

CRONACA CITTADINA

**Il Sania diventerà
con l'intervento di**

la magistratura
e l'informazione



DELLO SPORT

altri strabilianti risultati nel nuoto

**e dei record mondiali
is 3^a anche a Belgrado**

Due nuove stelle olimpioniche, l'italiana dell'età adulta, 43 anni, e il polacco, 22, si sono presentati a Belgrado con un record mondiale. Oltre ai primati in programma nei giorni seguenti.



La marcia

**Da Pola si
in poco me**

Il leader della marcia è il polacco, 22, si sono presentati a Belgrado con un record mondiale.

Tutta l'atletica

Il torneo di pallanuoto si anticipa

Pulici, 3 gol, aggiusta la

Per il campionato di calcio del 1980

Il Novara al posto dell'Hayduk

Il leader ora è

NOTIZ



The most recent series of Salvo's works is entitled *Spring* and represents a series of landscapes in Umbria, Tuscany and other hilly regions. They are views of farmhouses perched on ridges of the Appennines, with the contours of mountains forming theatrical "wings," improbable wads of clouds animating the sky in "picturesque" fashion and exuberant trees strategically located in the line of vision. Everything looks ecumenically arranged and composed, trained to follow a pictorial liturgy that accompanies the ritual of vision. It is difficult to recognize the irreverent origins of these canvases, with their rich colors and traditional subjects, in the *Memorial Tablets* bearing the inscription "I am the best" or in the narcissistic arrogance of the early photographs of himself in the act of *Blessing*. And yet Salvo has always been – and this has only been confirmed today – one of the great "Conceptual painters," an artist who is capable of crossing, with the agility of a cultivated naïvety, the borders of a complex artistic map that is constantly changing. Looking at his painting means accepting the obliquity of a cross-eyed gaze that mixes up times and techniques, languages and meanings, academicism and experimentation, in order to wander through the lithe nudity of the unknown and the surprising.

Salvo's artistic formation took place toward the end of the sixties in Turin, the city of Arte Povera, through his association and friendship with Alighiero Boetti, Mario Merz and Gilberto Zorio and his first shows at the gallery run by Gian Enzo Sperone, all against a background of extraordinary confrontation, experimentation and mutual stimulation. And it was on this creative training ground that Salvo developed his own and different approach, that he began to trace the coordinates for an independent direction, unconstrained by programs and objectives. The difference did not lie on the plane of language or form – Salvo does not fear the anomaly of materials –

but on the specific one of conceptuality, of the aesthetic results of the practice of art. At the end of the sixties and the beginning of the following decade, Salvo anticipated the egocentric attitude that was shortly to take hold on the international scene. The centrality of art as a vehicle of social development, with the great revolutionary and to some extent ideological drive that had characterized Arte Povera in Italy and elsewhere in the world, was leading to an implosion within the individual and the artist. The strong atmosphere of militancy in art had often produced real enthusiasm, and unsuspected creative energies had been released that could not be channeled outward in their entirety, that were not absorbed into an all-embracing sociality. It was the sort of libertarian tremor that ran through the Situationism of Pinot Gallizio or John Cage's Fluxus experiments. "We are the Revolution," wrote Joseph Beuys about his own works, and nothing comes closer to the engraving "I am the best" on one of Salvo's first tablets. But in this case too, Salvo's experience stands out because of the way it does not yield to an anarchic and self-referential individualism, but conceptually filters this need for a "subject" in a work that, in a strange and apparent contradiction, reestablishes its own centrality and own "classical" power of expression. The photographs of Salvo in the *Blessing of Lucerne* or the *Self-portrait as Raphael*, or the photomontage of the *Hunter* or *Sicilian bandit*, in a manner not unlike the deliberately redundant and rhetorical *Tablets*, provide confirmation of an approach to artistic research that simultaneously aims at the assertion of the artist's own individuality and the recognition of the work's universality. This dichotomy leaves a profound mark on Salvo's art, underlining its developments and conditioning its outcomes. Yet it is also this inner tension that permits access to this poetics and the unveiling of its most hidden secrets. Thus the restless exuberance of the ego, on the one hand, and the en-

**Amare me, (Love me),
1971
incisione su marmo
rosa Portogallo
cm 29,5 x 42
Collezione Mazzei,
Bologna**

chanting mask of the painting, on the other, represent the opposite poles of an aesthetic way of thinking that is able to rediscover the agility of an approach with no limits and no directions.

Thus the decision to make his own name coincide with the image of the work, giving it the chromatic backing of the three colors of the Italian flag or writing it alongside those of the great masters of the history of art on a schematic map of Italy or Sicily, is an emblem of an artistic approach that constantly walks a knife's edge between the self and the other-than-self. It is a labile and in-

sidious frontier that mixes up and confuses rather than separating and distinguishing, an uncertain border, an edge lost in the quest for a liquid centrality. In fact if the *Salvo* works in three colors combine the conceptuality of the word, already present in the tablets, with the symbolism of the coloring, the ones with "Italy" or "Sicily" allow the pictorial image to break into the work. Of course, it is a figure that is still highly conceptualized, both in the graphic support of the territory represented and in the letters that make up the names. And yet these works were an important turning point in *Salvo's* artistic career, intro-



ducing the pictorial element that was to characterize future developments. The work rediscovered its manual character, the involvement of the artist became physical as well as intellectual and the image assumed a singularity, a uniqueness, that altered the intimacy of the relationship between the significance of the artist's own name and the form of the letters that make it up.

Here thought showed its own face, revealing itself to the indiscreet gaze of those who laid claim to the work and releasing a subtle and delicate sense of the visionary. But this thought was disciplined and polite. It did not yield to the instincts of an incontinent viscerality, its gaze was cultured and its mystery lay in the citation. And so, around the middle of the seventies, Salvo began to run through the grand themes of Renaissance painting, composing a pictorial alphabet that he was to use from then on, based essentially on poverty of form on the one hand and artificial coloring on the other. Both aspects have been amply illustrated by Renato Barilli but it is still worth taking another look at a number of points that may help us to decipher a line of research that is cloaked in banality and takes flight in apparent superficiality. Especially in the series of works with mythological subjects or the ones dedicated to *Saint George and the Dragon*, though the argument could also be extended to the *Nocturnes* or to the "city suburbs," "harbors," "viaducts" and "flippers," the line is clumsy, deliberately archaic and stiff. In reality, what interests Salvo is the transformation of the model, and so the figure is subjected to violent pressure and flattened, the perspective distorted, the composition crushed. St. George is often too tall for his horse, the lance too short, the houses too narrow, the viaducts too high or low, the figures out of proportion, the snowflakes too big for roads that are too short: everything is out of scale in this painting that has gone back to being thought. So the account is the artist's subjective one, the

gaze is Salvo's and those figures are the letters of his name which have been dissolved in a syrupy and unreal color. In fact even the chromatic aspect alludes to an exclusively mental purity: dawns and sunsets or more discreet nocturnes are lit up with a sugary palette that fascinates and charms but moves ever further away from a representativeness that was only promised. The chromatic virtuosity of the nighttime scenes rent by the beams of headlights, or the even more sophisticated one of a pictorial surface made up of innumerable tiny touches of color, reinforces the cumbersome presence of a narcissistic and exhibitionist individualism that fuses with the painting and conditions its effect. The change in Salvo's style has not modified his poetics, just changed the setting: the confine between the assertion of self and the thought expressed by the art has only marked out new territories; the painting is the public and fascinating face of an intimate and morbid concept of artistic individualism.

The more recent *Landscapes*, along with the *Ottomanias* of the mid-eighties, the "naves" of Gothic cathedrals and the "ruins," as well as the "still lifes" to some extent, present not only the customary brilliant and visionary coloring, but also that sort of perceptual impropriety that the artist justifies through his linguistic primitivism but which in reality permits a totally arbitrary approach to painting. Thus the houses look enormous for the hills they stand on, unlikely plants trace familiar panoramas and classical columns, palms or minarets outline an uncertain and unstable narrative, beyond which it is not hard to discern the artist's commitment to reclaiming the role of the individual in the creation of reality. There is a will to power in the imagination that makes Beuys say, quoting Schiller, that: "freedom, in its purest and most absolute form, can only be found in the activity of play" and the most radical art does not conceal the fact that its total freedom lies in its playful nature. The long course of development that



Salvo's research has followed certainly runs along the frontier between the territories of a pictorial poetry which has its own panorama and takes its own delight in evocation, and the more shadowy and violet ones of an inner emotional construct, silent and individual, in which thought dominates and controls the form. Play becomes the instrument that Salvo uses to steer his way through this oscillation: an oscillation that is above all a quest for absolute freedom and will to power, which the artist dilutes in easy-going colors and an elementary and childish composition.

