

Luigi Zuccheri

SUBTLE HUNTS

Sylvia Kouvali, Piraeus

16 June – 31 August 2024

MMXX at Sylvia Kouvali - Luigi Zuccheri: *Subtle Hunts*

M –Thinking back to Junger I find apparent likenesses, substantial similarities as well as antithetical aspects compared to our Luigi. I would like to believe their way of perceiving nature is different, but I cannot. The aim is different, in my opinion; the former grasps the epic of variety and yearns for knowledge with a Goethian impetus; the latter, setting out from the same viewpoint, makes it instrumental to the hierarchical inversion of the anthropised world: man is no longer the apex of the food pyramid. This inversion does not take place, as we would be led to believe, at the hands of a larger predator –a bear we might think, or any other animal that man is naturally inclined to fear –it is here the smallest ones that are most frightening: a mole as big as a small car or a butterfly as broad as a café umbrella will certainly cast the few human figures into the very deepest despair.

M –But here another point comes in: Zuccheri has often been referred to as a positivist; his inversion of proportions –and therefore of hierarchies –has often been seen as a caressing of nature and an affectionate reproach of humankind, but I don't see all this, or rather, I see it as more than this: his good-natured figure, his kindly letters I believe denote a more infuriated stance against man. The disproportions and perspectives do not serve to instil a sense of uncertainty but one of vexation. Zuccheri unleashes a form of harassment and torture onto his fellow human beings, who had done so much harm to themselves even before they began to do harm to nature (the separation between man and nature is very clear: those who are simply not part of the world's makeup but who occupy it, and that which now, in these paintings, suffers from this occupation). Humans seem to confusedly inhabit an alien and hostile world, one which longs to torture and expel them. It should be pointed out that it is precisely the depth of field and the many overlapping planes that make his compositions believable. There is no allegory in his paintings: the more believable the composition, the more disconcerting it can be.

M –We are led to see a certain degree of docility in him, but this is a mistake: with the onset of old age, the trick of concealing misanthropy becomes more complex, and irony (in the Socratic sense, if you will) is irresistible. The human figures who –in their peasant goodness –had previously retained some benevolence on the part of whoever painted them, with time become hideous monsters, stains, legless and wretched, shadows draped in rags that by now have very little of the human to them.

M –It was not enough for him to invert the roles between victims and executioners. Through the inversion of proportions, Zuccheri interferes with his human figures by depriving them of the sense of detail that his (uncommon) technique reserves for all the other elements of the composition. The man is thus a shapeless blob of a few, deliberately rough brushstrokes, whereas he will always dedicate tender loving care to any lizard. Even the medium thus becomes a way of levelling offence towards all mankind.

M –But there are those who see something playful, something fairytale-like in his animals and spontaneous grasses the size of cars or houses. We don't, instead we see misanthropy; we see the 20th century, disappointment, and the everyday practice of a great painter who toys with humans the way a cruel little child plays with crickets. The variations on themes, the recurring elements –it all contributes to the construction of a purely mental world in which to vent his spleen.

M –The technical experiments, the continuous search for new solutions and new colours to extract from that same nature add an almost alchemic level, painted with honey, with coffee grounds, with the clay he himself scoops up from the riverbeds, with eggs. With these techniques that he himself calls recipes, he rails against guilty humanity, and with excellent results.

Bio

Luigi Zuccheri (b. 1904, Gemona del Friuli - d. 1974, Venice).

During his lifetime the artist participated in many important group exhibitions including: Venice Biennale (1950) and Museo della Permanente, Milano (1965).

Posthumous solo exhibitions have been held at Karma, Los Angeles and New York (2024); STANDARD (OSLO) (2023), Fondation Vincent Van Gogh (2022-2023) and in Italy at MMXX, Milan (2020); Museo Civico d'Arte, Pordenone (2014); Musei Civici di Treviso (2007); Museo di Montefalco (1982); and Galleria del Girasole, Udine (1975).

MMXX is a Milan based artist-led project founded by Emanuele Marcuccio and Daniele Milvio in 2020.