

# Stravolgimento temporale e dinamismo spaziale nella pittura di Trovato

Angela Di Natale

Nel futuro  
profetico vedo  
che la terra dal sonno  
(grave la profonda sentenza)  
si leverà a cercare  
il suo creatore mite,  
ed il deserto selvaggio  
diventerà un dolce giardino.  
(BLAKE W., *La Bambina perduta*, in: *Canti dell'esperienza*)

Come può l'oscuro e ultraterreno mondo dell'invisibile manifestarsi e apparirci nel suo contrario? Rendersi visibile senza perdere la sua dimensione altra, non omogenea alla visibilità? Senza perdere la sua primigenia ed eterna forza mescolandosi nella dimensione temporanea e temporale della visione che ne stempererebbe e ridurrebbe la grandezza?

Solo il tocco dell'arte e del suo genio lo rende possibile in un fugace istante miracoloso che ha della visione comunicando con la luce le tenebre da cui esso emerge e che lo avvolgono, rendendo possibile quello squarcio che è la cerniera che lega le due dimensioni dell'essere e mostrandone la reversibilità e la piega che le unisce le fa comunicare.

La potenza occulta dell'Essere si fa così carne e creazione-creato, che è la forza dell'origine e della fine del tutto, in quello scarto di luce e ombra che, senza sovrapporsi, per un attimo ed un lampo appaiono insieme nel loro perenne convergere.

Può la pittura di Trovato definirsi semplicemente immaginale, onirica, visionaria, astratta? Bastano forse i riferimenti al Simbolismo e/o al Surrealismo a caratterizzarla? Se sicuramente non potremmo connotarla come rappresentativa né figurativa nel senso letterale, tuttavia lo spazio e il concetto di astratto non sono forse sufficienti a caratterizzarla. Qual è il lavoro di Trovato sulla tela? Qual è il fenomeno da essa dischiuso? Le tecniche utilizzate non solo non sono indifferenti, ma suggeriscono forse una possibile chiave di lettura, non certo per una comprensione piena ed esaustiva delle sue opere.

È come se le figure che emergono dallo sfondo in realtà non se ne distaccassero veramente, ma lo portassero con sé, si disperdessero esse stesse nello sfondo in maniera da rendere impossibile una separazione netta ed evidente fra la materia (sfondo) intesa come realtà d'appartenenza, sfondo ontologico, sostanziale, provenienza cosmica o cosmogonico – divina e suo risultato o effetto o, ancora, sua destinazione finale.

È come se lo spazio si animasse a rappresentare un dinamismo che stravolge le consuete dimensioni temporali e queste, trasfigurate, si cristallizzassero in una spazialità immobile e cangiante che ne svela l'intima complessità. Se ci limitassimo, perciò, a considerare l'immaterialità, l'irrealtà delle sue opere ne vedremmo forse soltanto un aspetto e non il più significativo.

Non necessariamente immagini di un altro mondo sono quelle di Trovato, o meglio se trattassi di alterità è quella dell'indistinzione temporale, di uno spazio in cui origine e fine, passato e futuro non sono scindibili, ma paiono invece convergere senza per di più essere distinguibili da ciò che da esse deriverebbe o da ciò che ad esse tenderebbe.

Se non si tratta solo di proiezioni oniriche e visionarie della propria psiche, dell'Es e dell'inconscio soggettivo o collettivo, sembrerebbe riduttivo ridurle solo a questo; queste opere sembrerebbero piuttosto comunicare qualcosa che ha dell'inquietante e che confluisce nella creazione di un linguaggio nuovo, che fa a meno delle contrapposizioni dominanti in quello consueto e, anzi, forse le denuncia come limitanti senza neanche doverle adoperare, utilizzando solo la forza dell'arte e della sua rottura magica.

L'indistinzione tra figura e sfondo, che la materia pulviscolare della tecnica pittorica o la voluta evanescenza di quella fotografica fanno emergere, sembra suggerire piuttosto l'abissalità dell'impossibile scissione non solo fra sostrato ontologico, materiale, divino o demoniaco che, precedendolo, darebbe luogo al nostro mondo e alla quotidianità esistenziale consueta, e lo spazio siderale futuro, gli eden possibili, divini, celestiali o infernali e desertici di un'ultima destinazione, ma anche fra tutto ciò e la sua derivazione.

A conferma, piuttosto che a smentita, di quanto finora detto va fatto rilevare un ulteriore aspetto che è quello, anche se non sempre immediatamente evidente, della carnalità, passionalità e visceralità che è comunque all'opera nelle creazioni di questo artista.

Non solo una dimensione e una tensione semplicemente intellettuale, concettuale, mistica e spirituale sembra animarle, ma anche la forza dirompente e dissacrante del mostrare la vischiosità e corporeità che schiaccia e comprime, ma anche concretizza e rende possibile ogni vitalità esistenziale. La presunta evanescenza dello spirito è intrisa irrimediabilmente di sudore e sangue, di fluidi umorali, di tutta quella materia che dovrebbe essere il sottoprodotto dello spirito e sua escrescenza o rifiuto, ma da cui non si può prescindere come da ciò che lo sostanzia, lo concretizza e solo lo fa essere.

