

μετά τα Φυσικά

by Cynthia Penna

Metaphysics: a science that studies the essence of things, and not their real nature.

"...it goes beyond the contingent elements of the sensible experience... according to a universal prospective. Metaphysics focuses its attention on what it considers eternal, stable, necessary, absolute, seeking to capture the fundamental structures of being". (from Wikipedia)

Guffogg's research in painting and the arts has always explored the essence of things, what is visible and what may immediately be obtained from sensorial prerogatives; his research focuses on what is beyond the phenomenal reality: research in metaphysics.

What Guffogg describes in his painting is expressed through the immediacy of the gestural language, but he aims to go beyond mere physical gestures, beyond the physicality of the object.

Ever since the Eighties, when he definitively abandoned figuration, Guffogg has begun to focus on the gesture, that is to say repetitiveness and its freedom.

Instinct guides the hand according to rigorous criteria that might seem antithetical with respect to the very nature of the gesture, but which are on the contrary stabilizing and appropriate to the research he wants to conduct.

The purpose of metaphysics is to attempt to explain the universal and objective structure which is supposed to be concealed behind the appearance of the phenomena... Guffogg pursues a universal, placeless and timeless reply behind the outward appearance.

He therefore proceeds according to a scientific rigour, with a freedom that is conscious and channelled in schemes of technical rigour, in order to achieve a result that looks to the soul rather than to the object as such. The unreal space and light borrowed from Rembrandt, from his early works with very dark backgrounds, the static quality of time rendered by an object which suddenly appears in the image, and which resembles a photographic image in which the moment is frozen far ever; the feeling of a total, absolute silence which accompanies the apparent movement of the object, render the sense of the metaphysical character of the whole.

Incredible as it may seem, Guffogg's metaphysics is also found in the magic and unreal atmospheres of De Chirico, where the figuration is replaced by another, stripped of any sense of reality; it is important to note that it is NOT a matter of an absence of figuration, but a rendition of the essence of figuration.

Unreal illumination, unreal colouring, dilated and alienating spaces: these are the elements the two have in common, within the context of a research that unites them on a philosophical level of being and essence.

The works from the Nineties and the first decade of the new century introduce a much vaster coloration and a superimposition of pictorial surfaces and backgrounds that render them much more dynamic.

But the research is, to an increasing extent, centred on a yonder and a beyond which pervades the canvas and pulls the eye within it.

The patina technique, borrowed from the old masters, which makes him apply up to 80 coats of paint and build the work up slowly, creates subtle variations of hues and illumination, that allow the light to penetrate through the layers and reflect, rebounding towards the spectator, giving an illusion of having been created from within the work.

The intricate passages of sign and colour create a kind of tangle of strings, a central nucleus that is unravelled and that slowly irradiates towards the edges. The primary gesture is followed by a continuous sequence of secondary ones, a sequence dictated by both instinct and reasons.

Guffogg explains that, once he has carried out the first gesture, which marks the first "curve", the seriality of the subsequent lines becomes almost automatic; he also recounts that a trace or sign curving towards the right is offset, as if "by instinct", by another one to the left, in a symmetric development borrowed from Sixteenth-

century symmetries that are definitively lost in the final reading of the work. It is a kind of uncontrollable "domino effect"; the succession of gestures becomes "obligatory": it is that one, and no other.

This superimposition of gestures is both conscious and unconscious; it traces the trajectory of the construction of the pictorial field, of the "scene". A signic trace which is composed and "issues" from his hand with a rhythm not unlike that of a music score. The continuous and incessant superimposition of the sign and the trace gives rise to a superimposition of the surfaces and levels of paint which, together with the cutting and frontal light, gives the work an almost three-dimensional depth. The result is a kind of writing, a gestural writing inspired from the ancient Chinese technique where the artist performs a kind of dance with the canvas. And what about the desire elicited in those who observe, to put their hands into that tangle of light and to mix and unravel strings with the same force and vehemence as its creator? An attempt to reach the centre, the heart of the tangle and to begin to mitigate it, to unravel the strings to find out what is beyond, or what is happening outside-and inside it?

In any case, it is precisely as a dance that Guffogg describes the particular "realization" he has been working on for two years with the "Ginevra de' Benci" by Leonardo da Vinci; almost a companion in the flesh, who has accompanied him for two years, in his research and in this daunting challenge. The work (the only one present in the American territory) hangs in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and represents the theme of the whole new body of works which Guffogg has been working on from 2011 until today.

But why has the artist chosen that work and that author? Perhaps because else Leonardo's work is nothing if not a metaphysical work. Its basic structure is definitely so, and Leonardo, for that matter, was wholly familiar with Aristotelian philosophy, to which all this is closely connected.

The scene is completely unreal even if it portrays a real personality; the eyes which seem directed at the spectator really do not "look at him": they are as if lost in emptiness; the "deafening" silence of the scene and the total stillness of everything: immobile trees, leaves that do not fly in the wind, a landscape visible in the far background that seems to be immersed in a dream, and that has nothing real to it.

Everything takes place in the mind of Ginevra, in the mind of Leonardo, in an intimacy that is NOT violated, in the thought of a personality which is not externalized and not betrayed.

metá ta Physiká: the pursuit of what is beyond the reality of thing, the overcoming of the contingent and unstable elements of reality in order to seek the essence of man in something more eternal, more universal and more absolute.

Perhaps the soul?

And the colours of Leonardo, his extreme spatiality, his immense range, have inspired the work of Guffogg, which breathes the same air: open, immense, immobile and still, but which aims directly and irremediably for infinity.