When Extremes Touch

There are moments in nature as well as in cultural life when extremes seem to touch one another, or to play dice over the sign that is to be assumed. One thinks, for example, of the chain of the Himalayas, the highest on earth, which is located not very far from the Marianas Trench, the lowest point on the surface of the planet. And where, how and when is that tiny difference decided which determines whether we are born male or female? And, the most mysterious and disturbing case of all, just where does the difference lie between the positive and the negative in electromagnetic phenomena? Coming to art, our century has experienced at least two of these magical moments. The first is already part of history, as it dates from around 1916, give or take a year, and centers on the opposition, the deep gulf or rather the essential equivalence, with a mere change of algebraic sign, between Marcel Duchamp and Giorgio de Chirico, who were after all practically the same age, one born in 1887 and the other just a year later. Around each of these, of course, it would be possible to mention many other names through which that extreme bipolarity was attenuated, toned down, and at the same time given substance, creating two opposing fronts. But we have to examine the nature of that wonderful clash indirectly through texts and documents, as there is practically no one left alive who witnessed it at first hand, or if there is someone, then he could have been no more than a child incapable of understanding what was going on at the time. Yet to another and very similar episode we have all been witnesses, or at least very many of us. It occurred about half a century later, on the threshold of the seventies, and in a way stemmed from a resurrection of the two proud adversaries who had clashed on the previous occasion. Duchamp, though he had died just a short time before, had obtained an extraordinary revenge, through

a sort of "standardized" and widespread Dadaism. But de Chirico too, still alive and kicking, had also been taken out of the closet of forgetfulness, or worse still that of rejection, and was about to be restored to his role as irrepressible master, in so far as he was dialectically bound to his counterpart. All this happened because, in the research being carried out at that time, the wonderful click had occurred again, the triggering of opposites, and this time we were all able to watch the fun live, at first hand.

The Three Ways of the "Conceptual"

If we were to ask ourselves in just what consisted the Duchampism of the years around 1968, we could find no better example than that of an American artist, Joseph Kosuth, who was also protagonist of perhaps the broadest and most comprehensive of the many movements that emerged at that time, "Conceptual" art. Kosuth, in a limpidly didactic operation, had explained to us that there were now three principal ways of addressing any object. The first was the direct and to some extent ingenious one of citing the object by bringing it in "just as it is." In essence, that is, by returning to the concept of the ready-made, central to Duchamp's subversive approach. The second, through references of a linguistic kind, naming the thing through the entry under which it is listed in the dictionary. The third, and final one, was through a technological process, i.e. by representing the thing by means of a photograph. Kosuth refused to consider the traditional mode of artistic representation by means of line and color on any flat support, and by doing so was celebrating the climax of a trend that in fact claimed to be leading inescapably to the "death of art," understood in a sense that made no song and dance about the abolition of certain procedures pertaining to a long tradition of painting and sculpture.

Il villaggio, 1993
olio su tela
cm 80 x 60
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino



Was this in the end the cancellation of any interest in the past and in the museum, of any respect for the values of aura, nobility of craft, manual skill? Had the attitude of the avant-garde, led by the movements of Futurism and Dadaism, been taken to its most logical and radical conclusion? In one way, it really seemed that this was the case, that a point of no return had truly been reached with that set of techniques drawn happily from outside art. And yet it was at that very moment that the mysterious click occurred, for the second time in a century: the impalpable redistribution of charges between positive and negative by which those same ostentatiously non-artistic techniques, hostile to any good tradition, were made to function the other way round, though without re-

Il villaggio, 1995
olio su tela
cm 100 x 80
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

nouncing anything of their iconoclastic potential. And this is where Salvo comes onto the scene, for few artists at that time felt so much of a need to shoulder the responsibility of such a role, and to carry it out in such an extraordinarily exemplary fashion. Certainly, similar cases were to be found among all the exponents of Italian "Conceptual" art, whose preferred terrain at the time was Germano Celant's *Arte Povera*: a movement to which the critic himself had been tempted to give the name Neo-Futurism. And undoubtedly, the plus sign, i.e. the impulse to take on the present and the future, space and time, was clearly apparent in the majority of its members. Yet not infrequently the "other" sign appeared as well: in Fabro, in Kounellis, in Vettor Pisani, as well as in one of the best-known members of the whole group, Giulio Paolini, in whose work the reversal of sign had already been stabilized, becoming a constant mode of operation. There can be no doubt that, in Italy, the systematic re-exploration of the museum with instruments of a "conceptual" type commenced in Paolini's work. And in it the three sorts of instruments on which Kosuth had insisted – words, photographs, objects – were used to an equal degree, mixed up in doses that were carefully measured in view of the end to be attained, consisting in the resuscitation of some work or *topos* from the previous history of art. But immediately afterward, Salvo, with his characteristic stubbornness and unilaterality of intervention, took up all of these means (though he then dropped the way of the ready-made, the sampling of objects) and tried them out thoroughly, one by one, to see whether they could be used, notwithstanding their futuristic bias on the surface, to bring about a reversal of perspective, from plus to minus, from future to past.

Words, then, were Salvo's starting point, when he was still a bold young man recently transplanted to Turin, but already determined to follow in the wake of the most

Il villaggio, 1995
olio su tela
cm 80 x 60
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

Inverno, s.d
olio su tavola
cm 49,8 x 34,7
Collezione privata,
Trento

highly regarded avant-garde movement of the moment. But then came the mysterious mutation: instead of being used to define energetic phenomena (as in the work of two of the most admired "Conceptual" artists in the United States at the time, Weiner and Barry, who spelled out phrases or verb forms inspired by movement and action in gigantic letters on the walls of leading galleries), the words that he resorted to were directed toward the past, toward an evocation of aura, and not just at the level of the *signifié*, of "what" they said, but also at that of the *signifiant*, of the means used. In fact Salvo asked for the help of skilled stonecutters to carve those solemn phrases into the hardness of the marble, thereby evoking a ritual, that of the memorial tablet, which has few rivals in its power. To tell the truth, for a while he wondered whether a softer and more accommodating, but equally precious and craft-based technique, such as embroidery on cloth, might not have suited his purposes. But in the end he preferred to rely entirely on the use of large epigraphic inscriptions in marble: a question of greater hardness, and therefore of greater clarity and resolution, even on the didactic plane. Salvo is an artist who likes to get his hands on things, to unequivocally lay hold of them. It is perhaps for the same reason that the first of the words he felt the need to propagate was his own name, Salvo, not lacking in a classicism and essentiality of its own (in Italian, the word can be understood as "safe," or "I save"). Here we have already a sort of self-portrait pared to the bone, the vehicle of an unrestrainable narcissism. And here too he was going down the road taken by de Chirico, who, as is well-known, never tired of proclaiming himself *pictor optimus*. But it is easy to see that there are two choices: either you go along with Duchamp and declare the death of art, and therefore renounce your own ego, losing yourself among the things and eventualities of the world, or you preach the great return, and therefore re-



store value to the creator, the authorized bearer of the values of the craft, commencing with yourself and feeling called on to play almost the role of a priest.

And then came photography: a tough nut this one, an indigestible mouthful. How can we forget Benjamin's celebrated analysis in which he declared that the invention of the technique of photography meant the extinction, for our own time, of the value of the aura, the privilege of the one-off piece, of the "handmade" with skill, craftsmanship and accuracy? Is not photography the main guarantee of the principle that anyone can become an artist or, to borrow the words of Ben Vautier, that "art is easy",

Gennaio, 1997
olio su tela
cm 50 x 60
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino



both for the user and for the subject to be tackled? Anyone can push a button, and any object or situation can be worthy of having the camera lens turned on it. Let us add that the first and most important and historical emergence of the photograph is linked to the use of black and white, or at least to monochromatic processes, adverse to the pleasures of polychromy, even if technical progress has now resolved the problem (and in fact one of the differences between the Conceptual art of that time and the revived version of the present day lies in the fact that color photographs are no longer rejected, but on the contrary used almost as a rule). Then, however, a boring, tedious black-and-white picture seemed to be the necessary complement to an act that set out to make a historic renunciation of all "artistic" allures. And so how could the inversion of tendency be introduced into the heart of such disarming austerity? We know how our Salvo proceeded, in order to attain this end: for one thing, by confirming the suitability of an autobiographical narcissism, by making himself the privileged protagonist of many shots, and thereby automatically saving them from anonymity and banality. Dressing up as a hunter, or a vendor of fruit and vegetables, meant assigning importance, a sense of the sacred, to those functions. It meant treating them as if they belonged to a museum, if not of history then at least of traditions, folklore, perhaps of idioms and stereotypes. But soon came a distortion, an emphatic underlining: in other words a shift from the rituals of the present to those of the past, when for example the sacred was at home, in our midst. A time when it was the custom to bless almost everything, meals, harvests, quite ordinary occasions. The secularization of our society has relegated rites of this kind to a forgotten corner, or to one of cloying, sickly conformity. In short, they have been declared "out" to all intents and purposes, consigned to the unusable realm of bad taste. Yet this is precisely why the time has

come to dust them off again, though still in the name of the "easiness" made possible by photography. And so there he is, our Salvo, on the one hand wearing the clothes of today, while on the other he assumes the pose of someone offering his blessings, his auspices, somewhere between the serious and the humorous. As reversing the flow of time requires a great effort, is it not necessary to start by allowing oneself to skimp and simplify a little?