E allora queste opere sembrano indicarci non solo ciò da cui veniamo o verso cui andiamo, ma anche la complessità dell'esistenza nella sua commistione di inizio e fine, astratto e materiale, carne e spirito, sia che lo vogliamo sia che questo ci offenda o ci ripugni, sia che riusciamo ad accettarlo e volerlo così come si deve volere il nostro destino.

La visionarietà allora non è semplicemente vedere ciò che non c'è, come qualcosa di non esistente, ma vedere e far vedere ciò che comunemente sfugge o ci lasciamo sfuggire in quanto pauroso o inquietante.

“Tutto e tutto gli aridi mondi sollevano,  
il basamento del ghiaccio, il solido oceano,  
tutto dall’olio, dall’urto della lava.  
Città di primavera, il fiore governato,  
ruotano dentro la terra che ruota  
le città incenerite in un cerchio di fuoco”.  
(THOMAS D., *Poesie*, Edizioni Guanda).

Giochi di luce incandescente, proiezioni di colori brillanti e intensi che emergono da ammassi e cumuli magmatici di indistinta materia, che si riproduce e si dipana irta in grovigli o si distende in uno spazio atemporale di inquietanti ombre. Ghiacci e improvvise apparizioni metalliche e minerali, come gocce e cascate d’acqua inattesa che inondano una superficie senza spazio definito, provenendo dal suo interno e non da una distinta fonte. Comunque, quelli dei paesaggi Trovato non sono mondi terreni e umani conosciuti, di una bellezza che toglie il respiro malgrado la solitudine e l’aridità assoluta che sembra caratterizzarli, ma come e comunque abitati, se non da forme di vita note, da un calore magmatico che da esse promana e si diffonde senza distinzione interno-esterno; non freddi e glaciali ma vulcanicamente incandescenti, come se la luce che li avvolge li animasse, riproducendo il movimento vitale della materia che è contemporaneamente mortifero, in uno spazio dilatato continuamente rinascete. Come in una metafora pittorica della genesi e dell’apocalisse, dell’esistenza altrimenti del suo dinamismo inesauribile e orrorifero, della nostra contingenza che rende nella visione quanto la vita e l’amore siano anche di per sé il loro contrario e questo possa anche, a sua volta, essere purificazione rigenerante e rinascita ad un più alto livello.

Allora perché intendere questi spazi inanimati, mossi solo da incandescenze di luce, solo come risultato di un certo pessimismo e non anche invece come un inno alla vita, in tutte le sue forme e necessità, accettazione catarattica anche della tragedia e del dolore che essa implica, sua lode e glorificazione, quasi preghiera che negli squarci di colore grida con intensità stupefacente la sua vittoria sul tutto e la mostra con la calma e immobile, ma iridescente e scomposta contemporaneamente, luminosità di liquefazione metallica (oro-argentea).

La visione si accosterebbe qui a quella mistica (San Giovanni della Croce e la sua *Fiamma d’amore viva*) e una forse non dichiarata o manifesta, ma pur presente religiosità, si mostrerebbe così anche nelle tele dove i soggetti sono quelli sacri.

Nella *Crocifissione* le croci e il Crocifisso sono lontani, in primo piano, di spalle ai contemplanti, che inerti, dolorosi, increduli assistono immoti al disumano spettacolo, mentre una donna non guarda, si volta per non vedere lo strazio che però non è che accennato, mai gridato con ferite e sangue evidenti, quello che urla è lo spazio, il cielo, sono la materia e la luce che sembrano squarciarsi in quell’imprecisata ora senza tempo in un tramonto che sembra albeggiare e in un’alba che si scurisce di un buio che è quello dominante, invece, per contrasto in un’altra *Crocifissione* e che nella *Resurrezione* avvolge e circonda l’unica ombra di luce che emerge al centro, del tempo e del quadro, per distaccarsene in tutta leggerezza e nell’evanescenza del superamento spazio-temporale che, come unica guida, la solleva e avvolge.

Ed è sempre la materia che sembra esplodere, quasi a voler sfondare e uscire dalla tela, a voler guadagnare un suo ulteriore spazio, quella da cui emergono i demoni o entità di mezzo (di esplicito riferimento biblico-letterario) come *Abbadon* e *I mostri dell’Id*, dei degli inferi o entità comunque inquietanti, che con la loro bestialità e ferocia sembrano minacciarci. Inquietante è anche la materia informe dalla quale essi provengono, che sembra non riuscire a contenere la loro incombenza ma che

ancora li imprigiona, dalla quale essi provano a sfuggire e liberarsi. Mostri che sempre sono sul punto di aggredirci, delle nostre paure, del nostro orrore quotidiano, ma anche quelli cosmogonici di tutta l’umanità che deve essere redenta e che è continuamente minacciata, ma non necessariamente dall’altro da sé, quanto da una parte di sé, quella più oscura, quella autodistruttiva che la spinge a voler tornare verso quell’indistinto da cui deriva e da cui sembra non potersi del tutto staccare.

È quella stessa materia, da cui vogliono emergere, che nello stesso tempo continua a ricoprire, confondere e inglobare in sé le stesse paurose entità dei nostri incubi, per cui alla fine è difficile distinguere chi o cosa sia la vera inquietudine e minaccia ed è questo che fa nascere il terrifico palpito comunicato dalla tela.

