always imagined the subconscious like the inside of our planet Earth: a sphere of liquid magma always moving, invisible and impossible to perceive and imagine. It is just thanks to volcanoes that we can imagine how, under our feet, although at a few kilometers depth, lies an ancient energy, a huge incandescent mass. But if the subconscious is the core, how would it be possible to find a magma chamber and a conduit so that at least a small part of this lava could generate an eruption, covering the conscious component of my ego, my earth's crust or at least part of it?

The writer's block, the "white canvas" syndrome, the simple and classic lack of inspiration, seem to be that absence of energy, energy perhaps missing from our conscious self, from our will, but abundant in the buried layers, rich in magma that is only expressed if conveyed, projected to the outside, free to move without control or only with a partial control.


So if I understand correctly, the inspiration comes from contact between what is buried, the subconscious, and what might call the outer life?

Our ideas, the fruit of the substance now cooled and hardened, the endless experiences accumulated during life, can come to express sublime results, rich and complex, but it is the contact with the magma that permeates the works of an overwhelming energy, that energy that thrills the viewer, the reader, the spectator.

Personally I had the impression that my subconscious even inhibited, or at least acted as a brake on my creative ability, making me feel in a constant state of dissatisfaction with what I produced. My productive life was permeated by a desire to create something not consciously willed, and corresponding to what originates from the unconscious. An unrestrainable need to express the unexpressed that will take me to an amazing discovery for my conscious life.



...an instinctive
journey toward
something unknown
and perhaps for that
reason so attractive.



The word “discovery” implies randomness; the observation of something that already exists in nature and for which one discovers a new utility, in a certain sense, a revelation. Why did you use that term?

Well, perhaps the right word is really revelation: it happened the first time I realized that I had unintentionally created an image that seemed dictated by someone else. The reality is that it was nothing more than a work that had a totally different reading from what I wanted to express. Nothing particularly outstanding from the aesthetic point of view, but definitely a forerunner for what I would have later produced consciously, trying to convey to the outside what my mind kept carefully buried.

So there was just a beginning, a Big Bang? Tell me exactly what happened ...

One day in late spring, as always I was riding my scooter, the indispensable means of transport for surviving the Roman traffic and the delight of my lumbar vertebrae, brutally compressed between the holes on the road surface by now left alone, as if it were a skin capable of self-regeneration, and the almost total absence of reaction on the part of my bike suspension. But let's leave the streets of Rome and go back to the paintings: I was in the vicinity of Largo Santa Susanna when I saw a fellow biker moving in the traffic right in front of me, wearing the obligatory approved helmet and a white t-shirt embellished on the back with two vertical dark grey strips which sloped towards the center in a band of lighter gray. The shape intrigued me and I decided to develop it with my putty knife technique on an MDF 100 x 70 cm board. As I arrived here in my atelier, before the figure disappeared into the depths of my labile memory, I prepared the acrylic color impasto I use as white and opened a brand new 1kg can of opaque black color. I settled a couple of large sheets of paper on the floor more or less where we are now to prevent it from getting dirty (contrary to other colleagues whose studios I visit, I do not like that the floor to indicate that it is a painter's studio, I prefer the floor to remain clean, neutral, as if it were that of an accountant) and because, at a later time, the spots of color can distract me; also the white sheet of paper lying behind the support helps me focusing on what I have to paint (as you can see the studio floor is black ... I must have some sort of obsession with the absence of color ...). I placed the board on the sheets of paper with the short side against my knees and began to spread a cordillera of white in the middle, starting to crush it by moving the spatula on the two opposite sides. Then I started, after dipping just the edge of the putty knife into the can of black, to create a gradient effect to the long sides of the painting, but failed in what I intended to do, given the limited possibility to control the outcome of the gradient effect using a putty knife on a mountain of white stucco still totally fresh. But I did not give up.

I started again with the white stucco at the center and the black color on top of it; nothing again. I tried again and again for an hour without realizing how much time had passed, in fact, only a part of my body had noticed the passing of time: the same, poor, old neglected back.



40 1/2

In fact it is a fairly common problem, something that Mr. Bertelli realized long ago (the inventor of a very famous Italian transdermal patch [translator's note])... and then what happened?


