

Marignana Arte

METAMORPHOSIS

Paths beyond form

Critical text by Carlo Sala

The theme of metamorphosis inevitably refers to a literary tradition that goes from the classical myths of Ovid and Apuleius to the existential and grotesque tensions of Kafka's tale. However, it also alludes to the countless figurative essays that these texts have inspired over the centuries: from Bernini's Apollo and Daphne in the Borghese Gallery to Parmigianino's admirable frescoes depicting Diana and Actaeon in the Sanvitale Fortress. If in past centuries this discourse unravelled on a figurative level, among myths, allegories and moral notations, nowadays it has a broader meaning. In fact, for some authors it reverberates from a formal point of view - found in the creative process itself - or in relation to technology and science.

Our contemporary human gaze has become familiar with a highly hybridised landscape where nature has been conditioned by anthropic action that has profoundly modified its morphology. The remote places described in the great explorers' chronicles today are mostly reachable, partly altered and visually mapped until they lose that aura determined by distance. In his photographs *BC#2* and *BC#9* (2021), Yojiro Imasaka (Hiroshima, 1983) focuses on the peculiar marshy landscape of the Bayou in Louisiana, punctuated by large rivers, such as the Mississippi, and dominated by lush vegetation. His works are the result of a profound dialogue with nature in order to bring out its uncontaminated and hidden aspects: to the massified and objectified imagery of places, the author opposes a personal aesthetic of memory. In Imasaka's photographs one perceives a primordial visual climax expressed through an amplified chromatic datum where the territory, usually subject to continuous mutations caused by man, seems to return to a suspended and timeless primordial stasis. The landscape depicted by Giulio Malinverni (Vercelli, 1994), on the other hand, is built on colour and light, which becomes matter in his paintings. In Malinverni's pieces, the concept of metamorphosis is revealed in a way that is exogenous to the very process of painting. In his recent works, landscapes are the result of a continuous formal process of becoming that generates deliberately alienating views studded with incoherent elements. These works reveal a series of references and cross-references to the history of art. For example, in the canvas *Metamorfosi* (Metamorphosis, 2023) the mountains depicted recall the tradition of Leonardo's backgrounds,

whereas in *Il Colosso* (The Colossus, 2023) a figure emerging from the fumes of the volcano evokes the protagonist of the homonymous artwork by the Spanish painter Goya. Finally, in the painting *Paradiso* (Paradise, 2023) it is Tintoretto who is summoned, however in an ironic key. The Venetian's ranks of saints and blessed in Malinverni's painting are in fact reduced to anatomical portions (of the buttocks) from which beams of light emerge. The works of Silvia Infranco (Belluno, 1982) play on the apparent dichotomies of the material they are made of: wax. On the one hand they crystallise the state of affairs of a given moment, and on the other they are the offspring of a vital material, which seems to be part of a perpetual energy flow that could change its forms again and again. To realise the diptych *Herbaria (from Egerton 747)* of 2021, the artist started by making Polaroids with a series of medieval herbals, capturing the slightest signs of time. These changes marked a starting point for working with wax on a material level. Her works are dense with stratifications creating an intense balance between memories and present instances of the artist. In this sense, the surface of the works is built on a mixture of different time frames, vital suggestions and signs that refer to fragments of memory capable of activating a wide range of impressions. In *Fitografia* (Phytography) of 2021, the central element is the remnants of an everyday object - tea bags - which lose their functionality and become aesthetic and sensory matrices thanks to the range of colours and smells characterising them. What emerges is a tonal polyphony where the object pertaining to the flow of life is 'frozen' and made durable to define an aesthetic composition. In the intervention by FUSE* studio (active since 2007), metamorphosis invests digital visual data through the aesthetic and generative potentials of machine learning algorithms. Like Infranco's, which are thus placed in an ideal dialogue, FUSE* work starts from a series of herbaria made by Ulisse Aldrovandi in the 16th century. The illustrations of the famous naturalist and botanist are subjected to the action of artificial intelligence, which, at its peak, generates an output of artificial images. These pictures challenge the perception of the viewer, who questions himself ontologically about the nature of the visual magma subjected to his gaze. The video work (2023) and the prints (2022), part of the Artificial Botany project, are in fact suspended between analogue and digital, sources from the past and technological processes, historical documents and contemporary expressions, aesthetics and science. In the fluid visions proposed by fuse*, each element is in a continuous transformation. Moreover, what in the original source was traced back to a taxonomic logic, now seems to possess a vital afflatus again, dictated by a digital biology.

All these aspects addressed by the artists in the exhibition are but fragments of a motion that touches every aspect of reality and, as the philosopher Emanuele Coccia reminds us, our very

existence is metamorphosis: 'Every body is a transformation of this *first living being* that appeared on Earth, which has multiplied, transformed, through the *continuum* of lives.'¹

¹ Mauro Garofalo, *Emanuele Coccia e Metamorfosi: così le città possono diventare una casa comune* (Emanuele Coccia and Metamorfosi: how cities can become a common home), «Huffingtonpost», October 12th, 2022.