

PASSAGES

SALVO (1947–2015)

December 10, 2015 • Massimo Minini

Salvo, *Benedizione di Lucerna* (Blessing of Lucerne), 1970-1975, photo mounted on aluminium, 43 x 35".

SALVO IS DEAD.

I remember going to Turin to greet him, our next-to-last meeting. (We'll have our final visit before long, when I join him in heaven.) We didn't have time to discuss the greasy beef in Carrù or the cheese in Castelmagno, the pink evening clouds or the Tour de France, oranges seen from below amid the leaves, or the holiday lights in Lucca, Ilaria del Carretto's city, in Jacopo della Quercia's famous sculptural masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance.

Salvo was all this, along with his proddings and instigations. Once, wonderfully, he said to me, point blank, "Tell me the names of all the African countries along the coast and their capitals, in counter-clockwise order." Obviously he was ready: Of course he knew the complete list in advance.

I don't know how his transition to avant-garde painting and back occurred in just four years. One day he had enough of bundles of wood, neon, stones. Surely he was influenced by a chance encounter with Giorgio de Chirico in Rome. They locked eyes, one knowing nothing about the other, the other, instead, knowing a lot about the master. Salvo described this episode to me while we were watching the arrival of a stage of the Tour. With him, art and life mixed happily. When I would leave his house, I never failed to stop by the nearby bakery, to take home their famous breadsticks—a sign of "Turinosity"—at the end of Via Artisti. This, too, seemed like a sign of fate.

Salvo died today: And with him, our youth. Truly, he had already been gone for some time, but we hadn't noticed, or perhaps we had only dismissed the thought. "SALVO È VIVO / SALVO È MORTO" (Salvo is alive / Salvo is dead), read a work from the artist's Conceptual/Arte Povera period. "IO SONO IL MIGLIORE" (I am the best), read another phrase, carved, like other words, into marble: "IDIOTA" (idiot), "RESPIRARE IL PADRE" (to breathe the father). Or "SALVO," written in neon in the colors of the Italian flag, and painted on a newspaper. That Salvo is no longer seems impossible, but a September text moved forward the hands of the clock of our life. A passing that hits us more than so many others.

He, former bad boy rebel, from Sanremo to Turin, who fell in love with Cristine, went into a gallery one day as a painter, emerged as an artist. He forged ahead in only a few months, participating in the latest Arte Povera shows and galleries. He worked with photography, marble, phrases, neon, tricolor flags, and then, after four years or so, having enjoyed all these opportunities, he returned to painting. Invited to participate in Harald Szeemann's Documenta 5 in 1972, he did not contribute works, but only his name in the catalogue, printed larger than the others.

Salvo, *San Martino e il Povero* (St. Martin and the Pauper), 1974, oil on paper applied to canvas, 9' x 74".

After Documenta, he got down to painting. His first paintings are clear: Saint George and the dragon, Sicily, and mythological subjects. He was a great autodidact, ready to place a bet, and had a great affection for de Chirico, for the Giro d'Italia, billiards, TV. He painted for himself, given that not everyone in his milieu approved of his change in direction. He found other friends, stopped doing Conceptual work, abandoned the galleries of that world.

We were very close for ten years and then gradually drifted apart, but we always kept an eye on each other. I was thinking about him just yesterday, looking at his *Ciclamini di Persia* (Persian Cyclamen) from 1975, which I keep at home out of affection, pleasure, admiration. And now also to remember a fellow traveler for a long stretch of a brief life.

Massimo Minini is an art dealer who has run Galleria Massimo Minini for more than forty years in Brescia, Italy.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

ALL IMAGES