It is my habit, knowing my space-time detachment while I make a painting, to set an alarm on my cell phone that brings me back to the reality of the actual things of everyday life, and in fact, inexorably the alarm rang, leading to the end of my vain attempts to do what the t-shirt biker had inspired me to do. After all I had a work meeting and it is not my habit to be late. So I cleaned the spatulas one against the other forming a ball of white putty with black inside and then with a masterful mason's technique, I shot it into the recycle bin, against a miserable piece of paper whose only fault was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and that will serve as dryer of the remains of color as the last task of its life. I scrubbed my hands with a nail brush, because what with one thing and another a distraction makes them victims of involuntary soiling, wiped them, and I took my things ready to get out. I walked out of the studio door and, like everyone else, I rotated 180 degrees on my axis to lock it, and it was in that moment, when the door was about to close, that my distracted and slightly unfocussed eyes threw one last involuntary look inside the studio, seeing what until then was invisible and unexpected. The door, following the procedure already undertaken and without any possibility of opposing the principle of inertia, closed with the typical metallic sound of the anti-intrusion bars. So, imagine me: still, in front of the closed door, my nose 1 inch from the shutter, the key in the keyhole (also my hand had relentlessly followed the principle of inertia, but in that case mental), analyzing the image fixed in my retina.

I look and I see, I see what
I could not, even wanting
to, repeat: impossible, not
repeatable, faces fixed in a
transcendent moment...



#0133.Purgatory.2010


Cherry Hill



**But what could you have seen that was so
disconcerting? You make me worry!**

No, do not worry, it was not the Yeti of which I had long suspected the presence in my studio and that revealed itself only when I went away and put everything in order when I was about to be back, or the reflection in the mirror that showed the classic black-gloved hands that strangle a neighbor, or a 10 cm spider enjoying hanging from the ceiling ... well this one sometimes exists for real ...

my work begins in order to fill a need and ends at the moment that I feel this need is satisfied, or rather, as I realized over time, when my subconscious considers itself satisfied.



**Of course I looked at the ceiling and Herman laughed, amused
... and then went on.**

None of this! I just saw the picture that was lying helpless on the floor, with white sheets as background, displayed in the opposite direction to that in which I had painted it. No longer a vertical work, but a horizontal painting: I had suddenly discovered a hidden world, never consciously wanted, even if created by my own hands. At this instant it was clear to me in all its evidence that, without meaning to, I had represented a bizarre black and white sight, a series of small houses, perhaps wooden, almost barracks, on the banks of a placid white river, seen through a glass that appeared to be covered in lampblack and as if someone had tried to clean it up in a central band releasing the sight of the strange scene in a false negative image.

**You painted a picture you did not mean to?
You made such an effort to paint something
horizontally that you did not realize that
“someone” was painting another image
perpendicular to yours?**

In a certain sense ... that “someone” was
myself, but in a version in touch with my
subconscious. At least this is my bold theory.

...it is not you to
decide if you are
important, the others
decide, basing their
decision on your
results.

But then you considered the painting yours? Did you admit it into your personal production?


Sure! That work would be called “Along the River” with a very meaningful subtitle for me, “waiting for the enemy,” in reference to the Chinese saying about revenge (If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by - Sun Tsu [translator note]). The body of the enemy that I was waiting for sitting on the bank of the river was finally passing by, it was the body of the frustration that was finally abandoning me, the enemy was the sense of helplessness left by something that I wanted to express, but that did not show itself, because expressing what is not in consciousness is a nonsense. It is only when you want-not, when you follow the gesture but leave it free, only when you look at what is being born without intervening, when using sufficiently uncontrollable means, it is there that maybe, I guess, the unconscious turns outwards, showing the image that you did not intend to give rise to, as if it had been produced by someone intimately connected to you but at the same time someone else.



#0135. El lago del rosedal de Buenos Aires. 2010



Hermano Horacio '10



I seem to see scenes of explosions on the sun's surface. Those tongues of fire that indeed, as you say, suddenly increase but quickly disappear, remixing with the rest of the stellar body.

So it is at that point that you started to realize that you had to free that part of you that seemed to arrange things randomly but in reality, was just proposing a new vision?

I would say yes, with "Along the River" I realized that probably the unconscious has the opportunity to reveal itself in a painting: the way in which this becomes possible, however, was for me yet to be discovered.


How to show in a painting what comes from the subconscious? This question also assumes that you accept that the subconscious exists, and to determine it we need to define it.

Exactly as I said before, the existence of the subconscious is not a scientifically verifiable fact, it is itself the result of an intuition. In what terms did you spot the problem?

