

In the imagined wonderland

edited by Antonello Tolve

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.
Edgar Allan Poe

Since 1987, the year of her first polymaterial researches and of her paintings on textured velvet, Annarita Scivittaro has drawn a creative itinerary that gathers together various fields of knowledge in order to weave together practice, theory, age-old themes, floating languages, *disciplines of beginnings and endings*. Open-minded about fantastic and fabulous themes («Hätten wir auch eine Phantastik wie eine Logik, so wäre die Erfindungskunst erfunden» said Novalis)¹, her tale is made of silent births and her way of working allows her to reflect upon the field of ornamental norms. She creates a physical (material, manual) and philosophical (mental) celebration, which embraces alchemy and phrenology, mysticism and occultism, mythology and sacredness, popular traditions and the history of human thinking. She reshapes the latter through irony, sometimes grotesque, which recalls the Lowbrow Art (better known as Pop Surrealism)².

Cracking the surface of reality and dissolving the boredom from the mist of everyday life, Annarita Scivittaro has always proposed parallel atmospheres, lively vanishing lines which lead to a magic world populated by *diableries*, by witty and pleasantly *horror* forms and figures, by *women who love too much*, by *freaks*, by neo-antique and post-human creatures, whose diversity is deeply rooted into the several wonders hidden inside the ordinary. Close to the alterations of the *Magischer Realismus*³, the artist moves continuously from a descriptive and representative scenery to the region of the *остранение*⁴, a narrative process that overturns reality from an unexpected angle. In my opinion, she contrives a pataphysic procedure, that – as Alfred Jarry suggests in the exploits and opinions *du docteur Faustroll* – focuses on a «science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des object décrits par leur virtualité»⁵. This is an imaginative⁶ parameter that rejects rules and encloses exceptions in order to derail from the railway line of reason and undertake, gradually, the path of a free fantasy.

Though a variety of concepts, evaluations, observing procedures and enunciation modes, Annarita Scivittaro's work is a continuous and sparkling reminder of life. Her artworks recall a beating present hit by forms and formula which transform shreds of popular culture into a polyphonic vision: life, which should be lived by going also through the looking glass, *in Wonderland*. She combines fairy tales, novels, legends, customs and traditions of Apulia with a multiethnic and multicultural arsenal, which leads to amorous scraps, details connected with devotion and thaumaturgy. By depositing sediments of experience and by adjusting them in a visual fabric that is nourished by a natural and a cultural (imaginative) knowledge where everything can happen, the artist whirls together different folk traditions – *Vera* (2017-2018) is, for instance, a sculpture that represents some traits of the Far-East (if we look at it carefully, we can detect some Chinese

1 F. von Hadenberg (Novalis), *Fragmente*, in *Schriften* (tl. 3), hrsg. von L. Tieck und E. von Bülow, G. Reimer Verlag, Berlin 1846, f. 1905, p. 309: «Hätten wir auch eine Phantastik wie eine Logik, so wäre die Erfindungskunst erfunden. Zur Phantastik gehört auch die Aestetik gewissermassen, wie die Vernunftlehre zur Logik» («If we had a fantastic as we have a logic, then we could discover the art of inventing. Somehow even the aesthetics is part of the fantastic, as judgement is part of logic» [N.d.T]).

2 K. Anderson, edited by, *Pop Surrealism. The Rise of Underground Art*, essays by R. Williams, C. McCormick, L. Reid, Ignition Publishing / Last Gaps, San Francisco 2004.

3 F. Roh, *Nach Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*, Klinkhardt & Biermann, Leipzig 1925.

4 V. B. Šklovskij, *Iskustvo, kak priëm. Sborniki po teorii poetičeskogo jazika* (1917), in Id. et al., *Poëtika. Sborniki po teorii poëtičeskogo jazyka*, Gos. izd-vo, Pétrograd 1919, then even in Id., *O teorii prozy*, Moskva / Leningrad, Krug 1925, pp. 7-23.

