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THE CREATIVE SPIRIT OF WILLIAM ROSE - BY SIMONE BANDINI

The long-awaited solo exhibit "Sinfonia di Cappelli" (A Symphony of Hats), by William Balthazar Rose opens soon at Sansepolcro's La Loggia art gallery. We met with the Anglo-American artist and his patron Ugo Agostinelli in view of the upcoming vernissage on June 23.

I met with William Rose, whom I have known for some time, in a café in Sansepolcro. The first ten minutes of our conversation bring to mind a game of chess, played defensively, with little drama. Or perhaps a game where neither player really exposes himself, revealing nothing of his intentions. It took some time to get into tune with one another. Neither one of us wanted to waste time and resources discussing the ins and outs of bourgeois art. Finally we said to each other, "Did you think it would be like this?"

Patiently we sought out a space for ourselves where we could feel comfortable looking at symbols of the absolute. The search for this locus *amoenus*, or pleasant place, was demanding, ephemeral and, in the end, exciting. Once the spring was discovered, it became an inexhaustible source, an endless song that plays over and over from the caverns of the unconscious to the peaks of one's own free will.

William Rose rises from the tortured abyss of the quotidian and hazards the opening axiom. "A subtle thread links the places of my life, from a childhood in England to studies in California and finally to Sansepolcro. A mystic pattern that stretches from San Francisco across the ocean and takes root in the valley of Piero della Francesca and the hermitages of San Francesco. It is a theme that is almost an obsession, or a destiny, rather; the motivating factor behind my works."

Remember the sense of inevitability of Greek tragedy, especially in Aeschylus, or the same parables in the works of Pier Paolo Pasolini. Well, in William Rose the formidable conflict between will and destiny, spirit and nature, is far from being resolved or subdued. He is an artist who lives his works and looks for art in life, never tame, waiting to plant the umpteenth banter of presumption and defiance on the shapeless motion of things. This mythological dimension of art, reconnection or *religious* (from the Latin *religio*, or rebinding), is an authentic attempt to re-establish a primal and ideal condition where human and divine spread in harmony from one nucleus. A bridge between the limitations of immanence and the horizons of impermanence.

William Rose is above all an authentic artist, an anarchist, who takes absolute individual freedom to an inevitable point in the gestation of his works. Freedom at all costs, submitted to a positive and creative will. "Will is an essential characteristic of the spirit... the profound sense of aesthetics. The will to express and affirm the unique along with the absolute. Both determined and undetermined. A journey imposed by those who look at art as overcoming the limits of *techné* or craft, imitation or even worse, as a pastime or bourgeois hobby." Immediately I understood how difficult it is for Rose to control the phantoms of contingency and truly focus on the joy of artistic creation, the only possible way to nourish and fuel his life.

The works of this California painter, English by birth and *Biturgense* by choice, show an evident complexity and problematic nature, requiring an effort of identification, or even better, a sympathetic penetration. The major themes of his painting, if one can summarize, express an archetypal force that is manifested in various series of symbols and expedient scenes. His technique, always precise and geometric, refers to a complex superimposition of layers that involve the painting's space in all three dimensions, given the tactile nature of some of his works. *The Pastorali*, or Pastorals, as Rose calls the country scenes where human figures are depicted in all their difficulty and fixity, almost frozen in their essence, recall the work of Piero della Francesca, though the message is transformed. The still lifes, sometimes bleak and yet always mysterious and cabalistic, are difficult compositions that are symbolically charged. Obelisks, shells and beakers unravel an impenetrable theory of certain magnetism. And then hats, cooks and cleavers, circus feats, tennis players and interrupted landscapes.

Rose's paintings are unexplored moors that require a pioneer spirit of adhesion. A psychoanalytical complexity without precedent, worthy of the best Freudian psychopathology of art. The human figures constantly express a disturbing impermanence, sometimes leaving the scene or simply standing apart. However, they do occupy a life and a deep incommunicability, spectators or protagonists of scenes that are absurd, humbling and solemn. These splendid works gather together flowers and thorns of the individual subconscious and draw strength from the symbolic and semiotic complexity of the collective unconscious.

The circus scenes and the same human figures clearly recall a sure tradition of the artistic and literary absurdity of Samuel Beckett and Antonine Artaud. They need to be studied with conviction, without losing oneself in the purely figurative aspect, to see that they, along with the symphony of objects, symbols and



hats, prepare a dance of freedom and self-sufficiency. To quote the late lamented master, Carmelo Bene, "... but art is so big and life so short", yes, too short to be frittered away on the amusements of bourgeois mediocrity.

During the last three years, his patron, Ugo Agostinelli, has become a constant point of reference for William Rose. "I met William three years ago, after studying two small paintings in a display window in Sansepolcro. I was dazzled right away by this sort of nineteenth-century style, so different from the usual clichés. A style so retro, tactile and multi-layered, full of suffused light, yet as distinct and unambiguous as a sheet of music. Then you can see the perfect, yet precarious, balance. I watched him paint, rapt in a maniacal frenzy, the impetus taking on a formal precision."

The Anglo-American painter had a collection of small works, but Agostinelli convinced him to go even larger. "A great affinity developed between us, and without realizing it, we were following the same path. William became like family. Through our meetings I got to know the complications of his world, the poetry of his thoughts and gestures, his nature and fragility, his need to be reassured."

William Rose's artistic compression, his ideal tension towards the absolute and the other world, make up a complete artist who, still quoting the great Carmelo Bene, "creates a masterpiece of his life." Agostinelli adds to this, "He is all energy, thriving on our trips and get-togethers, days at the seaside or in the country, or the daily routine itself that becomes exceptional. And keeps producing new paintings with his usual disarming soldierly nature."

"After three years, the surprising result is a collection of 80 works, one that narrates the story of our lives at the high points and the lows. A sort of marriage," concludes La Loggia's gallerist, never forgetting to thank his friends and long-time supporters.

William Rose's exhibit, "Sinfonia di cappelli" (A Symphony of Hats), takes place at La Loggia Art Gallery in Sansepolcro from June 23 through the end of September. The opening is planned for 6 p.m. on June 23. For more information consult www.gallerialaloggia.com, or write to info@gallerialaloggia.it or telephone 0575 742151.



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