Nelle fotografie si intravedono e intuiscono soltanto, più immaginabili che percepibili, figure cristiche e sacre o, inversamente, demoniache, che sembrano liquefarsi ed essere immerse in una luce monocromatica che le rende evanescenti, indistinte e sfuggenti mentre le fa al contempo indovinare con una forza evocativa maggiore di quella che contorni precisi e forme definite potrebbero trasmettere: il Divino si può intuire solo, così come il Male assoluto o il Bene infinito, solo nella folgorazione di luce e/o tenebre da cui promana. Come nell’eclissi o nella cecità di San Paolo, però, finisce per sfociare nel suo contrario, in una visione e lucidità visiva più alta e superiore.

Del resto, anche i volti umani, le figure femminili sono indistinte e indefinite, osservabili solo dalla lontananza. Più ci si avvicina ad esse ed alla tela più sembrano scomparire, divenire cangianti e mutarsi, confondersi con la materia da cui emergerebbero, cristallizzate, mineralizzate esse stesse, quasi liquefatte in gocce che le assorbono e confondono, simboli di un’armonia e bellezza perfette ma irraggiungibili se non nella commistione con l’indistinto che le avvolge. Anche il terreno, come la divinità femminile di riferimento, non è univoco né acquisibile del tutto ed è come se la femminilità alludesse (come in THOMAS D., *La ballata dell’esca dalle gambe lunghe*) alla necessità del suo sacrificio, come se essa dovesse mutarsi e immolarsi per la cattura e l’imprigionamento, la conquista di quelle forze oscure, il Male, il Mare che la richiedono e la esigono per placarsi ed essere placate; così come possono alludere alla vita nel suo femminile riprodursi e perpetrarsi che, con la sua capacità generatrice, sconfigge sì ogni volta la morte emergendo da lei, ma solo a prezzo del dolore, del sacrificio e della sofferenza che ogni parto prevede e richiede e che comunque, temporalmente limitato, dovrà ripetersi ogni volta senza fine per sconfiggere ciò che combatte e a cui torna eternamente, come dice con altro linguaggio e con queste parole il poeta: “Un processo nel tempo del cuore/ muta l’umidità in secchezza, nella tomba gelida / la dorata esplosione si scatena. / un tempo nel territorio delle vene / muta la notte in giorno; nei loro soli il sangue/ accende il verme vivo / [...] un processo nel tempo del mondo / muta spettro in spettro; generato di madre ogni bimbo / nella loro ombra duplice siede. / Un processo sospinge la luna nel sole, / strappa le logore cortine della pelle; / e il cuore restituisce i suoi morti”. (ivi THOMAS D.). Questo *Processo nel tempo del cuore* è ciò che sembra pervadere anche la folgorante opera di Trovato con il suo apparente immobilismo che in realtà è assolutamente dinamico, che comunica l’eterno movimento del divenire e mutarsi e trasmutarsi materico e spaziale e che, stravolgendo la temporalità consueta, mostra questo ricongiungimento all’alterità e alla diversità di ciò che percepiamo altrimenti come noto e ordinario, consueto e tranquillizzante, con l’inquietante e l’inquietudi-

ne esistenziale che i suoi quadri comunicano e svolgono narrandole, per superarle e possederle.

Arte perciò non più come nell'ancor oggi dominante concezione platonica, come *mimesis* e rappresentazione, come copia e riproduzione di una realtà originaria che la precederebbe e causerebbe, essendo più vera di essa, ma come ri-produzione intesa come essa stessa creazione, genesi e parto, con tutto il dolore e la sofferenza del

caso, della vita e della sua contingenza materiale, quindi anche del suo limite temporale e mortifero, in un processo che fa però questa creazione atemporale ed eterna, in grado essa sì, quindi, di sconfiggere tempo, morte e loro dolore e sofferenza.

“[...] La mia / Arca canta nel sole alla fine / della rapida estate di Dio, e ora il diluvio fiorisce”. (*Prologo* dell'autore in: THOMAS D., *Poesie*, Edizioni e traduzione italiana Guanda).

# A transtemporal, visionary, lyrical, oneiric art

Enrico Crispolti

For a great many years now, at least since the output of the mid-1980s and the work presented at the 1986 Rome Quadrennial, the temptation has spontaneously arisen to describe the painting of Francesco Trovato as set in a visionary dimension. Albeit by no means generically improper, this description proves, however, immediately insufficient by virtue of its ultimately general nature. It is certainly evident that Trovato's imagination works in terms of an introjective vision with respect not only to phantasms arising from his own experience, as is natural, but also – and far more often – to more complex events connected also with remotely echoing mythical situations, albeit with no attempt at archaism. In other words, while in his imagination this process of introjection traverses the terrain of living experience, whose voice also succeeds at times in achieving an episodic predominance, its actual work takes place rather on a vast horizon of imaginative confluences that bind singular figural probabilities – at times almost assuming the status of mythical archetypes – of the Mediterranean classicism of his homeland in eastern Sicily (as in the great *Krypton* of 1986-87). At the same time, the maceration and apocalyptic nature of these figures seem rather to lead us to northern climes, it being no coincidence that a certain echo of Gustave Moreau's ambiguous fantasy appears to arise instinctively in some cases. In any case, Trovato's cultural imprinting is rooted in European Romanticism, as is shown by great canvases such as *Mente lunare* (Lunar Mind) of 1986-87 and *Montagne incantate* (Enchanted Mountains) of 1988. It is, however, impossible to reduce the substance of Trovato's pictorial imagination, and indeed his visionary quality, to the attraction of these two poles alone. Within the complex and typically intricate pictorial fabric that Trovato creates, it is even possible to detect a basic, preliminary, analytical and cellular thrust. (At times, and especially in his sketches, it is possible to discover elements practically of echoing, or at least of instinctive and hence unconscious affinity with the historical *Movimento Nucleare*.) In the same way, futuristic stellar allusions can be detected in some inflections of his imagination, above all in the landscapes with long horizons furrowed by hints of truly alien boreal luminosity. Examples include the above-mentioned paintings of 1987 and 1988, *Antiche lande* (Ancient Moors) and *Eclissi* (Eclipses) of 1988-89, and *Vento lunare* (Lunar Wind) of 1988.