I imagined a series of impulses, feelings, passions and fantasies that remain outside the domain of consciousness, just as they reveal themselves in dreams or in those moments when you wake up but you still remain in a state of semi-conscious deep relaxation, in a sort of decompression phase before the return to reality. This is the phase of awakening: it is as if a part of the brain remained in a state of sleep and waking at the same time, in a state of self-induced hypnosis. At that stage the presence of the subconscious could be detected, the moment in which a series of relationships and connections, in real life hidden by the glare of everyday life, manifest themselves in their delicacy; translucent objects barely visible in the dim light of awakening, but too subtle to be appreciated in full consciousness. The world of the subconscious, always present but simply overwhelmed by the enormous power of the signals we receive from everyday life during the waking state. When these signals begin to fade, the reality of the subconscious begins to disclose that light interlacement of ideas flowing unstoppably into the folds of superabundant reality.

I do not want to find a justification to the way I paint, I am just trying to find a logical explanation to what I do.

...some other
times I stop
and I say, but
what crap have
I done?



Well, who among us has not experienced the feeling of clarity of some visions, who has not solved problems that seemed unsolvable in reality, in the state of drowsiness? In fact, it is as if the total lack of external interference would leave our brains to process information at a deeper level and at a faster rate than it could during the day.

You have hit the mark: according to this view that considers the subconscious as flow, it is the reduction of data that come from real life that helps the expression and reading of the subconscious channel; then silence, or a repetitive and monotonous music, such as Tabula Rasa by Arvo Pärt, the detachment from the problems of everyday life, in a kind of active meditation which helps the mind transmitting images from the subconscious, also thanks to pictorial means that prevent the author from attempting to control the details of what he is painting, leaving the carrying out of the work to unintentional gestures, to the expression of the subconscious.

So it's also matter of means of expression? Reducing the possibility of controlling the details helps the emersion of the subconscious stage?

Exactly, and the chromatic minimalism also helps to reduce distractions, black and white, pure light and its total absence, even more distant from the inputs of the conscious world, with its roars, its dazzling lights and its frenzy.

A painting method of which I had already sensed the possibility was based on the use of mellow colors, water-based and fast drying, spread with large flat spatulas on rigid, smooth and textureless supports. Just like driving a car on a slab of ice covered with oil: control of the vehicle is practically nil. This technique, not that of driving, forces a fast execution because of the water-based color's drying speed, and prevents the painter from an accurate control of the details. In this way, all that you can consciously control is reduced to a minimum, the noise level is lowered and the possibility of expression of the subconscious mind is increased.

I must confess that this modus operandi is not the result of research, but a simple effect of my painterly and technical demands dictated by the type of abstract painting with wide color fields which has always characterized my work; at the same time I do not think that my subconscious has suggested which painting technique I should use to let it express itself: this would be like admitting that my subconscious is other than me, a third-party acting independently and directly influencing my actions, something that I do not think possible or even desirable, in a sense.



In fact, if this were the case, it would be some sort of relationship like the one between Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde, on the other hand you do not think there is a complete separation between the conscious and the subconscious stage, right?

That's right. A painting technique which is difficult to control, but not totally unmanageable as was the peinture automatique of André Masson, makes possible, according to this hypothesis, the expression of the sub-conscious stage of the human mind. The absence of environmental distractions, a high level of concentration, the detachment from the inevitable problems of everyday life, almost in a meditative state, conveys the expression of that substratum of the mental stream outside which, although without showing itself with evidence, is always present. As when two fluids held together by forces of interaction of different natures (e.g. oil and water), are poured into the same glass container: they do not mix with each other, they only touch in a common plane, giving rise to an enforced cohabitation. The subconscious is the plane in which reality and mind are touching: it is a buffer zone that interacts with both parties. It's thick and thin, full of basic information, unelaborated and primordial, hard to express and to read, if not in a dream or pre-awakening state.

Obviously I do not pretend that my imaginative vision of the subconscious is scientifically sound, just as you remarked before, it is only an exemplification of what could be: an attempt, you decide if successful, to give an explanation to the need that I had to represent something fleeting, of which it is not possible to speak in terms of common sense and within the canons of an aesthetics linked to the expression of consciousness.

...the faces are
not people but
messages...

#0255.The sleeping land (particolare).2013





And today, after many years since that first impact, after the first revelation, has anything changed?