The Return of de Chirico

Up to this point, if we are sincere, our artist had not yet ventured into a territory all his own. Giulio Paolini in a systematic way, and other representatives of Arte Povera in more desultory fashion, were also using words and photographs to resuscitate the past, i.e. they too accepted the reversal of direction. From passage to passage, we also have to admit that even the founding father Duchamp had already gone this far and that, in effect, these artists were still operating in an area that was in conformity with his ideas. But where was de Chirico? How was his lesson being interpreted? A lesson that in those very years was again revealing all its daring and relevance, in this matter of reexamining the past. In fact it is easy to see how such an undertaking could be carried out with the help of non-artistic means, which were enough in themselves to obviate the risk of being swallowed up by the practices of the past, unequivocally condemned as such by history. At bottom, words and photographs could be used a bit like protective armor, like sheets of asbestos that allowed one to wander through the rooms of the museum without being consumed by the sinful flames that burn there. But if we drop those instruments that create a distance, will not painting be ready to devour its new and unwary adepts, catching them in a vice of continuity and, in short, making them look like



vulgar "penitents?" As if it were necessary to admit that the avant-garde had been wrong, that there has always and only been an endless process of evolution in painting, which is capable of reproducing itself by branching, today just as in the past. That anything else only gives rise to eccentricities which are fated to burn out, to disappear sooner or later over the horizon. De Chirico had reacted to a danger of this kind by resorting to a sickeningly artificial and false manner of painting, in full revolt against any possible process of continuity with the final manifestations of nineteenth-century naturalism: perhaps even reviving those as well, but in ways that were openly inflated and exaggerated. Painting, in short, as if it were itself a ready-made: re-creating the museum, as it was not possible literally to take



the tradition of painting, before the process was blocked by the historical avant-garde movements: post-impressionisms, more or less degenerate expressionisms, or still worse classicisms, academicisms lacking the spark of self-criticism and irony. A linear and unbroken history of painting had been interrupted forever, and could only be taken up again by introducing conspicuous and consistent indicators of distance, and of a resumption, but on levels that have changed totally: just as it had been possible to go back to "representing" in the ambit of the Conceptual, but only by making use of the humble tool of photography, within the reach of all. But was photography the only one of these "public" and popular means of tackling reality? Was not an interpretation of technological progress that came to a halt at this process, invented and introduced, it should not be forgotten, in the last century, somewhat naïve? Our century does not want the faithful, exact copy, on a one-to-one ratio, but the kind that is entrusted to the minute dance of electronic impulses, similar in their logic to the tesserae of the ancient art of the mosaic and sharing some of its characteristics: in the first place, the power to synthesize, schematize, reduce. In the years in which Salvo was tussling with the difficult question of a type of painting worth of our times, the world of data-processing came up with video disks, the forerunners of compact disks and other resources of the kind, which have been given an enormous task: capturing the whole of the past, but with that wide-meshed net that is proper to electronic systems. The whole of the museum is "stored in the bank", but on condition that it accepts this storage in what is in the end a fairly low definition, certainly not matching the one that emerges out of appetizing mixtures of color, out of the nuances and vibrations produced by the paintbrush or the spatula. The world of images has been duplicated, but only through transmutation into a population of airy, immaterial, di-

the masterpieces of the past and stick them all together. It would in any case have to be an approach that was neither personalized nor private, but on the contrary ostentatiously public, declamatory, even if accompanied by liberal doses of narcissism, which the artist made a display of but did not really believe in, except as part of the didactic role he had assumed.

And so Salvo too, after the phase of words and photographs, realized that the most decisive challenge lay in an exhumation of the "ancient" practices of drawing and painting, perhaps to be cultivated in succession, in a graduated approach to the difficult problem. Which certainly could not find its solution in a relationship with things, figures and situations based on instinct, or on yet another revival of the chapters that had emerged out of

aphanous phantoms, afflicted with an attack of lightness, of loss of substance. Which, it must be said, has certainly not been at the expense of the pleasure to be derived from color. On the contrary, we know that exactly the opposite takes place: the color conveyed by the medium of electronics is purer, more intense and more brilliant than that of paint mixed on a palette. It was against this, in an extraordinarily premonitory fashion, that the Divisionists had rebelled, showing themselves to be the true forerunners of the results achieved today by means of electronic paintbrushes and the cathode-ray tube, stirring up ghosts that may be insubstantial but are filled with a chromatic intensity never seen in the past.

Back to before Raphael

It will be objected that Salvo's images, while they are also dematerialized and at the same time radiantly colored, do not at all create the impression of arising out of a sprinkling of tiny strokes. On the contrary, if we want to stick to the historic terms of the debate that raged a century ago, what holds sway in them is a principle of continuity, of *à plat*. So they are descended from Gauguin rather than Seurat. But even the way of large areas of color, provided that they are equally intense, brilliant and strictly confined within their outlines, is familiar in our time. It suffices to think of the world of animated cartoons, which has moreover turned out to be ideally suited to television broadcasting, in spite of the pointillism on which that medium is based: proving that the two apparently contrasting ways, those of Gauguin and Seurat, aimed in reality at a single goal, or rather provided the dialectical sides of one and the same process.

As always, the means is the end, the form and the content are required to proceed arm in arm. And in fact if, on the level of the former, the means and forms, Salvo comes down on the side of lean, reductive, stripped-

down techniques, on the level of the latter he draws on the wisdom of all those ages that can be described as primitive, the ages in which representation was carried out in an archaic manner, with the maximum of synthesis. And so all the manifestations of fifteenth-century Italian art, before Raphael went to Rome and gave birth there to "modern" naturalism, would be appropriate for him. Along with all the other, later proposals in which our Western tradition has tried to rediscover that simplicity of style. In fact we find that the inversions of sign with which we began this discourse have not taken place in this century alone, but at other crucial moments in history as well, at least on every occasion that the watchword "let's go back to before Raphael" has been raised. This is what happened between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, with the opening up of a gigantic fault in the fabric of our culture. And it was no accident that the two forms of primitivism that were rediscovered at the time and put forward as a remedy for the excessive emphasis on skillful use of tone and chiaroscuro, i.e. for the obtuse naturalism that had taken root in our culture, were Greco-Roman and a revival of the Quattrocento respectively: the neoclassicism of David and Canova, or the pre-Raphaelitism of the Nazarenes and Purists. And then, as is well known, naturalism experienced a new phase of vitality up to and including the Impressionists, only to be challenged again by the Symbolist current, in which Seurat and Gauguin anticipated the techniques that were to be used, in a very similar program, in our latter part of the twentieth century. And yet when Salvo finally, around 1973, decided to go beyond words and photographs and return to painted images, he drew in equal measure on those two fundamental sources of all art that is considered primordial, worthy of a beginning. On the one hand – and this was almost a homage to de Chirico who in his turn, using a

**Strada con lampioni,
s.d.
olio su tela
cm 70x60
Collezione privata, Forlì**



deliberately "ugly" style of painting, had paid homage to Greek art – the young Turinese artist went back to the world of archeology (a word that contains a whole program within itself, with its effort to establish a science of beginnings). And thus we find columns, Greek temples and muscular heroes ready for titanic exploits appearing in his work. It is a world that we are already accustomed to seeing expressed in the white of marble (or of plaster casts), and that this shrewdly conducted resurrection could therefore confidently tackle in its light, airy and dematerialized key. On the other hand, there were the miraculous deeds, the angels and saints that the Italian artists of the fifteenth century were still able to depict with so much "Gothic" grace, with a delightful spirit of "romance" that was capable of resisting – though not for long – the wiles of an impending naturalism. That exhibition in Bologna, intended to look back over the entire course of Salvo's career up to then, boasts two absolute masterpieces representing each of the currents referred to above. For the archeological one, there is *The Giants struck by Jupiter's Lightning Bolt*, and for the fifteenth-century one, an enormous *Saint Martin and the Beggar*. Both pictures are dominated by a palette deliberately restricted to cold and transparent tones, which are indicative of their passage through a mental filter that creates a distance. It is no longer possible to tell where reality lies, in that it has long been captured and interpreted by the masterpieces of the past, which have made sure that it was deposited in the museums. In our own time, these in turn are approached by means that are ready for a new re-recording. But of course in each of these passages something is lost to the mode of translation. The physical substance of the bodies is pared down even further and their intellectual character is augmented: the character of dreams or phantoms or ectoplasm that stay on the surface, determined to avoid sinking into space, to scorn the

Notturmo in montagna,
1986
olio su tela
cm 60 x 45
Courtesy Galleria
In Arca, Torino

Notturmo, s.d.
olio su tela
cm 60 x 50
Courtesy Studio d'Arte
Raffaelli, Trento

vulgar arms of weight and volume. Besides, even though they have renounced certain qualities of crass and tangible physicality, these images have gained others, those of incisiveness and persistence. It really seems as if, like in the computers of which we all make use now, a process has intervened that is capable of "saving" them, of making them indelible in spite of their magically suspended existence, interwoven with unreality or, as we might put it today, virtuality.