The occasional friction or alternating succession of these multiple allusions leads to the sudden dilation of imaginative "seeing" that is wholly typical of Trovato's work and in short to its substantially visionary nature, which is striking and disquieting but not immediately aggressive, being rather seductively and often terrifyingly mysterious and insinuating. In some ways, this con-

stitutes an imaginative, unpredictable and always highly captivating form of "seeing" whose crucial intermediary proves to be a filter that is introspective but not necessarily for this reason only surreal. Each image is deeply marked by this, not so that Trovato can speak about himself but in that he indicates every imaginative confluence of his passionately participatory humoral nature. He thus experiences his present wholly as complexity drawn from the most remote and even mythic depths, while at the same time imagining futuristic cosmic visions.

This is an imaginative tangle that exercises magmatic pressure, taking different forms midway between the immanent and the transcendent, the ancient and the futuristic, in a latitude that in any case always proves to be more infernal than earthly. This is indeed suggested by Trovato himself in his equally lucid and enraptured writing: "The material I paint is visualized in continuous alternation, and hence in a state of utter instability. This metamorphic procedure thus distances itself constantly from reason in its attempt to define the absurd, like a cosmonaut, the last survivor of an extinct civilization, preparing for his last flight, from which there may be no return, bound for worlds and eras that are incredible but lost, absurdly primordial and prehistoric, where everything is possible and nothing incomprehensible, where birth and death, real and unreal, present, past and future merge to form a single whole with the feeling of presentiment."

The time occupied by Trovato's "seeing" thus evidently eludes all forms of everyday and historical conditioning. It is in fact wholly introjective and implosive, swallowing everything up in a dimension that is solely the time (and space) of imagination and visionary dilation, and certainly not that of historical contingency. His imagination evades such contingency by establishing a transtemporal circuit between our remote origins and possible future, between the metamorphic mystery of an original cosmogony and the revelatory and arcane imponderability of sidereal projection.

His attitude is one both of challenge and of waiting for the image to appear, to manifest itself in the "miracle" of inspiration that takes concrete shape in the "work", where intuitive vision is transformed into the concrete, objectified reality of vision. The path is very clear: "What therefore remains is to operate in all directions with no crystal ball, to explore the whole universe from microcosm to macrocosm, like a great dream with all its visionary and richly glowing planets, where the Wonderful amazes, fascinates and blinds. [...] Only thus can the miracle take place, the creative will that seizes the artist and perhaps creates something extraneous to its own time. Following no sort of schematic form and operating with the technical means suggested by the

creative moment, one can thus block the magic and unrepeatable instant without wondering why and simply enjoy the unfolding of the miracle, the creation of the work of art. [...] But if we are to reach this point, we must be prepared to break away from our material existence and go beyond our own limits to project ourselves into a spiritual dimension”.

And this drive will certainly not lead us to the goal of pacification for the very reason that this goal is instead set at the level of a disruption of the codes that bridle our social and historical existence. Trovato’s visionary thrust is dynamically all-consuming and ultimately revelatory. “Everything is suddenly disrupted and destroyed. An abyss opens up and our altar of traditional reality – so comforting, serene, liveable and appealing – is burnt as though by lightning, and what takes shape beneath the rubble is true reality, monstrous, incomprehensible and terrible, which is so deeply true within its dimension that it can be called God or inspiration.”

is is therefore a drive that pursues an “inner need for the mystical”. “The phantasms that appeared as a symbol of despair due to the ungraspable nature of the divine, a dimension that I mistakenly believed myself to have grasped and absorbed, thus represent the ill-experienced mystical rapture of a profound existential pessimism in which humanity is dominated by the selfsame destructive forces that simultaneously feed its power and vital energy”.

The starting point of Trovato’s visionary approach is thus an implicit negative judgment on the present that concerns him, which is in fact regarded substantially as a condition of extroversion rather than internalization, of blindness rather than deeply revealing vision. Which Trovato instead seeks to construct through his own possessed figuration, and which entails regaining an original totality, a cosmogonic dimension. “Today,” he continues, “my path lies in a lyrical, oneiric dimension where material-oriented exploration mirrors the human being’s eternal dialog with primordial magma”. In point of fact, iconological reconnaissance of his painting – whose internal dynamics rule out any acceleration save in the initial surge of the inspirational thrust and the intuitive grasp of the possibility of a polarizing image – repeatedly points in particular to a cosmogonic dimension. Not so much in the detached evocation of remote origins but rather in the reappropriation of the harrowing territory of visionary virtuality, where iconic pronouncement is thus configured above all precisely in the insistent presence of the monster, the figure of sublime metamorphosis (see in particular paintings such as *Abbadon, I mostri d’Id* (Monsters of the Id) or *Moloch* of 1991). The term “metamorphic” does not, however, apply solely to the different icons that dominate Trovato’s painting but to its very fabric, to the consistency of its tissual context, both of which are in fact meticulously worked and reworked so as to impart to each, in their inseparable nexus, the substance of a reality that is indeed metamorphic, elusive and eminently ambiguous. “A bogus material that I describe as ‘optical’ and not tactile in that it appears solely on the plane, being wholly devoid of thickness”.