Today, after a few years since that thunderbolt, the dialogue between conscious and subconscious, between eye and hand, between the spatulas and the doughy color has become in a sense easier, although it is always a few days or weeks after carrying out a work that I begin to see the painting that I have made but I had not fully understood. I look and I see, I see what I could not, even wanting to, repeat: impossible, not repeatable, faces fixed in a transcendent moment, because the next moment they would irretrievably disappear under the additional, uncontrollable hit of the spatula, which would distort their meaning. And this is perhaps the only thing that remains in the domain of the conscious, the decision to start and to finish; but in the end not even this is true, if I find things that I had not seen in a painting of which I myself had decreed the “end of the work”.

So what is your role in the dialogue between the white surface, the putty knives, the black and white color?

My work begins in order to fill a need and ends at the moment that I feel this need is satisfied, or rather, as I realized over time, when my subconscious considers itself satisfied. There is also a relationship between the work and the viewer, that could be me or it may be another person: the fact is that the outcome is as variable as the minds of those who will look at the painting are different, and all the times that they might look at it, perhaps years later. Many times in museums I've seen again a painting I had seen years before, and I realized that the painting did not have the same effect on me as the first time. Maybe because my cultural level was in some way changed or maybe because my life experience made my reading different, or perhaps simply because at that time I was in a different mood, the fact is that for me the painting I saw maybe 10 years before was no longer the same. This is the case for all forms of communication, for cinema, fiction, poetry, music; it is very likely that what you feel today, you will not feel the second time you read, listen or watch.

My paintings, till they are in here, are not really born, it is as if they were in a sort of incubator, in their mom's belly; it is only when they cross that door closed in a box ready to be shipped, that they begin their real life, around the world, a life that no one can predict where it will lead...

...the enemy was the sense of helplessness left by something that I wanted to express, but that did not show itself, because expressing what is not in consciousness is a nonsense.



And here we get back to the concepts expressed by Volumism, the intimate rereading mentioned by Stefano Liberati in “ Volumism is freedom”; the continuous metamorphosis of a work of art in the mind of the beholder and the infinite readings of it by all the observers.

I go further: as in a labyrinthine house where every room has a door leading to another room, the questions do not end there. If it is my subconscious that expresses itself, what effect will it have on the vision of other people? At what level does a painting like that operate? It is observed by the conscious mind of the viewer, or perhaps it touches the strings of someone else's subconscious?

The question you ask is indeed a logical consequence of what you've said so far: and perhaps it is extendable to the reading of works of art in the broadest sense. The relationship between painting and the viewer has always been the subject of analysis by philosophers, critics and psychologists, but perhaps in this case, I had the opportunity to talk with an artist like you who has not tried to oblige the inner world to speak at all costs, as in the case of the surrealists, but to leave this world to express itself, with its own language, which is probably available on a subconscious level rather than within a conscious aesthetic field.

The surrealists in my opinion forced the hand too much. They had an aggressive approach in the search for a way of expressing the subconscious; they lacked delicacy, moving in an extremely tenuous ambit of our mind. It's as if you were trying to talk to a shy child shaking him instead of trying kindness and persuasive ways: you may get the opposite effect, a total closure. On the other hand the surrealists did not want reason to control anything of what they produced; for me it is not so, the reason plays a part, when I decide to paint, when I use the color or mix the putty. The borderline is very thin, the region in which the subconscious probably expresses itself is in that space located on the edge of my putty knife, that with a willed gesture expresses something not expected, something that surprises my conscious mind, something that yes, in this case, is not under the control of reason.

I have no doubt, I thank
art dealers, they are able
to sell my paintings, and
at the same time allow
them to get out of this
studio and to get out
there and live, starting to
have a personal history...
an unpredictable path
that will take them who
knows where...



So, for you the Surrealists started from an assumption that does not belong to you: the exclusion of reason from the creative process.

I do not want to find a justification to the way I paint, I am just trying to find a logical explanation to what I do. I do not care if the person who observes one of my paintings has a background useful to the reading of my work: on the contrary, I would like him or her to look at it without prejudice, ironic in the mind and open-hearted. I would like relaxed spectators who take time to get into the picture, free to come out of it when they want with the impression that they want. I do not want my paintings to point to a cultural elite, on the contrary I would like my subconscious to transmit something that would represent a universal language, a language that does not have to please everyone, but that is understandable by everyone, because it is read at a level of structural support to that of consciousness. But I see a puzzled expression on your face...