All Salvo's Metamorphoses

From that moment on Salvo's destiny was sealed, and over the following twenty years of intense activity he has come up with innumerable variants of this method of composing: variants on which this exhibition aims to throw light, though more in terms of internal mechanisms than in those of extended stages, in terms of quality rather than quantity. What counts is the insistence on the special relationship that the artist establishes with themes and objects and circumstances, which he is also avid to appropriate. This is never a passive relationship of imitation, from reality to image mediated by the eyes and hands. For him, in other words, it is not a question of seeing, of studying the way a certain thing or figure to be represented is made. Or rather yes, it is this too, if we are to credit some of his statements, such as when he claims that he is not yet ready to tackle a particular theme since he has not studied it sufficiently, has not yet mastered its secrets. We have to insist on the motif of the creation of a universe of phantoms, fully worthy of our banks of virtual images and ready to be inserted into some computer program, and then to be recalled in video games, or perhaps more simply in cartoon films made for entertainment or advertising. The animator has to find algorithms, logical schemes capable of re-creating things, but on a plane of programmatic rationality, in a relationship of

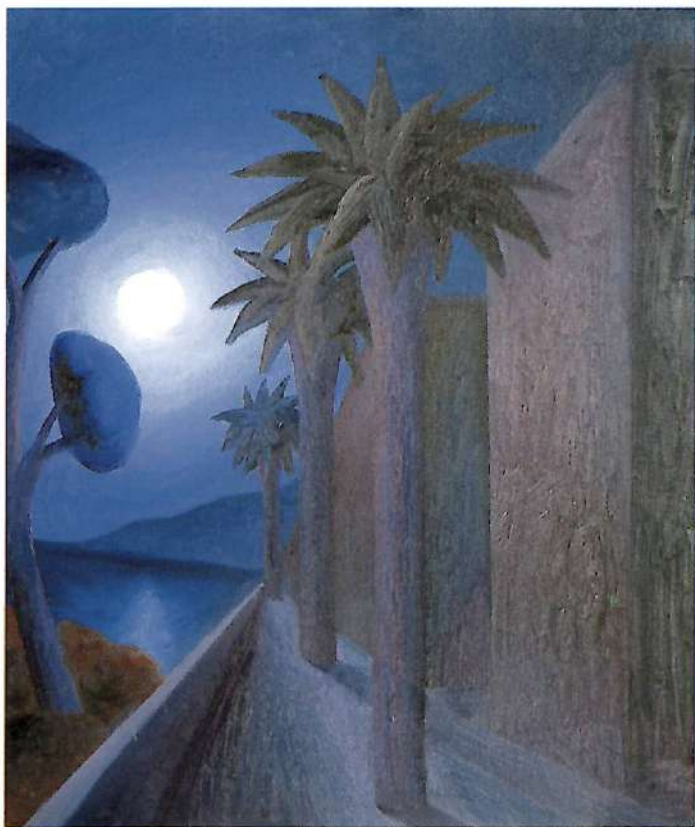


open challenge to or emulation of external reality, dispensing with those aspects of it that are more crude and embarrassing owing to their excess of phenomenal disorder. In a sense, the artist has to be able to reconcile the criterion of keeping reproduction inexpensive with the opposite one of variety, given that he is driven by the ambition to be as broad and all-embracing as the physical world outside. So he passes from one "current" to the other, through intelligent variations on a logo that the artist has already made his own. In this way he avoids having to start from scratch each time, while being able to produce appropriate variations on the basic motif. For this purpose the columns of the Greek temple have been invaluable to him, with their cylindrical essentiality, notwith-

standing the superficial pattern of the fluting. They are also ready to be segmented along the clearly marked lines of the drums, allowing them to be used like pieces of Meccano, which can be taken apart and put back together at whim. How many metamorphoses it has undergone, over the years, this initial and essential motif! Very soon it was able to fuse with the apparently very different motif (belonging to nature rather than culture) of the tree trunk, in turn ready to open itself up through the bifurcation of its branches. To stay within the sphere of architecture, however, the motif of the column has reemerged in the slender and vertical shapes of minarets (*Ottomanias*), perhaps in combination with another, equally essential motif, that of the rounded dome: another easily designed "logo", capable of giving rise to a large number of ectoplasmic manifestations. Naturally, the plasma in circulation is still that "pure" color – not mixed on the palette – rivaling the purity of the color produced by the cathode-ray tubes of the television or the *à plat* surfaces of animated cartoons. And even those spheroidal domes, like the cylinders of the colonnades before them, can escape from their architectural use to turn into beautiful, swollen, bulging clouds, ready to animate the sky through an invasion that is at once gentle and tenacious. The same can be said of every volume that has emerged from Salvo's hands, which if you like have much in common with the sort of inflated balloons that are widely used in meteorology today. And in fact his forms, full and essential but made out of almost impalpable materials, seem to hover in the void, floating up into a clean and pure sky, above the polluted gasses of the atmosphere. Here they are able to register the most phantasmagoric solar phenomena on their vast surfaces, when the sun is just appearing in dawns that – and here the Homeric epithet is truly appropriate – cannot help but announce themselves with "rosy fingers", or when instead it is sinking into sunsets

that have something incredible about them, owing to the intensity with which they cover the whole gamut of reds and purples. Anyone who has a sensibility too closely modeled upon the naturalistic scale of values – i.e. on a cautious moderation of the extremes, on the golden mean, on a fading into the gray that results from the canceling out of opposites – will protest at the brilliance of those colors. He will declare them to be impossible, in bad taste, prisoners of kitsch, or what amounts to almost the same thing, wholly worthy of the notorious taste of primitive artists. And it is true: that scandalously pure and bright palette, full of contempt for shades and nuances, for compromises, can be found not only in all the periods "before Raphael", but also in our own time, where it is linked to a "post" that is trying to get back in touch with the "pre" in a common strategy of resistance to the modern. In all this we are also witnessing a resurgence of the values of the South over those of the North, or rather, of the extreme climatic and meteorological conditions that are to be found above and below the temperate zones over the supremacy that the latter have established over the rest of the world, imposing the dominance of matching and mixed shades of color, dim and dark tones. Salvo, on the contrary, likes the extreme chromatic values that can be found in a warm Mediterranean landscape, from the Sicily of his origins to the Canaries, recently discovered as an ideal place for vacations, or in Nordic landscapes covered with a white blanket of snow, which has the merit of keeping at bay the gloomy contamination of the atmosphere, of putting nature under a bell jar. And so in his pictures the vegetation either blazes, set on fire by the heat and light of the sun, or is covered by a frosting of snow, allowing it to be tinged with wonderful shades of blue and violet. Just as, passing through the various times of the day, the artist delights in all the extreme moments, from the dawns and sunsets of which we

Senza titolo, 1991
olio su tela
cm 70 x 60
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino



have already spoken to majestically full noons and nocturnes, perhaps with the darkness rent by moonlight. Quite often Salvo decides to bring these opposing chromatic scales together, offering us nighttime scenes broken by cones of light, which find a weak pretext in the street lamps that interrupt the darkness of our real nights. And perhaps in the whole range of his production there are no more emblematic paintings than these, for that beam of artificial light almost seems to be the selective ray that emanates from the artist's intelligence and sensitivity in order to light up the darkness, the chaos, the crass materiality of what exists in the real, gray world, and to translate it, to win it back for a dimension of values that have been "saved" forever.

A chat with Salvo is always something of an adventure, a journey that you may start but which then takes you wherever he wants, sometimes at a fast pace and sometimes at a slow, relaxed one, perhaps following the promptings of memory, or those of a literary passage he has by heart and relives through his intense sensitivity, reinterpreted according to the needs of the moment. This is an account, as faithful as possible and therefore with the minimum of intervention on the part of the writer, of that fluent and smooth, even spontaneous eloquence of his, which is the fruit of a deep knowledge of literature. During the conversation Salvo explained his way of thinking – “it is in the apparently banal that great value lies” – by quoting an author of whom he is very fond, Giuseppe Pontiggia, and with whom he also shares the idea that the highest achievement of art is its apparent simplicity, normally so difficult to attain. A theory that is very well suited to Salvo’s art, but which, it seems to me, also informs his words. In the living room of his house, while outside Turin appeared to fade into the distance, Salvo conjured up images, using words as if they were the tools of his trade.

Salvo – Reality is irreproducible, otherwise you would really be making another reality. It is elusive... language tries, in a way, but when it describes a sunset in words this is not the same thing as the sunset. But even a painting of a sunset is not the same thing as a sunset, and neither is a concerto... The possibilities of representation are few. We are convinced that language is the one with the greatest capacity for doing it. After all, there are a hundred thousand words in a dictionary. On the other hand, the fact that you cannot produce a mirror image does not mean that you shouldn’t try.

Dede Auregli – Considering the selection of cycles of paintings on show at this exhibition, (the ottomanias, the nocturnes, the snowfalls, the many landscapes...), I think

it might be interesting to base our conversation around the theme, the idea of the journey, whether real or imagined, and so perhaps a journey of the soul.

S. – For years I traveled mostly in my imagination as there was a period in which I stayed mostly at home, but went on fantastic journeys, and then I started to really travel again... You know, when people go on journeys they are seeking their own paradise, or hoping to make a dream come true, or chasing after the utopia of a memory that they think they might be able to rediscover in reality.

D.A. – In this connection, I was particularly struck, if I may be allowed to take this theme further, by your works of “rewriting” from the beginning of the seventies. In particular by an imaginary adventure, the *Story of Salvo the Sailor*.

S. – It was the last one, you know, in the series of rewritings and substitutions of “Sinbad the Sailor” that I did between 1969 and 1972. I had kept it in my own collection but now don’t have it any longer. Somebody must have stolen it, it was bound in a special way, but there you go... Well, it was an action.