He works with oils, pastel and wax, which are usually mixed. Their application on paper or canvas is, however, very often preceded by a preliminary and very free provocation of the phenomenology of the primary, magmatic manifestation of tissue, of the fluid material, on the small scale, i.e. in micro-situations that Trovato tries out also through manipulation of a photographic or material nature, but in any case absolutely not reproductive. For the basic configuration of the future picto-

rial event, he thus uses the manipulation of another “means” of communication, which he has indeed used and still uses also in experiments that are wholly autonomous, i.e. specifically pertaining to a photographic phenomenology (as documented in this volume).

The visionary element of Trovato’s imagination is thus primarily one of cosmogonic metamorphosis and not strictly linked to iconic formulation. It hinges not so much on the figure in itself as on its inseparable ambiguous genesis. And it is this that has the value of miraculously inspirational exaltation for Trovato. This is what his visionary figuration is aimed at. Not at presenting surreal images, but at capturing the erupting magmatic manifestation of a primal irrational depth, of radical attraction that is both psychical and imaginatively perceptive, of ecstatic levitation, which he reconnects as though to a remote origin and at the same time to a hazarded future that offers if not liberation at least compensation. It is, however, precisely through the exploration of psychical reality that his mysticism develops, and not through opting for an “elsewhere” that is simply evoked as a possible alternative landscape. And it is thus into the very depths of a reality bemused by its own contingency that he intends to lead us, not simply into a magical surreal sphere. In his images it is thus possible to reconnect the distant past and the future in a transition that is both fulminating and revealing.

Trovato’s painting thus clearly possesses the fascination of complexity, ambiguity and fluctuation, of the goal of a mystical path that is revealing in visionary terms. With respect to the great tradition of contemporary visionaries (represented in the Italy of the second half of the century by Fieschi, Vacchi and Trubbiani), Trovato can, however, only occupy a position of unmediated uniqueness since what motivates his work is neither formally argued nor in any way narratively documentary and representational. More than on a constituted vision, and hence on a possible surreality susceptible of iconic illustration, he insists on the very origin of the visionary motivation as a response to the inspirational intensity of depth. At the same time, however, this is stubbornly provoked and obstinately sought after within a perspective of mystical introjective devotion, awaited in all its possible manifestations, and finally captured in its essence as an unrepeatable, miraculous event.

This comes about through preliminary revelation precisely in the material-oriented and what I would call molecular manipulation of Trovato’s minute experimentation with material and tissue. It assumes shape and fullness of image, however, only through the growth of the work, where the revelation itself, above and beyond the initial intuition of manifestation as possible image, finally bestows itself fully, concretely captured in its highly intense and complex pictorial context. And it is hence perceptible precisely through the fabric contextually established by the image, where we also attain the confirmation and objective definition of the initial inspirational intuition, the result of the constant and fully aware lyrical oneiric approach typical of Trovato’s work. This oneiric quality is thus manifested through a determining configuration of image, which in any case acquires the definitive consistency of visionary thrust precisely through its own epiphanic self-definition, first of all within the auroral probability that initially announced its possibility, albeit in magmatic embryonic form, and then within the constitutive manipulation of a complex pictorial fabric permitting its ultimate, disquieting configurative characterization.

It is evident that the image structure configured by

Trovato possesses an implicit drawing-based substance. At the same time, however, it is not born out of drawing in the sense that it actually originates in a magmatic prefiguration in the material-oriented fluidity of his sketches. Trovato is a formidable and captious draftsman, qualities that also apply to his engraving. It can, however, be stated that his drawing as such – i.e. above and beyond that which is materially implicit in the tissueductus of his painting through the use of pastel – is not prior but rather subsequent to the configuration of image. Its role is in fact to confirm and accentuate the visibility of the image, to provide further and wholly captious characterization of its configuration. In Trovato's drawing and engraving the metamorphic motility that constructs the pictorial image through the blended manipulation of different materials is reduced on paper solely to the play of pencil (or ball pen), which imprints and excavates the sheet, taking upon itself all the ambiguous virtuality of the fabric of the image itself. And we can readily see that the distance between drawing and engraving is really very short in Trovato's work.