Is that what you say should be tried in a sense: you should put your works in an exhibition and compel visitors to express an impression, rather than a judgment. Maybe we would not have a direct answer, but with the effect on the visitors we could draw a sort of diagram to see if you hit the mark, or better, if your subconscious has been able, through your works, to express something that could communicate directly to other subconsciences using a language more primitive than the classic one of paintings, but maybe for that reason more powerful.

An exhibition with a built-in opinion survey? An exhibition that ends with a questionnaire on impressions? It is interesting, although I fear it would become a target practice with tomatoes on my face, you know those old funfairs? Just kidding ...

But you do not need a statistical survey, to me it is enough if only a few visitors report, as a result of the reading of a painting of mine, an effect on a part of their mind over which they do not have full control, a deep emotional involvement and, from their point of view, inexplicable. It is not necessary for them to have a positive reaction; the important thing is that this reaction is not due to anything consciously explainable.








In the exhibition, where for the first time I saw your work, there were no “faces”: they are new or you did not you want to show them on that occasion?

In fact at that time I had not yet dealt with the world of “faces”: it was a discovery that came shortly after that exhibition; an exciting discovery, although I must say that these faces give me tremendous anxiety during their production. Just a hit of spatula in excess, and what I liked a moment before, is totally distorted and I do not like it anymore. In fact, the putty knife is a double-edged sword: it can originate intriguing unexpected figures, but at the same time it is a cold mother, because as easily as it gives the form, as easily it deletes it permanently, leaving me with a strong sense of loss and anger. But with time I have learned to live with these feelings, and I know that if I am not able to stop myself, an interesting face may disappear forever, buried in a moment. In any case, as you have seen, in the faces there is no trace of womanly grace, but power, mixed with a fatal sadness, almost supernatural; the awareness of an impending and inevitable disaster or simply the cycle of life.

And that is why they are floating on the black? That they seem not to have a body?

I think that the body would distract the viewer by placing those faces in the world of portraiture, that is where, this time in full consciousness, I just do not want them to end up. Despite the vast majority having human form and women's names, the faces are not people but messages; messages that I do not consciously elaborate but messages that come from the depths and that can each be read in a different way, rejecting them completely or being enchanted as Ulysses was by the sirens' calls. I must confess that sometimes I stop and look at one of them and I'm struck by the fact that I had not previously seen a trait, a feature, a superimposition of layers of black and white, and some other times I stop and I say, but what crap have I done?

However, in general I think the faces tend to have the strength of Catholic religious depictions, the feeling of an Ecce Homo, the agony of a deposition. These are paintings that shake, they make you take a stand: you either love them or hate them, they do not leave anybody indifferent, at least that's what I hope...



It seems to me that your work can be put into the expressionist current more than in the surrealist one. Although subconscious is a word most used by the Surrealists, Expressionists have always, like you, given more importance to the emotional side than the visual one.

Ah, no doubt. If I were to ascribe my work to a current, it would be Expressionism, both the abstract and the figurative paintings. And there is also a sense of social and political condemnation typical of Expressionism: especially in the reading of the faces you can feel the aura of something catastrophic, a warning, a sense of conviction of the atrocities that the human being is capable of perpetrating, of the monstrosities of which he is an expert author. Maybe it will be the speed with which information propagates in the world, but it's amazing how much violence, often really gratuitous, is generated on the Earth. And I must say that gender violence is giving me special anguish. The news coming from India on violence against women is chilling, as it is chilling to see how this thing is spreading in our country. This story of using acid to disfigure them is really the work of men compared to which a slimy worm is an English lord. In Italy, they take little account of family violence, the world of humiliations in which women are often forced to live.

Is it pessimism what transpires from your words or just a reading of the facts? Don't you think it is possible to live in harmony?

