

Jacopo Casadei: Irony Is a Very Serious Matter

By Maria Vittoria Pinotti

Not many painters today can create an autonomous universe in which they can wander freely, inventing and playing with coherence, without making any demands on the viewer. Yet when I first began to study Jacopo Casadei's work, I found myself getting lost in his imagery; by observing his works and listening to his account of them, I understood that the dimension of his research was as unbound as his imagination. Nevertheless, in the many exchanges we have had, each painting was subjected to rigorous critical evaluation, broken down into its individual components to analyze its expressions, rhythms, forms, tones, and respective titles. From these dialogues I came to understand that the motivations behind his practice of painting were in fact far removed from a rationalizing and analytical perspective of study, one that can at times obscure the freshness and success of a work. However, by stripping the works of all meaning and limiting myself to analyzing their mere presences, I perceived a state of spontaneous contamination that characterizes them: a fluid oscillation between control and abandonment, an apparent figurative carelessness capable of revealing everything without confessing anything. This secret, subtly concealed, continues to live timidly beneath the areas of color and in the creeping movement of the brushstroke, generating visionary works whose point of comparison is not so much with life itself as with the countless fables that life allows us to invent. Similar to small surrealist exercises, the canvas avoids conveying an explicit meaning; instead, the image - only when it appears - emerges through the accentuation of minimal physiological details such as eyes, gesturing fingers, noses, mouths, and at times profiles and barely tousled hair silhouettes. This is a capricious apparition that never fully reveals itself in compositional clarity, urging us to search for the right interpretative key and thus generating a subtle sense of estrangement. I believe that this initial encounter with the work represents the most meaningful opportunity to grasp its sense, as it opens onto the free parade of heroicomic, grotesque, irreverent, and mocking characters that Casadei envisions. Even if certain clues reach us through the intelligence of the titles, the absolute truth - which many of us obsessively seek in a painting - remains concealed, turning hermeneutics into a genuine act of resistance against informational obsession. What emerges instead is an open and vital stance, ready to move along multiple imaginative and interpretative drifts, in opposition to an artistic matter now impoverished by excessive readings. Through my many conversations with Jacopo, I have inferred that this irreverence stems precisely from his ability to create a rupture with conventional and collective behavioral attitudes; thus, he himself is the first - and perhaps the only one - to don the mask of irony, retreating into a desacralizing pictorial dimension as a form of resistance to the present. In this way, Casadei achieves something exceedingly rare in contemporary painting: an expression that, by rediscovering the freedom to act, manifests itself through chromatic irruption, expanding and stretching across the entire surface. The image, fragmenting into a simultaneity of appearances and presenting itself as a pure impulse devoid of proportional rules,

avoids focusing on a central focal point. Although the references are immediately recognizable - such as the manga boxer Forza Sugar, the composer Nino Rota, or Romagnolo dialect inflections intertwined with personal memories - the figuration presents itself as an anecdotal story of *nonsense*, which can, indeed must, remain as such. All this recalls the statements of the Surrealists of the 1930s, who urged painting to *entrench* itself - note well, this is their own combative vocabulary - behind the necessity of visually expressing inner perception. Thus a question arises, as profound as it is vivid: what are we to do with our imaginations? Perhaps relieve them, give them form so as not to watch them dying unfulfilled; certainly, they must be released into a visual field. It is here, I believe, that Casadei, positioning himself within the trench of the Surrealists, poses this question to painting. Yet the answer that reaches him is a nonsensical nursery rhyme, a dreamlike reverie, a happy encounter between fantasy and control - part of a process that must not mislead us regarding the apparent gratuitousness and infantilism of certain painted forms. For Casadei, therefore, *inventing is a very serious matter*, because identifying and translating the chaotic, instinctive, and visionary substance we carry within us is by no means easy. Consequently, content itself remains fluid, just like the imagination that generates it; the figure thus assumes many forms before arriving at the one most congenial to it, so that there is nothing it has not already been, or that it could not become at any given moment. Hence it may simultaneously be a succulent plant, a smile, an inguinal view, the silhouette of a man or perhaps that of a puma, a *paternal ambo* in the lottery rather than a *terno*. What the Surrealists had intuited nearly a century ago - ready as they were to raise trenches in defense of a practice capable of breaking through imaginative limits - was later taken up by Gianni Rodari as well, who was convinced that «there is no life where there is no struggle». Thus, by bringing together two sufficiently alien terms, the contrast of a *fantastic binomial* is generated; although it seemingly unites antithetical elements, it gives rise to a daring narrative. For Casadei, the canvas stages precisely this encounter: an experience no longer declamatory but surreal and fragmentary, conceived as a liberating and uncontrollable adventure that invites us to explore what happens when images derail from the overly familiar tracks of their meanings. Consequently, the notion of *space* is replaced by that of *situation*; the painting becomes a dynamic network of relationships in which multiple color fields, forms, and visual angles appear without hierarchy. The irregularity of the glazes and the soft succession of chiaroscuro veil and blur the evocative expressions of faces, and - even within the tangle of figures and signs - the research privileges tonal layering, allowing images to merge or emerge in complete disregard of representational functions. Thus, apparent chaos becomes a picture, a reservoir of energies, upon whose sensitive, emulsified background lies a dynamic image, as swift as the flash of a visionary thought with its countless “comings and goings of meanings”. Therefore, what is to be grasped in this exhibition is an impossible and estranging scenario: what would happen to painting if it were to abandon reality? This is certainly a tough battle to win, yet it is recounted here in a single, clear vision - irony.