On this occasion, Trovato has himself structured a plausible reading of his already very substantial body of work in terms of an iconic-formal invitation, which it is unquestionably advisable to follow in order to penetrate the complexity of his visionary imagination by means of more highly configured polarities. First of all, we have "ultraterranean landscapes" traversed by a visionary impetus arching from hints of our remote origins to projections of possible future imaginings, from a dawning of the world to scenarios of a cosmically projected future, midway between a magmatic embryonic state and spatially futuristic perspectives, in arcane silences and sidereal latitudes. This takes place in significantly entitled paintings such as *Mente lunare* (Lunar Mind), 1986-87, *Soli vaganti* (Wandering Suns), 1988, *Creazione* (Creation), 1988-89, *Antiche lande* (Ancient Moors), 1988-89, *Eclissi* (Eclipses), 1988-92, *Filamentazioni aliene* (Alien Filamentations), 1992-93, and *Aliene metamorfosi* (Alien Metamorphoses), 1989-94.

At the same time, there is an imaginative polarity marked by immersion in a flux of formless matter, and hence in a magmatic embryonic condition that is clearly of non-formal phenomenological type (stretching as far as "nuclear" emulsions). While this is certainly linked directly to the selfsame genetic condition of the form of image construction practiced by Trovato, it can also not be confined to a role of reduced initial prefiguration but unfold in an effective possibility of conclusive protagonism. From small to large, from initial tissual microanalysis to an image that asserts within the metamorphism of matter a probability of the revelation of image, in a sort of transcendental metamorphosis. This happens in particular with paintings such as the glacial *Stalattiti del silenzio* (Stalactites of Silence), 1988, the small work *Magiche piramidi* (Magical Pyramids), 1991, *Abisso lunare pluridimensionale* (Multidimensional Lunar Abyss), 1992-93 (using emulsion), *Luce abissale* (Abyssal

Light), 1993-94, *Atemporali topografie* (Timeless Topographies) and *Dimensioni atemporal* (Timeless Dimensions), both of 1994 (and both using emulsion). Other imaginative polarities are instead the result of figurative characterization, as in the development of possible future myths in a figurative futuristic projection, giving form to occult creatures, timeless guardians. Here we encounter some of Trovato's most memorable works to date, including *Abbadon*, 1985-86, rife with apocalyptic insinuation, the great *Krypton* of 1986, *Moloch*, 1990-91, or the compositionally more complex *Giudizio* (Judgment) of 1991-92, with its allusions to Moreau. These become more explicit through significant symbolic confluence – revealing effective ties of deep affinity with the Symbolist culture – in the paintings representing the further polarity focused on what Trovato calls the "feminine arcane". Depicting sibyls, fairies and mermaids, these include *Gorgone* (Gorgon), 1984-85, *Sibilla in metamorfosi* (Sibyl in Metamorphosis), 1982-83, *Flagello* (Scourge), 1985-86, and *Studio per ectoplasma* (Study for Ectoplasm) of 1984, a detail of which was reworked in 1995.

This constitutes the spectrum of eventualities on which Trovato's imagination has been deployed since the early 1980s. Drawing also insinuates its presence (as does engraving). A parallel but distinct role is played in his work by photography, parallel above all to the metamorphic material-oriented polarity but in accordance with a medium-specific approach that asserts Trovato's presence also in the sphere of photographic experimentation. This works precisely through specific manipulation, the use of mixing or blurring, the extraction of embryonic material-iconic epiphanies from emulsions, and the depiction of alien abyssal landscapes, occult alien creatures and arcane messengers in contexts of luminescent material.

There is thus no doubt that Trovato's imaginative pronouncement is characterized by an accentuated visionary thrust that actualizes the oneiric condition as a possibility of approximation to the unconscious level. Not so much in order to provide direct explication thereof in terms of a self-analytic perspective, but rather as access to a timeless revelation of boundless territories where remote, arcane, original and alarming elements flow together chorally, so to speak, along with cosmic, spatial and futuristic overtones of a no less disquieting nature in a destiny that thus links past and future in seductively terrifying allusions. And it is precisely thus that Trovato's visionary "seeing" breaks away from the existentially apocalyptic introjective visionary approach of a painter like Fieschi (a particularly important point of reference in the panorama of Italian figurative visionary art in the second half of the twentieth century) in the direction of a futuristic iconology that originally encounters disquieting suggestions and forms, seductions and terrors of the collective cosmic imagination, whose attractions lie otherwise in the fields of cinema, cartoon and literature.

# Between imaginal and imaginary

*Giuseppe Frazzetto*

At very first sight, the images painted by Francesco Trovato appear to be an example of the iconism that characterized the 1990s in various forms (as attested *inter alia* by the considerable use made of photography) and now seems to be assuming fresh vigor. In any case, however, the example is an atypical one. This is not only because the painters and photographers involved in this resurgence of iconism are on average about a dozen years younger than Trovato. Nor is it because his technique is characterized by a painterly care and inventiveness, whereas the norm in this field is either indifference towards or a more or less accentuated conceptualization of technique. (Trovato develops a largely experimental praxis that involves the painstaking superimposition of layers of oil paint, ink, pencil and various types of pastel. Various critics have drawn attention to the neo-avant-garde origin of this technique. Crispolti, for example, has theorized an “unconscious affinity” with the Movimento Nucleare.)

In actual fact, what we observe in the images painted by Trovato is the absence of a very widespread trait, namely irony if not indeed sarcasm, an absence that I shall not examine at length but simply point out as a by no means recondite indication of a specific view of reality. And given that I have written this word, I shall also add that in these images there is no intention to present or interpret what is commonly known in everyday language as “reality” but is better described on a more contemplative view as the circuit of appearance, the mere realm of visibility. Trovato’s images are explicitly and indeed programmatically visionary.