D.A. – But had you chosen the tale for some reason or were you just interested in the action of rewriting?

S. – Well, no, there are millions of books, and I must have done... ten. The choice was fundamental. Among other things, I wrote the story of Sinbad in a childish hand, using the exercise books they give you in second grade, whereas when I wrote the *Divine Comedy* the script was deliberately normal. Looking back now they seem like absurd works... At the time I had picked some fables, and then the *Story of Saint Francis* and this tale of Sinbad the Sailor as well: the work lay in the choice of the text that interested me. You know that in the story there two Sinbads. One stays at home and the other travels. Its like a sickness, because he travels to make his fortune, but after a while comes back with the money and then gets sort

Senza titolo, 1986
acrilico su tela
cm 143 x 164
Collezione privata
Courtesy Le case d'arte,
Milano

Gennaio, 1987
olio su tavola
cm 55 x 74
Collezione Barbara
Burgeradut, Roma

of depressed about staying in the same place and sets off again, let's say, always encountering hardships and difficulties... But the other one always stayed at home... Now I'm going to have to go and read it again...

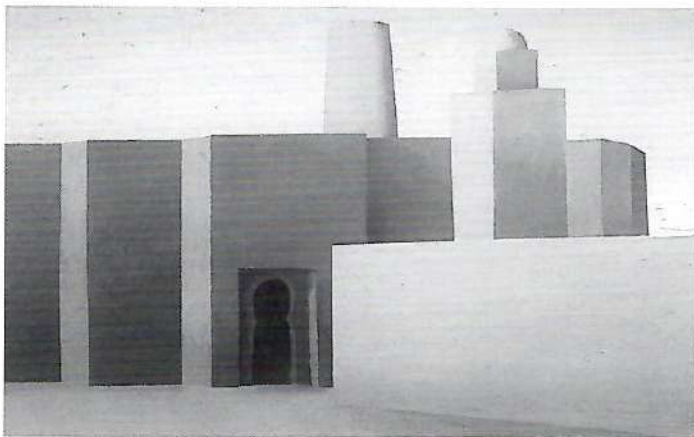
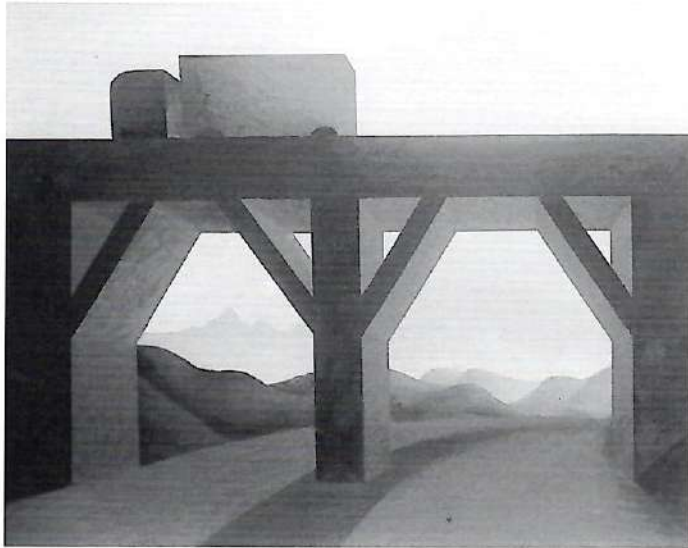
D.A. – Perhaps it is meant to symbolize the presence of two impulses in a single person...

S. – Yes, yes, I think that in reality this yearning to be else-

where, this desire always to be doing something else, is part of human nature. Stories and novels have been written about this problem, there is a vast literature... I remember, for example, a famous story by Hawthorne: splendid, a masterpiece of American and world literature. It's about a man tired of his wife who goes away with the excuse of the famous pack of cigarettes, but the



A4 MI-TO, 1992
olio su tela
cm 80 x 100
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino



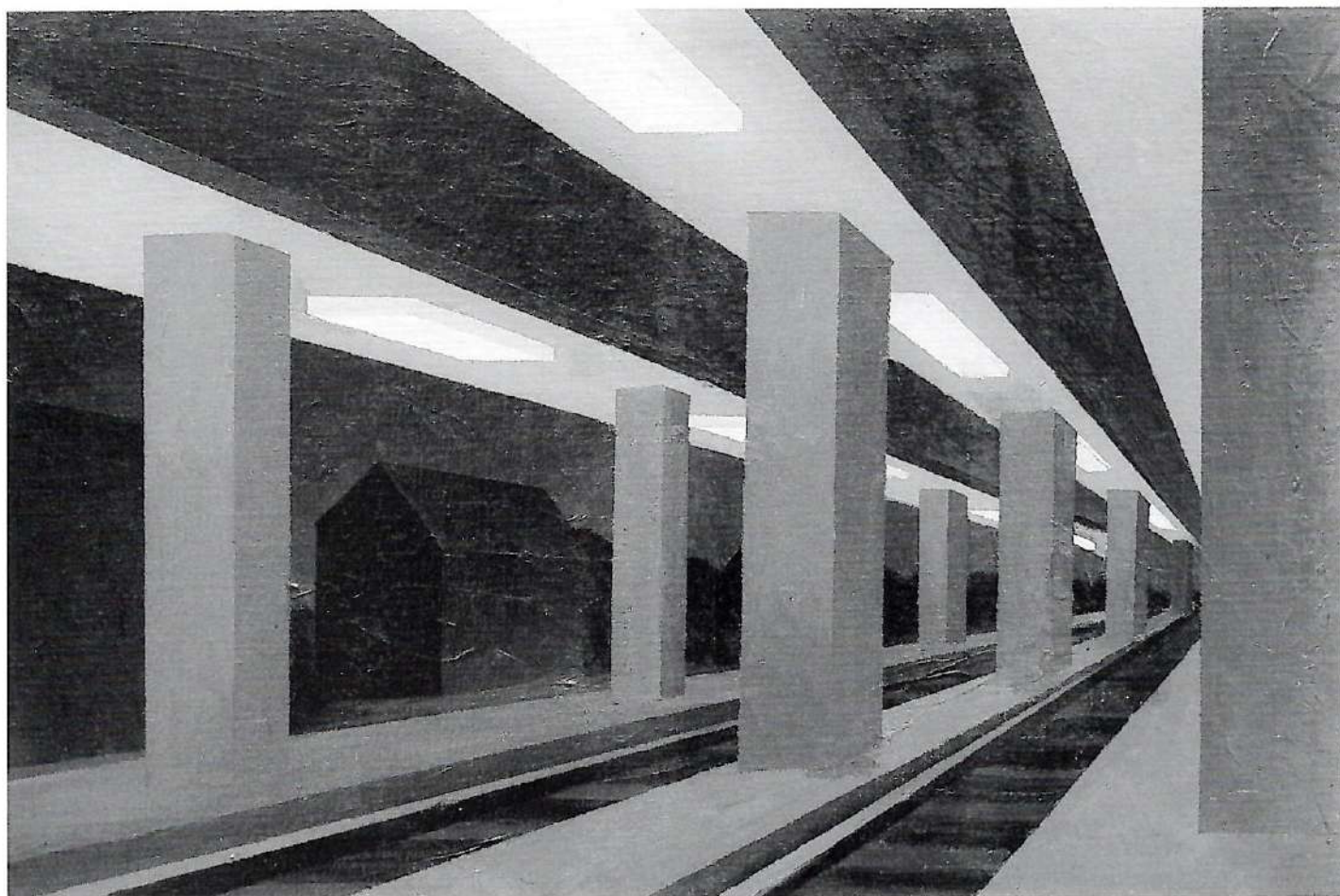
fascinating thing about Hawthorne's story is that he doesn't go far, so that he can almost see her from his window and when he goes for a walk he passes in front of the house, let's put it like this, of his former life, and he stays away twenty years. But one evening it's raining, and he feels a little gloomy. He's sad and knocks at his old door, and then I don't remember the rest [he laughs]. I think that's how it ends... That's where the fascination of the thing lies – after all Gauguin did it – that then you go away: the problem is whether there is really an else-

Monastir, 1995
olio su tela
cm 44 x 70
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

where, because often you realize that the elsewhere isn't there. And then, you see, I remember a story by Gandolfi that made a great impression on me. The story starts with a man who is arguing violently with his wife over the children and the tedious problems of everyday life. He can't take it any more, and so he goes to the station and catches the first train he sees with the intention of never coming back. But at a certain point he arrives in a town and gets off the train. He goes into an inn and while he is there realizes that the innkeeper is fighting with her husband about the children and everyday life... And there you are, the elsewhere is an illusion, you always find the same things everywhere... I think that when you travel, you shouldn't be looking for paradise, it's not that you're going to feel better. But for me at least, it helps to make me appreciate the things that I already have, even though it's always fairly exciting isn't it? You see a new sky, a new cloud... The philosopher Wittgenstein used to say – he put it beautifully from the literary viewpoint as well – that in comparison with the loneliness of the soul in the body, the loneliness of a man is a crowd. A man alone is a crowd... And so you can't escape... I think this thing of wanting to escape every so often is because we feel a bit like we are in a cage.