No, I do not consider myself a pessimist, and most likely what we see as negative is surrounded by many beautiful and positive things, people helping each other, people sharing other people's grief, people that beg but are also capable of giving. But it is a fact that if you produce weapons, somewhere in the world they will be used, and not for clay pigeon shooting. There is no generation that has not been compelled to see war or even participate in it: my father was born in 1932 and definitely saw it, I've got it a few miles from the nation in which I live, Italy, even if it seems that just a few of us have noticed. But if we continue like this, our conversation will continue with an endless list of wrong things, don't you think? Let's say in general that I would like people to live without causing too much trouble to neighbors, trying to keep busy and to do things: if we could apply the law of doing right, working with care and love, we would probably have a lot less trouble in the world and there would be more time and money to devote to research, to the preservation of what we have and to create beautiful things; and here I have to stop because I could broach, for example, the subject of the real estate disaster generated in our country over the past 60 years, that makes me ashamed to be Italian: it is dishonorable to see the beautiful things our grandparents left us, and the territory that instead we will leave to our children. Italy is the home of architecture, our ancestors have left us sublime constructional examples in all periods of history, giving us a territory infinitely rich of models of beauty even in the most remote and inaccessible areas of the peninsula. Today we see a land covered with cement, poorly managed, with third-world infrastructure and buildings of an unspeakable ugliness: how can you create beauty if all around we do not see anything other than ignominy? Why can't we have nice contemporary architecture, human-sized and for human beings? In many other countries this is done, why can't we do it in ours? The masons do not know how to use lime, sometimes they do not even know what it is! They think it is a weak material, they think that cement is the solution to all construction and conservation problems! How is that they do not realize that the structures built by the Romans in Italy and in the world and still standing, were made of stone, bricks and lime? It is so difficult to train workers and masons who understand the difference between historic buildings and modern ones? I condemn the great building speculators as much as smallholder devastators with their ignominious houses, without any relation to the territory: a nation that has more than 100,000 registered architects in its provincial associations; a nation in which, almost exclusively, surveyors plan buildings. Nothing but harmony! And now I stop and let's go back to painting!


Luckily, I am an architect! Otherwise you'd throw me out of the studio! Your judgment is perhaps a bit harsh but I certainly can't fault you on that one ... But yes, let's get back to paintings. So, from what I understand your work is placed between Expressionism and Surrealism, looking in the folds of the first for answers to the questions raised by the second, leaving a window open to the expression of the subconscious.

I'm sorry, wait, I do not want you to think that I give myself some importance, or, even worse, that I feel that I am doing something important: I am just telling you what happens to me, then, if what happens to me can be useful to others, if it can bring in ideas to create new things and live new experiences, I welcome it. I certainly cannot deny being flattered if someone like you is interested in what I do, but I always keep in mind the figures of the great artists and the light-years that separate me from them, both in technique, in the depth of their intentions and in the magnitude of their intuition. I try to be self-deprecating, and I like to do paintings free from the definition of the work of art, away from painful research, maybe too spontaneous and naive, but maybe for this reason, permeated by the force that some call "gut feeling", and that I would assimilate more to nature. I think that my works have something instinctive, that are far from being thoughtful, descriptive or didactic, and I think their strength is based on this, the opportunity to cross the border between the region of what is under our domain and what is so fleeting and within the jurisdiction of the subconscious.

To conclude and to try to give an answer to your question, I do not know where to set my work, or as I prefer to call it, my *divertissement*, whether in Expressionism, Surrealism or Neo-expressionism: I make paintings, two-dimensional painted objects to hang on the wall if you like them. Then I think freely and I make suppositions, being sure of not hurting anyone; I'm not ashamed to use the word "subconscious" without being a philosopher: I just try to give an answer to the questions that come to my mind, but always with my feet on the ground and the spatulas immersed in the colors. Sure, I have my sense for art, and I like some artistic techniques better than others, but I'm not an art historian, much less do I have a global vision, in fact I think I have a very small view of the art of the western world; the only thing I can say for certain is that the market does not affect my taste, and the judgments of art critics and historians interest me, but I do not take them at face value, I reserve the right to say "I am not convinced" no matter how well founded the construct on which the criticism is based, positive or negative, if it does not convince me, I am not convinced, and that's it. After all, it is not useful for everyone to think in the same way, on the contrary debate is productive, respecting other postulations and attitudes, but without obligation of agreement. In a world where the skills are so vast, and points of view so different, it seems logical to assert that it is unlikely that a single scholar can really play the role of supreme judge: scholars will always miss something they had not noticed, that doesn't falling under their competence. Teamwork, debate, public discussion, are guarantees of good results. Then there are exceptions, of course.

#0250.Mrs.Davidson (particolare).2013





And what about the alienation of your works? What do you think of the fact that they are sold on the market? Do you consider it demeaning? What do you think about art dealers, gallery owners and all those people moving on the financial value of your own work?