Furthermore, they are shot through with a singular ambivalence that strikes me as very “contemporary”, as I shall seek to clarify below. On the one hand, they appear to constitute dispassionate accounts of explorations in the darkest and most turbulent depths of the psyche. On the other, they resemble the places and creatures made familiar (a truly odd word to use here) by horror and science fiction films and cartoons as forms and emblems that are unknown and yet forever known.

This dualism prompts reflection. Anyone reading these words without knowing Trovato’s paintings might assume that his images are the outcome of a meeting between Surrealism and Pop. Continuing to think in terms of categories strictly linked to art history, he or she might indeed assign them more definitely to the Surrealist school in view of the grafting of material and gestures of “lowly” origin practiced in certain fringes of this movement (the best-known case being Max Ernst). Such assumptions would be both right and very wrong. The fact is that, in their own way, Trovato’s paintings reformulate the old question of where images come from, which can be turned into the similar and yet wholly different question of who produces them.

As we know, such questions have been answered in more or less radically subjective terms ever since Romanticism. The image is seen solely as the result of individual activity, which may or may not rework material that is already visible. In this connection, the differences between the various theories appear to be concerned primarily with the ratio, so to speak, of reworking to production *ex novo*. In schematic and highly approximate terms, we could say that the various forms of idealism assume that at least one type of image, i.e. the artistic, is a wholly autonomous creation. On the other hand, the various forms of historicism tend to regard it as the result of an act that is certainly individual and creative but nevertheless a reworking of other images. The extreme forms of so-called postmodern hermeneutics even go so far as to see the artist’s work as nothing more than an operation of daring and brilliant bricolage.

These views are, of course, quite out of fashion. For some decades now, it has appeared impossible to speak of artistic images without referring to their linguistic component. This issue lies wholly outside the scope and purpose of this article and I have no intention of addressing it here. At the same time, however, I cannot refrain from noting that emphasis on the linguistic aspect ultimately leads to the alternative indicated above in that it appears possible to trace linguistic validity – or metalinguistic validity, as it would be more correct to say in practically all cases – either to the invention of a new language (or metalanguage) or to the deft metalinguistic recomposition of already existing linguistic wholes or fragments, with largely self-referential results. In any case, seldom does the discussion of contemporary art make any reference to a very different way of viewing the nature and provenance of images, which is remarkable given that this alternative view informs the work of some of the leading avant-garde figures. With all due caution, and with the “hesitant step” spoken of by Gregory Bateson, reference should in short be made to what Henri Corbin called the *mundus immaginalis*, i.e. the view that images – or at least some of them – exist objectively in a “third realm” distinct from the purely material dimension and the dimension of incorporeal (and hence devoid of visible form) spirituality.

At the broadly religious level, leaving aside the differences between the various faiths, the objectivity of the imaginal is, for example, what makes it possible for angels to appear (Corbin’s work is in fact primarily devoted to Islamic angelology). Pure spirits though they are, angels do not “borrow” a vaguely humanized form in order to show themselves, but reveal their own imaginal form for an instant to the privileged person to whom the vision is vouchsafed. These views are well known to anyone acquainted with the works of the great Pavel Alexandrovich Florensky, or (with more specific

reference to Catholicism) to anyone with anything more than a purely scholastic idea of the protracted conflict between iconoclasts and iconodules. (Some may note that an extremely impoverished version of the concept of the imaginal is to be found in the “archetypes” of the “collective unconscious”, a hypothesis best forgotten for the time being in view of its abuse by the cheap mysticism of self-proclaimed New Age gurus and singers in a state of senile crisis).

From the secular viewpoint, the imaginal presents itself as a sort of limiting and literally transcendental concept with respect to the far weaker notion of the imaginary, defined as the set of images possessed by (and/or possible for) an individual, a social group or an era. As such, the imaginary is to the highest degree unstable, volatile and subject to the vagaries of chance, whereas the imaginal would be stable and unchangeable, in a word eternal. Moreover, with respect to the imaginal, the producer of images (or at least of some images) would be essentially a receiver rather than an inventor.

It is clear that Trovato has for some time chosen to operate in this borderland. Indeed, to continue the spatial metaphor introduced here, it should be noted that in an interview a few years ago the artist quoted the following passage from Novalis: “We dream of traveling throughout the universe, but is the universe not within us? We do not understand the profundity of our spirit. The direction of the mysterious path is towards our intimate depths. It is within us and nowhere else that eternity lies with its worlds, the past and the future.” This is an illuminating quotation in many respects. It would appear that for those who have made it their own, painting is neither a mere linguistic or metalinguistic activity nor the more or less immediate or obliquely transposed projection of the Ego and even the Id. On the contrary, painting is necessarily understood as the unveiling of an elsewhere that is both inside and outside us, simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous.

In short, as an inventor of images, and often indeed of “personages” with their own specific physiognomy, Trovato does not appear to content himself with the results of his subjective vision. He intuitively realizes that vision in the true sense of the term always includes a spark or flicker of objectivity, and seeks out the elements making it possible to obtain this flicker. (From his religious standpoint, Florensky asked how an icon could be painted by anyone who not only did not possess within himself its archetype – or model, to use the language of painting – but had not even seen it.)