When I was a kid I invented a game that was supposed to demonstrate there are two of us in the body, body and soul. In short that there is someone caged inside.

"I met Salvo thanks to his love for books. His house is crammed with volumes," wrote Giuseppe Pontiggia who, with his numerous, intense writings on Salvo, is obviously as interested in the artist as Salvo is in him. "His curiosity is as boundless as his judgment is original. He suffers from the quiet and lucid madness of expecting salvation from books. Or, for the time being, happiness. Books give him the childlike happiness that only



lovers feel, that is total happiness [...]”.

All the way through our conversation, whether at home, in the restaurant, or in the car under an unrelenting downpour of rain, Salvo was constantly stimulated by memories of his vast and extremely varied reading. So it came naturally to ask him whether he gives more space in his paintings to real life or to the one imagined through the pages of books...

S. – The relationship is never so direct. Some of my writer friends have asked me what my relationship with books is in painting, but it’s not easy to say. I think that only, I won’t say a mediocre but at least a foolish artist will, af-

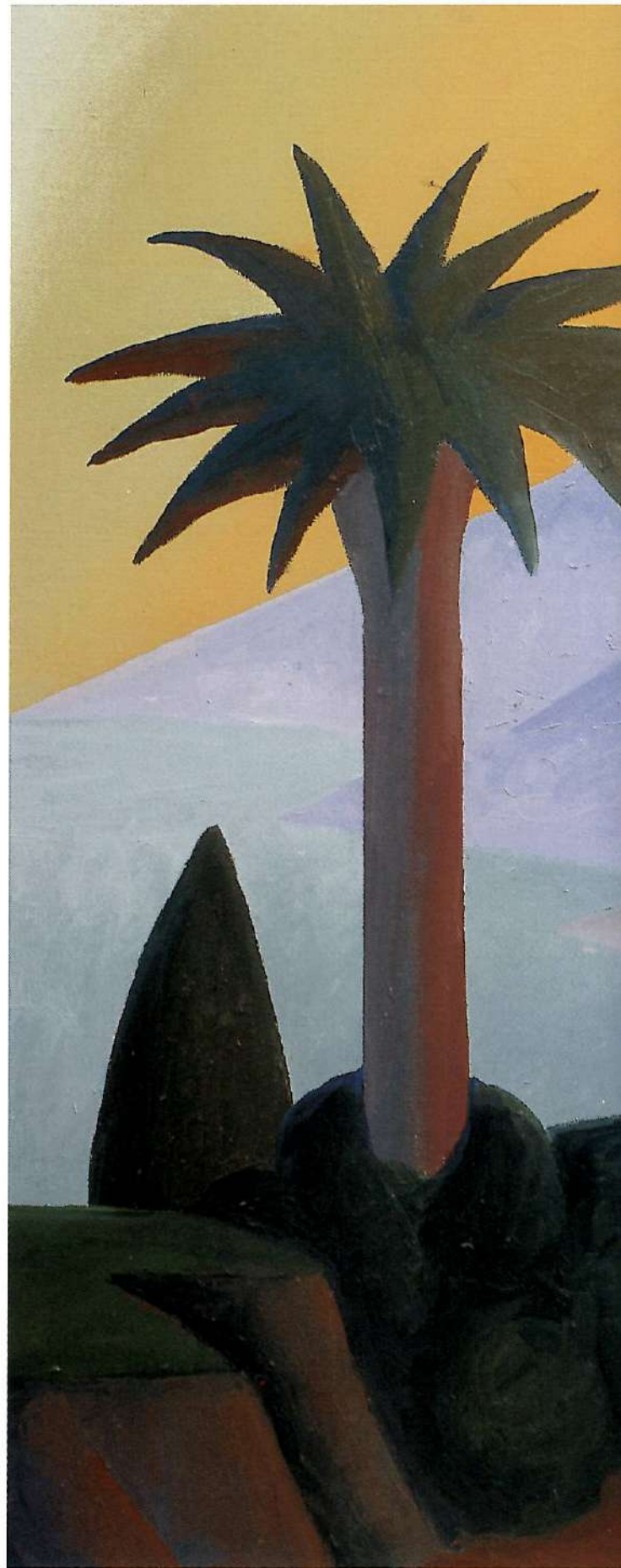
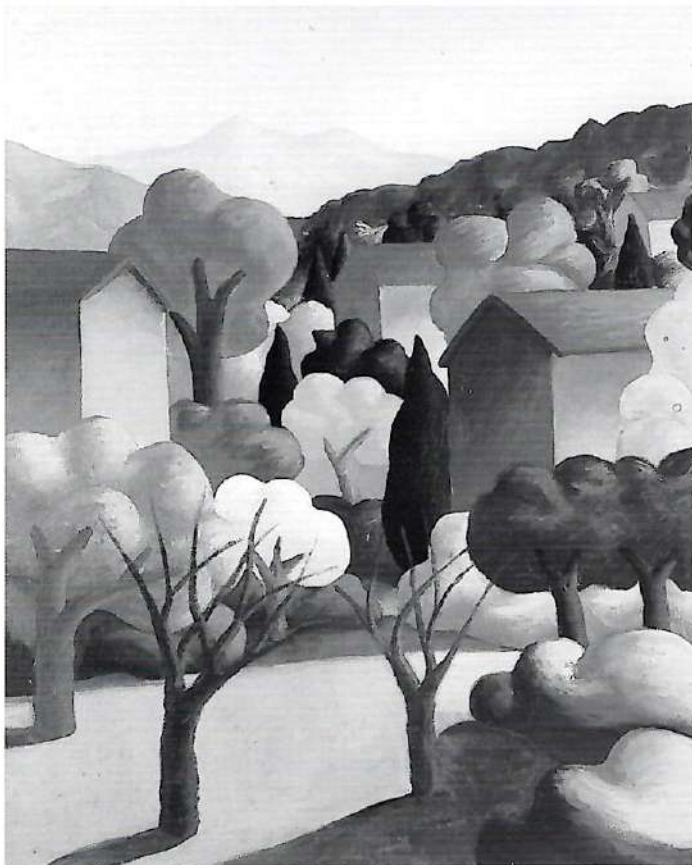
ter reading a book – any book, let’s say *War and Peace* – go and paint a picture of Napoleon on the Russian Campaign or a portrait of Tolstoy or a Russian landscape... I mean to say, the relationship does not necessarily have to be obvious. It can even remain secret. For me it’s often like that. In other words when you’re working you don’t carry out an investigation or a psychoanalytic analysis of why you have done that particular work. It would require twice as much effort and in any case you would have to take into consideration the conditioning imposed by the technique used.

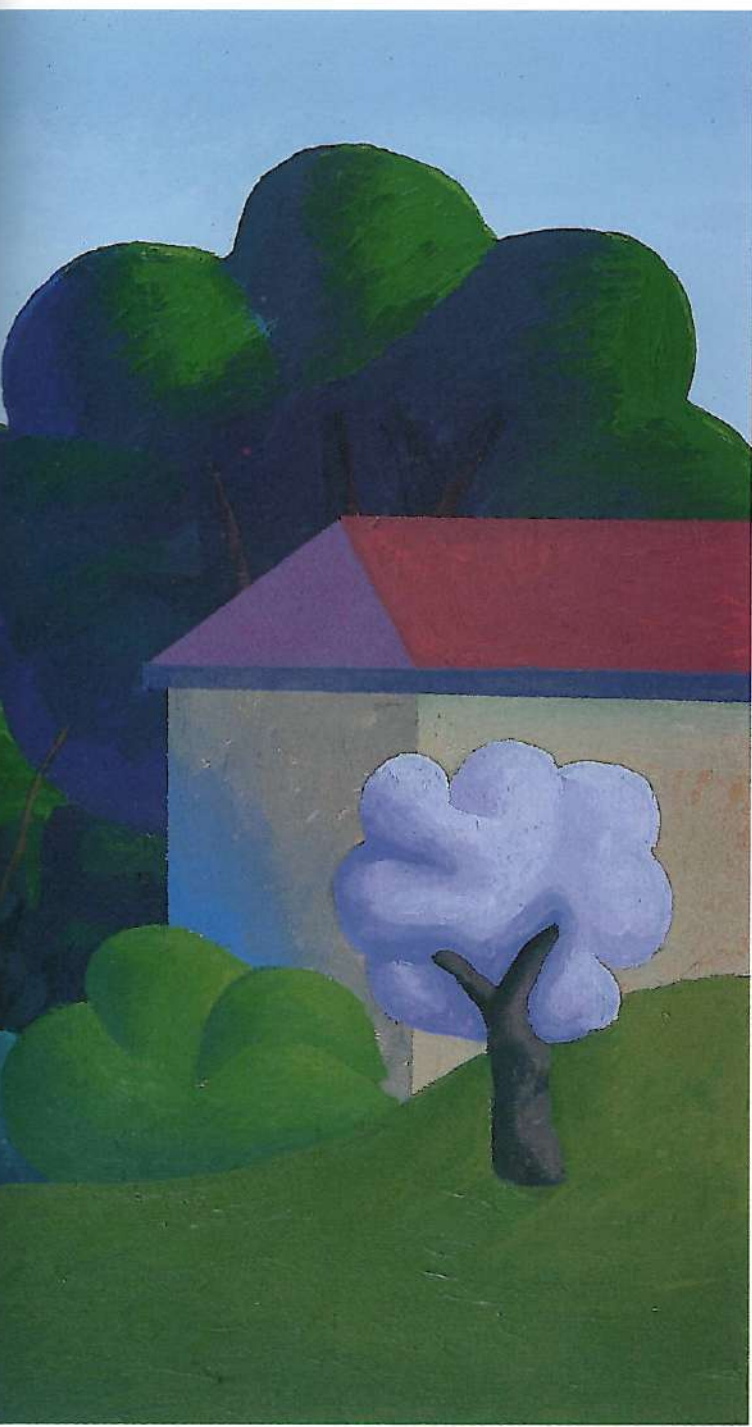
As for real journeys, I’m not a painter from the National