5 A. Jarry, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataohysicien*, Eugène Fasquelle Éditeur, Paris 1911, p. 16.

6 Adopted also by Duchamp, Vian, Ernst, Miró, Dubuffet, Prevert o da Enrico Baj who in 1963, together with Farfa, Fontana, Dagnino, Queneau, Man Ray, Tadini, Umberto Eco among others, set up the *Istitutum Pataphysicum Mediolanense*.

newspapers which caress and draw her skin) and some Mexican superstitions – in order to melt, knead, connect, shape celestial creatures, arcane idols, hybrid forms, children of a world without geographical and cultural borders.

Her imagination evokes figures which show – the precious production of the last decade is an eloquent example – a variety of behavioural models that can be empirically observed. However, they are also amplified by the use of a sharp sensitivity or by a sudden explosion (an authentic freudian *Witz*), which connects the miracle of Virgin Mary or of the Saints to the freak, as well as Christian rites (those of Apulia are rooted into paganism and magic) to the lightness of contemporary atmospheres, customs and traditions of towns, the cities, the metropolises, the megalopolises.

In the trilogy of virgins (*Vergine delle api*, *Vergine dell'Ichthys* and *Vergine dei trofei* made between 2015 and 2017) the female doll recalls the Virgin Mary, transformed into a modern, sexy and attractive (even fetish, I'd say) woman. In the trilogy of calaveras – *Vera*, *Cala Vera* and *Rosmunda* (2016-2018) – the devotional universe of Italy takes its material form and merges with the Mexican funereal tradition (and in particular with the confectionary products usually eaten in the Día de los Muertos). The recent trilogy of idols – *Idolino*, *Natività* and *Morte al padre* (2017-2018) – bewilders and amazes spectators through the overabundance of decoration, which recalls the interiors of a Buddhist temple or the crispy and persuasive nuances that can be found in several Eastern cultures, where glistening light means deity.

The series of drawings called *No meat on Friday* (2013) is closer to pop-surrealist art and shows – as well as pastels such as *Shopping Time* (2009) and *Bonneure* (2009) – a bias towards the world of illustration, that is constantly converted in sculpture by the artist, at least in the last decade.

Erotic and ironic, heretic and heroic, her amulets and relics – *Inverno*, *Ex Voto I* and *Ex Voto II*, *Ira*, *Ex Voto*, *occhio non vede*, *Santi Cosma e Damiano*, *Bisanzio*, *Lago*, *Vista sul lago* and *Giardino* (2018) – embrace, on the other hand, the English side of pop art and in particular Jim Dines' iconography, even if her hearts cannot be considered her signature or her "trademark". They rather represent scraps of a reflection upon *ex voto suscepto*, a devotional form that turns its back to religion in order to pursue ornament, here intended as commitment, as creative vow, as exclusive love. By using paillettes, beads, crèche animals, little hearts, skilfully spun wools and recycled materials such as cans, Annarita Scivittaro's artworks aim at redeeming decoration (the ornament, the garniture), putting it in the foreground as far as human creativity is concerned. Beside several strategies which start from the *fantastique* genre, in order to wander and show the charm of a *heimlich* (comfortable, calm, familiar, usual), which becomes *unheimlich* (eerie, disturbing, scary, creepy) ⁷, Annarita Scivittaro creates a bestiary constantly fed by an ornament that cease to be a crime and becomes code word⁸, mental organization, lifestyle, central space of a cultural geography, of a *Bildhafte Denken* that transforms daily encounters and objects in the *stuff as dreams are made on*.

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translated by Giulia Perugini and Laura Picchio

7 Cfr. S. Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, in »Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften«, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, Wien - Leipzig – Zürich 1919, pp. 297-324.

8 For any further information please see A. Trimarco, *Ornamento. Il sistema dell'arte nell'epoca della megalopoli*, Mimesis, Milano 2009.