A further intuition crystallizes upon this one and gives rise to the ambivalence mentioned at the beginning. The “outside us” (and even the “inside us”) is both noble and ignoble, sublime and grotesque. As Hermetic philosophy warns us, “what is on high is like what is below, and what is below is like what is on high”. In the same way, what is objective must, if it is to avoid becoming general, retain within itself the mark of individuality, which is made up of transient temporality, of chronicle and history, of likes and dislikes.

At the opposite extreme from the extra-temporal hieratic quality that envelops all of Trovato’s painting and distinguishes it as striving towards the imaginal, the artist rediscovers his own nature as a man living in a certain era from which he necessarily draws and reworks his images. He paints devils – or perhaps fallen angels – but devils that also have an explicit, avowed and disconcerting resemblance to Giger’s Alien. And if an interest in Blake or Redon’s symbolism emerges every so often, at the same time some of the Trovato’s eldritch landscapes bring to mind the terrible and impossible “color from space” imagined by H.P. Lovecraft.

In his internal travels, Trovato thus touches upon outer space, inner-outer spaces that no one has ever seen and of which we can only imagine images suspended in the ambivalent simultaneity of the imaginal and the imaginary.



# Material abstraction

*Ottavio Cappellani*

In Trovato's painting, the viewer is struck by the way in which the image stems from the very material sometimes rashly denied to it by art. "Image" is not to be understood as "figure". The latter, where it appears, is only a pretext to display the former. At the same time, however, image does need figure in some respects if it is to appear. It must achieve "incarnation". On the established view, image is supposed to shed light on figure, like a blessing descending from on high. We know, however, that in reality image can bring its own charge of anxiety and destruction. It sometimes achieves incarnation at the expense of figure, which it takes over and replaces like an alien organism. And yet figure without image is not nothing, otherwise it would be of negligible importance. If anything, it is from the tussle between image and figure that something else can emerge, that a synthesis can take place. Trovato operates within the sphere of this conflict. His painting "shows" the outskirts of existence where image and reality converge in foaming conflict. From harrowing monstrous apparitions constituting an image that cannot easily be tamed to metamorphoses in which the subject is devastated or instead revitalized by the image (when the victory takes revenge on both figure and image, and it is at this point that the material begins to glow), passing en route through the subtle ironies of astral landscapes like postcards from other worlds. Through a singular form of alchemy, which is, however, wholly of this era (and it is surprising to find this "taste" in an artist alien to the great metropolises), Trovato is an artist who encounters the "pop" sensibility, fleeing it, disrupting its foundations, and reconstructing it. At present the important literary movement of avant pop is establishing itself in America. Key figures such as David Foster Wallace and Rudy Rucker (a university lecturer in astrophysics by profession, but also a writer of science fiction and direct descendant of Hegel), both of whom are published in Italian translation by Bompiani, are bringing out works in which "pop" is seen in a completely new light with respect to previous years. The speed of the present era, its digitization, the value of art and its reproducibility are dissected with a profundity (and seriousness) that pop art rejected. It is not a lightweight aesthetic that moves beneath the glossy façade of pop art, but rather Jungian archetypes and categories of judgment. Science fiction, horror and cyberpunk enter into this reflection as new names of idealism, religion and technology.

Trovato's photographic works are exemplary in this sense. These images have all it takes from the graphic viewpoint to be described as contemporary and modern, and yet we discover to our amazement that they are absolutely "analogical", manually produced by means of a technique that eschews "digization" on principle. And doing this takes above all time. The secret meaning of avant pop is anti-pop. Could these images be produced by means of graphic software? Would they have the same intensity? The honest answer is probably yes. They would not be art, however, but computer graphics. Producing these images by means of an "ancient" technique is instead an extremely interesting artistic challenge. Trovato, a human artist, does the same thing that a computer could, but takes a lot more time and yet does it just the same. There is time inside and beyond these images. They are works far more "abstract" than any website. Slowness and speed, fundamental categories of the relationship between man and technology (I refer, for example, to the work of the philosopher Emanuele Severino or Milan Kundera's book *La Lentueur*), appear in Trovato's work and become object, bringing with them an intrinsic value. Those photographs have a "real" value above all because they hold within themselves the time that our era lacks. Man cannot withstand the speed of technology and crashes into a wall. Trovato's photographs are integral and unique, absolutely non-reproducible.

Trovato has infused these works with a surplus value that defeats stupid contemporary speed and endows them with a provocative value that is in itself neo-avant-garde. The same considerations apply to the large paintings. The more the surface area of the painting expands, the more painstaking the work becomes and the more abstract the material. The further we enter into the details, the more the vision dilates. Space has its own duration, its own time. In the magma of the clash between image and figure, abstraction and material, it is material that appears in Trovato's work to be the very element capable of resolving the conflict. But it is a material that succeeds in becoming abstract without losing itself by virtue of a distilled relationship with time. As we know, there are two "classical" readings of every dialectical trajectory: abstract-concrete-abstract and concrete-abstract-concrete. In an era in which material loses itself on becoming abstract, Trovato's material abstraction appears to be an appropriate response.

A black and white photograph of a rocky, cratered surface, likely the moon. The surface is covered in numerous craters of various sizes, some with distinct shadows and others appearing as simple pits. The lighting creates a high-contrast, textured appearance. The word "Opere" is written vertically in a white, sans-serif font on the right side of the image.

Opere