Senza titolo, 1993
olio su tela
cm 100 x 80
Collezione Giulio Borla,
Biella

L'Etna da Taormina,
1993
olio su tela
cm 80 x 100
Collezione privata,
Chieri (TO)

Geographical Society. Your world, inside, should not be shaken up or altered by your travels, otherwise you're a reporter or an illustrator. If Morandi had traveled a lot, perhaps he would have painted his bottles a little differently and nothing more. A good artist can always paint a glass or a bottle. What counts is the way it's done, among the infinite possible ways in which it can be represented. The difference of the individual is important because when you paint you are telling your own story. You see, I think that a good artist always looks at reality and a bad one at reality painted by another artist, like Leonardo and his followers... Be careful though, the myth of language as a means of reflecting reality is just a myth. It's what I was saying to you before. You know it took me





forty years to understand the meaning of Magritte's pipe – I remember that Luciano Pistoï had the same misunderstanding of Surrealism as I did. In truth you can't smoke with it. It's not the real object, it's just a picture, and so "ce n'est pas une pipe."

D.A. – Tell me more about painting, not just from the theoretical viewpoint, as you did in your famous *On Painting. Imitation of Wittgenstein* (1980), but as something that belongs wholly to you, to your daily life...

S. – Yes, I have a special passion for painting. I've done it for so many years. I mean I started in 1963 with my first exhibition at the Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, showing an oil painting. I still have it over there, that first picture of mine: I found it at my grandmother's. It was painted in 1961, that's thirty-six years ago. You can imagine how many things happen in thirty-six years. I was very enthusiastic about it as a boy. I used to go and buy those little books, the "diamonds of art." Do you remember them? I bought them all and copied them, the smaller ones – I don't remember the edition – with Paul Klee, Mondrian, Utrillo.

What I'm trying to say is, it's been a very passionate thing for me. Now talking about painting is talking about the world, you can start from so many points. I don't really know where to start.

D.A. – While you were talking... do you remember the first time you were fascinated by the possibility of painting, by your ability?

S. – Yes, yes, in third grade. I was eight years old, at home in Catania, the same year that we moved to Turin. I was at home and I copied the cover of a comic – it was a "legendary" comic you know, for it was *Capitan Miki e il Grande Blake*, which now has a cult following – and Capitan Miki was a handsome boy with dark hair, parted in the middle, who killed a bear. I copied that cover so well that everyone was amazed at how good I was.

**Marzo,
1985**
olio su tavola
cm 55 x 50
Collezione Giovanni
Aglietta, Biella



Senza titolo, 1995
olio su tela
cm 55 x 45
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino



Noa Noa, 1995
olio su tela
cm 98 x 82
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

So there's this thing in my memory, which has always made a great impression on me, because the subject, the hero killing a bear, is a bit like the iconographic tradition of St. George and the dragon, and this was the pictorial theme that first attracted me after my more conceptual works... So, at the age of eight, I was told for the first time that I was good at art, which I liked you know. But it was not until the first year of junior high school that I really started to paint. I took the drawing teacher some pictures I had painted on paper with enamels and he praised them greatly, asking me to bring more of them to his house. And when I went to his house I saw that it was full of abstract paintings and then I had doubts about what was the right thing to do: in fact I did go through an abstract period afterward... So it was in those years that my passion was born. You know, I started to look at what a picture was, to buy books. I went to museums, I



**Primavera,
1997**
olio su tavola
cm 75 x 45
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

Primavera, 1997
olio su tela
cm 150 x 200
Collezione privata,
Colonia
Courtesy Galleria
Buchmann, Colonia

went to see exhibitions, to understand what it was. Those were the years in which Francis Bacon became really famous and he had a great influence on me. I started to paint lots of things, hundreds of pictures. Who knows where they've all gone? Then I joined the Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts where, for a few thousand lire, I had the right to show three works at the annual members' exhibition. I had submitted three drawings, including the head of an old man that was d'après Leonardo. They accepted it and I put the first of my pictures on show... That's how it all started, you see? I always say it's a bit like driving a car. Nobody is born with a license. You learn, and then you may become a champion!



D.A. – In the eulogy of painting that you wrote in the manner of Wittgenstein, one of the things that throws light on your way of understanding it is the statement “remembering is one of the states of mind,” which it seems to



Senza titolo, 1997
olio su tela
cm 44 x 67
Courtesy Galleria
Buchmann, Colonia

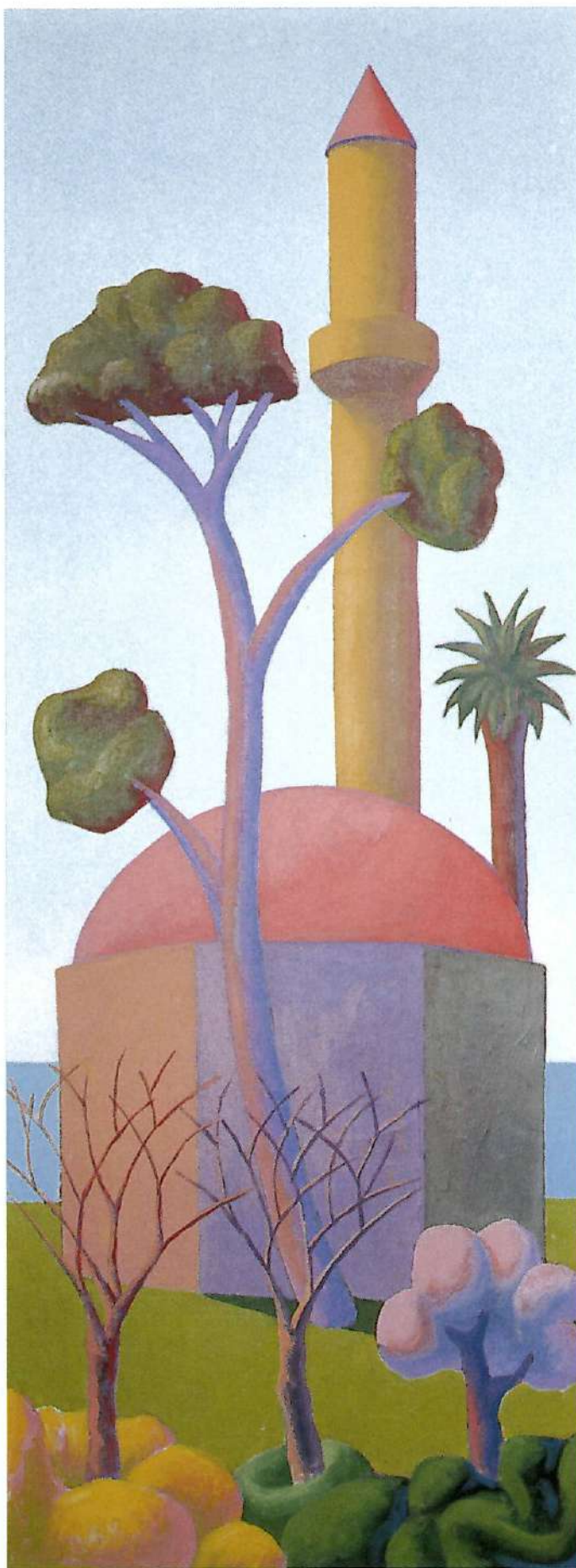
me has great relevance to your work...

S. – It could be, you know. I wrote that at a time when I had read all Wittgenstein's books and had been much influenced by them. So I decided to apply his method to a different subject, one that interested me, painting, just as he had applied it to mathematics. Just think, I had managed to read the whole of his treatise on mathematics. I read it easily and with pleasure, he is so good at explaining things. In essence, Wittgenstein's thought endorses the theory or *modus of common sense*. That is, according to this theory, everything that becomes common is right, rather like the mechanism of a trial in which it is the majority of the jury that decides whether the defendant is guilty or innocent, independently of reality. This also happens in the use of a word, whose meaning becomes what it is normally used for by most people. So it can also be said that a picture is beautiful because everyone says so: everyone has always said that the *Mona Lisa* is beautiful, and so it's beautiful. And then when it has been said for centuries that a painting is beautiful, it ceases to be just beautiful and becomes a yardstick against which Beauty is measured.

This is why I criticize certain aspects of modern art, which will not become yardsticks until they are at least three or four hundred years old. They have only been beautiful "as of," that is as of five minutes ago, or five years or fifty years. We shall have to wait and see how long they last. This is his method, but to arrive at it Wittgenstein makes a probing analysis of words and language. That's why I fell in love with this theory, which opened up new horizons for me.