I have no doubt, I thank art dealers, they are able to sell my paintings, and at the same time allow them to get out of this studio and to get out there and live, starting to have a personal history, an unpredictable path that will take them who knows where; and this for me is unique, priceless and often not even taken into consideration by those colleagues who complain about the high percentages taken by dealers. My paintings, till they are in here, are not really born, it is as if they were in a sort of incubator, in their mom's belly; it is only when they cross that door closed in a box ready to be shipped, that they begin their real life, around the world, a life that no one can predict where it will lead, after sales, exchanges, inheritance, accidents and restorations: I think it's more due to this than to mere selling that my gratitude goes to anyone involved in placing my works on the market. They are, in an image that will surely make you smile, midwives who, even if not taking a direct part in the creative process, help the coming into the world of my paintings. As you may have figured out, humility and respect for the work of others is very important for me; knowing how to correctly weigh the importance of the function of others is a great gift that makes you stand with your feet on the ground, preventing you making a fool of yourself, typical of those subjects who think they are important; because it is not you to decide if you are important, the others decide, basing their decision on your results.

No, you're right, we critics have a bad habit of trying to pigeonhole, for simplicity, the artists; but, since you've talked about your personal taste, what you like and what not, or rather, as you say, what convinces you and what does not in contemporary art?

Contemporary art is too wide a field, let's talk about contemporary figurative arts. I do not care about sensational sculptures, about the 20-meter high super-rabbits, I do not like the pieces of horse coming out of the walls because I do not understand their meaning apart from the spectacular side, which is not usually a close relative of rich content; they are nice objects, they make me smile, but I do not feel they add anything to my sensibility, nor to my knowledge; I respect the work of those who carried out the sculptures, with hard work and professionalism, but I can only see the commercial and spectacular side. In addition, there is the issue of the market created by powerful art dealers, which imposes some authors, totally ignoring the enormous art production of the world.







Are you talking about the universe of authors who show their works on some portals on the Internet, residing in the USA, the United Kingdom and France such as Wotartist, Fineartamerica, Potinsdarts, Foundmyself, Saatchionline etc. etc.?

Yes, in fact, these sites allow everybody, free of charge, to show their works, they are a giant kaleidoscope of works and authors, among which you can find really interesting painters, far from the spirit of competition that characterizes the market. In fact it is for this reason that on my personal website I created a section similar to my online gallery so that I can invite people to exhibit and speak freely about their own works; but one at a time, for heaven's sake ... I think that is part of the cordiality and brotherhood among colleagues, perhaps absent in the world of great art galleries and the great merchants who decide all with millions of dollars. Of course, as I said before, I respect the work of the merchants, but I believe that to have a broader vision of what is produced in the world today, you should turn on the Internet and make direct contact with the authors that interest you.

And what reactions have you had from the colleagues that you contacted? I imagine it would have seemed strange that another painter contacted them to show their works in a dedicated page on his website. And what did you do with the non-Italian artists? Did you speak to them in English?

Yes, English is a language that is usually spoken by those who use these sites; the reaction is almost always flattered surprise. I always try to make the email I write to them sound very personal, so as not to be confused with the hundreds every artist receives with the proposal of being included for a fee in a few shows, or even worse, in some publication, which inevitably, in the words of the publisher, is of fundamental importance in the contemporary art world, and will make you famous all over the globe and let you sell a lot of paintings. However, past the hurdle of the first contact, I ask them to send me a selection of 10 works with titles, technique and size, and possibly a text in English to describe their work; the text can also be minimalist, they don't need to fill pages and pages, but at least say where they work and, if they have their own websites, the address so that it can be visited. Usually I host them for a few months. At the moment my page is dedicated to guest artist Sabina Nore, a young surrealist painter who lives and works in Vienna, and is in my opinion interesting, and whose work exudes a sense of humor that is rare to meet in the work that you see around.

The chat was not so long, but opened chasms that were necessary to fill; I felt a little embarrassed, I did not expect to find something new, something fresh and funny and instead, although in a serious and eccentric way, Herman was able to light the flame of curiosity in me. The questions that he put to himself and to me were disarming in their simplicity. I had the feeling of having met a Martian, a linear and at the same time deep person, conscious but still curious, self confident and doubtful. A fully-fledged anti-artist.

