

Be like all the everyday people

by **Marco Arrigoni**

Well, here we go again. On the other hand, it comes natural to me. When I look at a work of art, I can't avoid a distant comparison with poetry. For some people it is a gamble, a perilous stroll. Patrizia Valduga, one of the poets I admire most, told me: there is no great dialogue between art and poetry; the expressive movements would be too distant. And yet I feel that grafting is an irreplaceable opportunity for revelation. In agriculture, it makes it possible to obtain something new through the indissoluble union of two similar or different tree species. Grafting art and poetry results in a prolific clarity of vision.

I say this because Serena Vestrucci's art has always reminded me of three great Italian poets. In chronological order: Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912), Umberto Saba (1883-1957) and Giorgio Caproni (1912-1990).

It is not a question of a similarity of poetics or an analogy of intent. But rather a sharing of imagery, symbols and expressive stylistic features, if by expression we mean a manifestation of thought.

In all three of them there is an underlying theme typical of Vestrucci's practice: adherence to the everyday, to life as it unfolds and unfolds. I would say that what Serena has in common with them is her communion with everyday things, on which she shifts her gaze and allows her attention to settle, in order to perceive a certain sense of existence.

Pascoli uses natural images as emblems of an imaginative surplus: *bright sun, apricot trees in blossom, scrawny boughs, a seagull's wing, the shrieks / of the calendar, the clouds [...] / pink with peach trees, white with plum trees. It is a celebration of small things, of the simplest and most humble reality.* This is what Vestrucci does when, for example, in this exhibition, she uses seven different varieties of cabbage (*Teste di cavolo*), or when she creates the cast of two rings of floured squid (*Anellini fritti, per sempre*), or of cherries (*Orecchino di stagione*), or when she brings the tips of two felt-tip pens together, mixing the ink of one with that of the other (*Finché la crisi non vi separi*). It is no coincidence that the artist often uses the term literally when describing her works, as if to say that this is how things are: I adhere to reality, I lie down at its height, I want to melt and fit like clay to its shape, so as to give it back to you without too much artificial

deception. This respectful approach to the most usual things is intended to bring us face to face with the very essential fact of a perennial auscultation of the mystery, concealed in the daily unfolding of life.

Like in Pascoli's works, there's a troubled, restless, inquiring character towards the reality of things, which manifests itself behind a possible childlike candour or even a subtle irony (just think of the title of the group of sculptures: *Teste di cavolo* [Cabbage Heads]). If we look at the single, isolated clumps of vegetables, lost and scattered across the gallery floor, we first get a hint of a smile, of a curious correspondence between habit and surprise. Then we catch glimpses of human faces, with absent eyes. There is a sense of desolation, of tragic solitude, but also of resigned and at the same time vital respect for an anti-monumental sentiment that is extremely devoted to sobriety. Sculpture repudiates glory and teaches us to see true value in their flat correspondence to the course of things. Vestrucci's approach is a physiological return to the bottom, from which the ascent acquires true turgidity.

This aspect brings me to Saba. Do you remember the lines of *Amai* [I loved]?

*I loved the worn words that no one else / dared use. I was enchanted by
the rhyme flower / love, / the oldest and most difficult in the world. / I loved
the truth that lies in the depths, / almost a forgotten dream, that pain /
rediscovers as a friend. With dread the heart approaches it / and never after
lets it go.*

Both Saba and Vestrucci share the predilection for a sign that names and defines with precision, without alluding or evoking (just think of the term *literally*). There is no hermeticism, difficult interpretation or need for paraphrasing. The datum is immediately revealed and exposed. Exposure is important, but we must be careful: in the floristic world, excessive exposure to the sun of a plant, that has been growing in half-shade, can be fatal. What Serena does, and what Saba did in a consciously non-conformist manner in the 20th century, is precisely not to display on a pedestal, but to clarify, to give the necessary light to show the things linked to the normal habits of life, without tearing them away from the ordinary, because it is there that they acquire their necessary *raison d'être*.

After dwelling on the usual progression of reality, Serena elevates it to a more general symbol of a broad condition. There is a clear and immediately perceived act, behind which we notice the making of the deep being of the world and of man. The *Trucchi* series of works comes to mind, in which popular eye shadows are used to paint a sky on canvas. You speak of *Trucco* [*which in Italian means both trick and make up] because this is what it is about if you name things by their name. But behind it there is a precise and emblematic action, well captured by Cesare Pietroiusti. The act of making up here makes a paradigm shift and turns the canvas from a mute servant for the action of painting, into the actual subject of a work that consists in dressing it up. And at the same time, the banal act of putting on make-up and tricking acquires a symbolic value: it becomes a goad for attention. This attitude can also be seen in *LOST*, a ream of white handkerchiefs, each of which bears a letter of the word that gives it its title. It is the description of an altered state of mind, of a neurological disease, that deteriorates the sense of memory and reality. Everything is made clear through the meaning of the

title: lost. Between reality and work, between work and symbol there is a tight, deep and not negligible link. Or rather, the work falls where life is made; Saba would say, *where the red of the watermelon does not forget the green of the skin*.

And finally we get to Caproni. I see in Serena the perception of an insurmountable limit of reality and of a modesty in crossing it, combined with the profound sensation that penetrating beyond appearances is vain. It is necessary to indulge them, to court them in order to see in them, on the surface and not beyond, stimuli for thought. In his works one does not notice the movements of a rebellion against the impenetrability of reality and thought, there is no proceeding all *spurts and useless races* (G.C.), but a subtle and affable entanglement in the affairs of the world. This is what emerges from the drawings *Batter d'occhio* [Eye-blink], in which the signs are given by the instantaneous blinking of eyelashes on large sheets of paper. She calls it a choral work, I really see the very fragile destiny of each one of us, who side by side succeed each other in our instant of life on the great white sheet of the universe. Serena here is well aware that each of our moments together with those of the others creates a great cloud, or a flock of birds towards the sky.

There is in Serena Vestrucci

the desire
[...]
to live the life
of all,
to be like all
the everyday people

(Saba)