D.A. – Our ability to remember things, the faculty of memory, isn't that at the base of everything?

S. – Indeed I would say that without it we would no longer be alive, we would no longer be the set of things that make up our life, our being one way rather than an-



San Giovanni degli
Eremiti, 1988
olio su tela
cm 25 x 35
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

Ottomania, 1986
olio su tela
cm 100 x 80,5
Collezione privata,
Milano



other. And just think, to give you an example, that when someone looks at a picture he is able to judge it because in reality he has lots of pictures in his mind. We judge painting, art, because we have many pictures in our heads. If we didn't have this ability to remember judgment would be impossible... They are all languages on which we agree: I know that you are familiar with the same pictures that I have seen, so in art there is a game of this sort. If I had to decide whether someone is an art critic – but I have already written this in *On Painting* – the first thing I would ask is whether he is capable of distinguish-

ing a Filippo Lippi from a Filippino Lippi. If he can, then perhaps we can communicate, but if all he can do is distinguish a Fontana from a Picasso, then for me he is not a critic but someone who is trying to be "clever," who is trying to be "modern" and bring me the latest things. When somebody churns out judgments, then I would like to know whether or not he has the tools he needs to do it. If he does, then his judgment, whether positive or negative, becomes strong, meaningful. It acquires value in my eyes.

Favretto painted some fine pictures. From a distance they

Ottomania – Il Minareto,
1986
olio su tela
cm 60 x 50
Collezione Rosella Nesi,
Firenze
Courtesy Santo Ficara,
Firenze

Ottomania, 1992
olio su tela
cm 80 x 70
Courtesy Galleria
In Arco, Torino

look fussy to the point of nausea, but when you look closely at them they are all dots, they look strange. What I'm trying to say is that he has talent, and I'm talking about someone who is not considered a very great artist, and nor do I consider him one. But a little picture that I saw at a restorer's was marvelous. It represented two women at an antiquarian's and was painted with such magic that if you looked at it close-up it was just blots. That day there was an "important" Turinese gallery owner who scorned it just because he didn't know it was by Favretto: this is



what you get when you deal with dilettantes who make judgments. It's difficult to make absolute judgments. You need to think a great deal before saying that someone is a great artist or not.

In addition excellence, whatever the field, is rare. Even in nature it's rare, a great tree, a diamond... If anchovies were as rare as truffles... [he laughs].

D.A. – To go back to Wittgenstein, and your application of his philosophy to art...

S. – The eulogy of common sense that I found in Wittgenstein was very interesting and I also found it close to my own way of being, similar to my artistic expression: in the work of painting I have always stayed between two fron-

tiers, that of complete abstraction and that of representation alone, even if it is not exactly the result of calculation or reasoning.

D.A. – While we're on the subject, there was something I was curious about: have you ever painted a desert? Because it seems to me that in your works there are always situations where there is a human presence or, if it is absent, there still remains a trace of it, even just a cultural one. While I was wondering if the desert, or the sea, by themselves...

S. – I have thought about the desert many times, I must say, for it's fascinating. But no, I've never painted it because there's a division of space in my pictures and some

things have to be present in order to create a horizontal and vertical organization of the space. And even in an abstract painting there has to be a yellow spot here, a pink and a green one there, and a desert, you see, does not lend itself very well to a rhythmic division, as in general when we think of a real desert there's just a base and a sky, isn't there? You can't even put a tree in it, otherwise it's not a real desert! Once I had a dream in which I painted a completely empty picture with just one thing at the bottom... a nightmare in other words! Moreover, I've never painted a picture of the sea in which there is just the sea, and I never will. Nor have I ever painted pictures in which you see the land from the sea, because in my view to paint pictures like that you have to have been a sailor, to have spent a long time at sea. Then you have it in your heart, let's say, this seeing the land from a distance, but I have always seen the sea from the land. Come to think about it, I did once paint a picture with two peppers on a yellow ground, and I called it *Two Peppers in the Sahara Desert* [he laughs]. It was a joke. You know, every so often you make jokes. Once, for instance, I painted a heap of manure, and I entitled it *There's a Smell of Manure around Here* because when I saw it that thing stank... Certainly, the theme of the desert does not lend itself to my idea that a painting should have a musical rhythm to it.

D.A. – And this is true even of your recent pictures, in which I would like to single out another detail that has struck me, the fact that, unlike your earlier works, the space has become increasingly crowded with presences, whether they are trees, bushes or houses...

S. – Certainly, indeed the most recent subjects that I've painted are landscapes like the one you've seen on the invitation to the Ficara exhibition, these valleys that are ranged one behind the other. They are springtime scenes, because that allows me to use spots of yellow, pink and

white, the colors of trees in the spring. You see, occasionally I may have painted a winter scene, a fall of snow, but just out of whim and only on a small scale, because in a large picture it would be very boring, all that white... So in my view there has to be a pattern of colors in a large picture, and only a spring scene lets me do that. Then a picture is always part of a sequence, and so you produce variations, a bit like Morandi's subjects which may always be bottles but there was a period in which he made them black, the period in which he added a red spot, the one in which he made the necks long, and then short – I'm inventing all this of course. A picture is always born out of a need... For instance, I am beginning to have had enough of landscapes, I must confess, I can feel the desire for a change coming up. Just as there was the period of the pictures with pines and cypresses – when I painted my first landscapes in 1979, the columns suggested the first tree to me, in a very simple way, in fact, for if the column has a cloud behind it then it can turn into a tree with foliage, a sort of mutation that took place because for me painting has always been a form of learning – from which I went on to paint the kind of landscapes I do, as a sort of variation on the earlier ones. Only now they are no longer Mediterranean but, how shall I put it, country-mountain scenes. So I had gotten fed up with painting pines, of producing variations on them: one time under the blazing sun, another at night, yet another at sunset when there was a red sky, and then when there was a violet one. In short, I painted three or four versions and even ones in different nighttime settings. Just think, it was only a few years ago that I decided to paint the nocturne with a flash of lightning, and in order to prepare for it I had to spend two or three hours under the rain watching a storm at Forte dei Marmi. That way I was able to see the effect that the lightning had, when it turned completely violet. It's like a lamp bulb that

is turned on, but a bulb that, not being as powerful as the sun, gives a violet tone to everything. Of course, after many years, even the passion starts to wear a bit thin, or at least becomes a bit routine. It cannot be otherwise, you can't always maintain that enthusiasm. But as long as there is still at least, how to put it, a burning ember then you try to come up with a variation in which you start all over again, you begin to experiment again, for the most fascinating moment in the whole period in which I paint a certain subject is the one in which everything is still to be discovered. And then comes the time when I can do them by memory. This is what happens to me when I paint, that I find myself following a route. At the outset I'm beset by fears: I'm always very cautious with the first pictures on a given theme, but when I get to perhaps the fifteenth, the color explodes and I've reached the end. This always happens, every subject is taken to the maximum tension, to an extreme freedom of coloring, but right when it reaches its climax the subject dies and I have to invent something else. Of course it may happen that some friend asks me to paint a particular subject. If it fits in with the theme that stimulates me in that moment I might do it, but when a subject is dead it's dead. I'll give you an example: Ippolito Caffi, not a great but a good Venetian landscape painter of the nineteenth century, had painted a picture of the feast of the candles in Rome. I have never seen it, but I can imagine it, at night, with the tapers, the horse racing, the lights... And there are about forty versions of this subject because the picture had proved so popular that everyone wanted one. You might say he was a commercial artist, but he was actually a genuine idealist (he was killed during the battles for Independence), who may not have wanted to disappoint his friends and admirers... John Ford once said (and this has been quoted by Luca Beatrice as well), "make the same film every time, just change the horse." It's a great

saying, you can always do the same thing, perhaps just changing an irrelevant detail. The real problem is doing it well.

D.A. – Is there some theme that might stimulate you to start on a new cycle?

S. – Though the provocative vein of my youth has faded a bit with the passing of the years, it hasn't vanished entirely. As I have said on other occasions, I like to look for my subjects in the garbage can as well, to try them out in a very different situation. So why not? I might look in a little local market, the one at Palazzo Porta for example, where you can find pictures with rural scenes, seascapes, little houses in mountain landscapes and, maybe, certain imitations of Neapolitan painters, those rainy scenes with a carriage, a horse cab, reflected in the wet surface of the road, while in the genre of figures you find clowns or old men with pipes, in other words the "character." Well, one day I too would like to paint a clown, really! I like the challenge: if you're good you can turn even the most trite and boring subject into a fine picture... Besides, the theme from which I started out with the pictures of springtime scenes was that of the mountain landscape with little houses. In short, I like being provocative.

D.A. – So let's end with a little provocation [and Salvo's response would be, as always, tinged with gentle irony]: if you hadn't been able to paint, to be an artist, what would you have liked to do?

S. – If I hadn't had any luck with painting, you never can tell. Perhaps something that would have taken me around the world anyway... a truck driver! Like an artist in his studio, he's alone in his truck, with one companion at the most, and then every so often he sees someone, like at exhibitions, when he's loading or unloading... Life is strange. I think we always do jobs in which our innermost desire, or rather inclination, can come true, jobs that allow us to encounter our own nature.



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