

Poet as seer

di Luca Beatrice

When Edgar Allan Poe introduced the stylistic features of a genre that would later be defined as “noir”, and also “gothic horror”, into early American literature, which now includes the Batman of Christopher Nolan's dark trilogy, he was perhaps unknowingly working against the hero protagonist of thriller films in favour of the many variations of adversary that he developed during the 1900s. Outcast, seer, dreamer, decadent, loser. The anti-hero conquered the spotlight because he was satirical, funny, dramatic. He embodied the weaknesses of modern man, who was not at all super, but unfortunately more human. He was less of a big talker but definitely much talked about.

The contemporary version of the spectre of the House of Usher, a virginal, mad Ophelia who roams the walls of a ruined castle surrounded by a stagnant moat and bare trees, is not a peacemaking angel but a suicide girl – sassy Lolita – in a film directed by Sofia Coppola. The film (*The Virgin Suicides*, 1999) was populated by young people, known as tweens in current vernacular, suspended in an icy, romantic atmosphere. At the dawning of the '00s, an aesthetic reflecting a new form of decadence was making way. Elegant and spurious, it has the spirit of rock and the semblance of a glossy magazine, it is fashion without the makeup, it is vapid but violent. It is loud but does not make a sound.

The new poets do not create stories. They look around themselves more voraciously. The director, the writer - and last but not least, the artist - mixes and stirs the elements stolen from reality to build his/her screenplay, leaving the spectator dangling in the red thread of the narrative.

LUCA MR has arranged the rooms of Palazzo delle Stelline into a set noir where nature is mother and stepmother. Floating yet real, his paintings of Voltaire's *Candide* exist in the disenchantment of the "best of all possible worlds". Unsettling yet real. Their enveloping silence confers the same air of mystery as one of Poe's tales. Here too, reality is provided in fragments. Snippets of ingredients lead the spectator to the creative process which provides a view of the whole: installation painting, video and audience interaction which, if it wants to, is invited to "rock" in a nest or stumble among the roots of a tree, being careful not to get lost among the paintings of flowers and people hanging on the walls, or knock into the bags hanging from the branches.

“On the calm black wave where the stars sleep / Floats white Ophelia like a great lily” wrote the poet in 1870 inspired by Banville's *Voie Lactée* (Milky Way);

perhaps Rimbaud had simply caught a glimpse of the famous painting by John Everett Milais. Without the worldwide web, it would be difficult to say who was the first to describe the feeling that opened the sets to so many disillusioned and bitter contemporary dreamers, victims of their own innermost feelings.

LUCA MR is a romantic poet in the guise of a rockstar. Besides the subjects, there are his mentors – declared and undeclared – to unveil his spirit. So much the better, he is terribly romantic. His iconic alphabet feeds on the decadence of the latest generation. Of note is the well-known “27 Club”, otherwise known as “J27”, consisting of musicians, artists and writers who died in tragic circumstances at the age of 27 and whose first or last name contain the letter J: Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones, Jean-Michel Basquiat to name a few.

It is difficult to recognize them in the fluid yet edgy mark which prefers settings that depersonify the subjects. The faces come out of the frame, inserted inside windows that zoom into a story that maybe continues beyond the frame. They are reminiscent of the fleshless characters of Angelo Stano (one of the best designers of Dylan Dog) and his bold, detailed perspectives of all his cartoons. And obviously, the painting of Egon Schiele, from whom many have inherited the secessionist style of academism.

LUCA MR has chosen a unique style of figuration that mixes the freshness of illustration with very sophisticated painting. He mixes with the decisive yet delicate mark natural backgrounds, floating on which are young men and women, who are more sensual than erotic.

Growing up in the era of mixed genres, the young artist prefers to draw friends and idols from among singers and musicians, actors and directors, and unexpected companions found along the way. He has a warrior spirit, he is a leader (he is the lead singer of a punk rock bands), he has acted on the stage, and last but not least, he is zealously dedicated to writing, citing Rimbaud as one of the "poet seers" who can bring a touch of reality to living flesh.

But it is in painting that the innermost nature of the artist finds its expression. Using a medium or large format, as opposed to contemporary English painters who are enamoured of small spaces, LUCA MR makes body parts gravitate in the natural elements. Among flowers and thorns, the subjects do not seem to be affected by good or evil. They are immobile, concealed in a nature that alternates between paradisiacal views and allusions to hell. Eden contains the biblical nature of the natural history of the earth and contemplates together the anthropocentric view that it is subjected to. There is no judgment, the silence does not shout out loud.

If the flowers, X-rays of paper petals assembled into a collage, resemble the first interpretations of Gary Hume's work or the photographs of Man Ray, the

portraits originate from a more common reinterpretation of the genre that ranges from the expressionism of Peter Doig to the explosive sophistication of Herman Bas. Still Anglo-Saxon, perhaps because of the same strictly musical rock and pop matrix, he is the equivalent of the painter Elisabeth Peyton, who represented borderline London in the '90s (with small portraits of friends and acquaintances, usually singers or guitarists), and who, by combining painting and installations in his latest two-man show with Jonathan Horowitz called *Secret Life*, has illustrated a journey through the complicated relationship between man and nature, in the movement of climbing plants (not just painted) and the twists and turns of human psychology.

Painting is the ground of improvisation, where reality is mixed with the imagination, where contemporary myth can slide into the undergrowth of fantasy.

The poet seer lets the protagonists of the story navigate through the settings of his memory. An enchanted wood, a cushion of daisies, a grassy meadow. In 1971, Anselm Kiefer painted his great self-portrait: in prison uniform, a man stands brandishing a burning branch, a small figure in the middle of a wood (*Man in World*). Perhaps LUCA MR is that figure who is asleep in a storm of coloured balloons, *Asleep in the Wood*.

Yet another poet, Charles Baudelaire, found evil in flowers - the sins of the flesh - the quintessence of a metaphysical - and to some, theological - lyricism.

LUCA MR is a singer of an emotion: very poor, if compared only with corrupt and desolate human nature, infinite if immersed in the secret container of the imagination and poetry.