PLATES

MISS.SAKAMOTO

#0158
70 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2011



JOANNE

#0224
70 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



MSR.HARLEY

#0238
50 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



ROMANA

#0188
45 x 35 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2012



MAGGIE

#0251
50 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



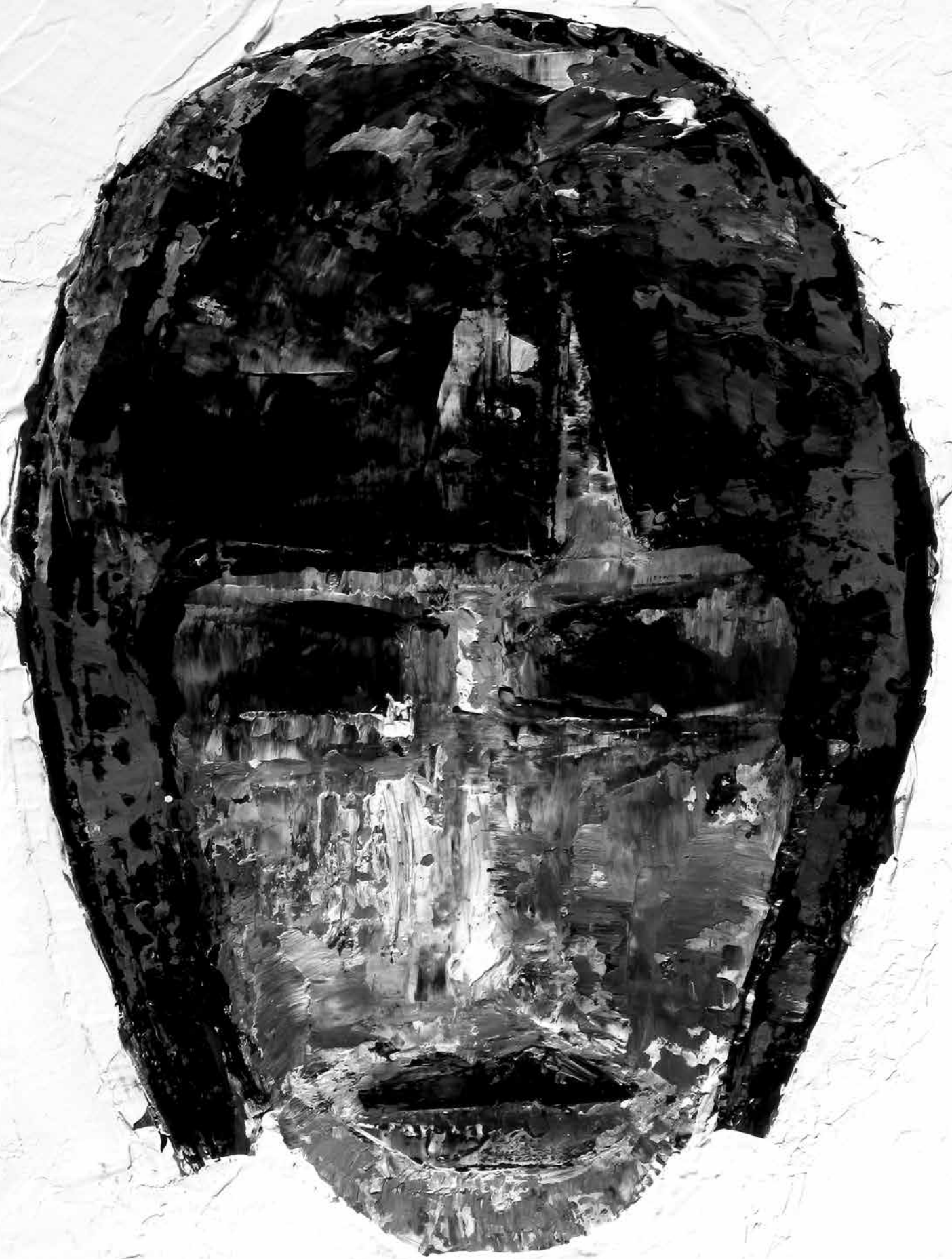
DOROTHY

#0158
54 x 42 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2011



MSR.DAVIDSON

#0250
50 x 42 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



MRS.PAGE

#0193
50 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2012



CHLOE

#0222
70 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



DIANA

#0164
54 x 42 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2011



KATE

#0225
70 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2013



NIKITA

#0270
70 x 50 cm.
Acrylic on MDF.
2014



