

Fields of memories

by Antonello Tolve

I o a n S b â r c i u

Illato lumine

a cura di Olimpia Bera e Antonello Tolve

opening 17 dicembre 2017, ore 11:30
17 dicembre 2017 / 20 gennaio 2018

Archivio Menna Binga | via dei Monti di Pietralata 16 - Roma

AMBASCIATA ROMÂNIEI
pe lângă SFÂNTUL SCALN ȘI ORDINUL
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«The eye [...] is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of the hand».

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Ioan Sbârciu (Feldru, 1948) is one of the leading figures in the contemporary Romanian scene. He is a painter who thinks with hands, an intellectual who shows a bias towards the *idea of making*¹ and an observer who carefully records life. His art turns its back on figurative painting and his artworks focus on a metalinguistic awareness, which decodes and re-encodes reality through primary tools together with forces, that establish contacts, secret contracts between thinking and making art. His canvases are arenas and even if they follow an abstract line, they evoke stories and places. They stretch across a communicative track, where expression is pursued through quick brush strokes, state of mind, impression and imagination.

Sbârciu revisits myths (*Rapirea Europei*) and Transylvanian landscapes (memories of his childhood, as for instance *Pădurea de cenușă* and *Transylvanian Landscape*). The artist starts from autobiographical experiences in order to disclose an erotic myokinetic gesture in his drawings. Sbârciu joins together Abstract Post-Expressionism and tradition (which is inserted in the framework of post-modernity), going back to those pictorial values, that allow to strengthen the relation between tradition and innovation, ancient and modern, past and present.

1 P. Valéry, *L'homme et la coquille*, in *Ouvres*, Gallimard, Paris 1957, p. 891: «the idea of Making is the first and most human of ideas».

Bearing in mind that *a painter paints with his brain and not with his hands* (as Michelangelo Buonarroti said), the artist portrays plenty of forces determined by the *passion of reason* and by a vision which brings together laws and chances, rational and irrational, meditation and instinctivity. Even if the brush strokes, which perfect artworks are spontaneous (the *Don Quijote* painted in 2013, 2016 and 2017 are eloquent examples), nothing is in fact left to chance (even the dimension or the colour of canvases – whites, ancient pink, olive green, greys and black – are carefully chosen). In Sbârciu's world dream and imagination as well as internal tools of painting, are extremely powerful and give birth to the same operative and creative environment, which portrays interiority, reveals feelings and opens new paths towards sleeping magnetic powers.

Since the early 1990s, or more precisely since the Fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu (sentenced to death on 22nd December 1989) when Romania opens up to a new intellectual spring, Sbârciu has focused on the present and has created a new school. The *School of Cluj* is an artistic trend free from the constraints of the communist realism and opened to the dialogue with the international culture through new expressive means.

His painting is a place where analyses, actions and reflections are carried out. Since the early 1990s it has become a real hand-to-hand with the canvas, a duel, a habitat in which *by offering his body to the world, the painter turns the world itself into painting*. Layers of colours, places and times are merged into Sbârciu's canvases with an energy made of transparencies and gestures, with a harmonious plasticity that gives a new shape to reality. As a result, the observer lives a bright and silent dream, where line, space, light and depth are the main characteristics of painting. Therefore, this art recalls data and dates and makes viewers reflect through evocative atmospheres.

The importance of colour and light (*the essence of painting is light*, as André Derain said), the emotions evoked by the contact with Nature, the effect of interruption, the search for a state of grace (which crystallizes the state of mind and detonates the power of colours), lead the artist to the creation of his drawing. This artwork is a *bildhafte Denken*, which is able to find a balance between *sense and sensibility*, between emotions and reasoning.

His canvases portrait actions and apparitions, bodies and brush strokes, which help observers reflect upon the internal tools of painting. Moreover, his paintings are fields of memories in which the artist shows and defines existential issues, that give birth to the work of art and to human conscience through chromatic surfaces. Sbârciu (a person who understands, improves and remembers) reflects upon all these things in order to conceive artworks characterised by bright and quick brush strokes. The tonality of the future prevails over the one of the past (made of sadness and resignation), over what was and never will be again.

translated by Giulia Perugini and Laura Picchio