

Dear Andrea

Notebook 25: *August Specters* and Notebook 50: *dry sterile thunder without rain* are on my desk. I keep leafing through them to grasp their secret. A painting of yours sits among my books. For years it has been just a linen card with color patches and the heading *Andrea Chiesi PIETÁ 8/7/97, 38x34*. In her old age and illness, my mother found it eerie; she would stare at it all the time, unable to take her eyes off it. So I turned it round and I grew fond of the back as well as the front. A pile of your catalogues in full sight serves to keep track of you as a painter, the symbol of a day-to-day discipline, monastic, obsessive, but necessary for a transfiguration of reality capable of unravelling its mystery through vision, fragments, reflections.

I often make a point of consulting them at random and fragmentarily, as I do with the woods around my house.

They stir me up; they help me refine my vision; they keep me company.

*Many more things, far more marvellous, inhabit this underground place.*

We were young; you were even younger. It was the bodies, and the bodies only, that defined the space.

Details, faces. Movements. Entanglements, gatherings, masses and solitudes. Encounters and clashes. Fervour. Dances and fights. Effusions. Exhaustion. Numerous falls, some rare levitations. Blue, grey, black. Livid, leaden, dazzling white. Scattered intermissions of orange yellow, amaranth crimson. It was the twilight of our world: *No future* for us.

All around people would get high on the end of history, the dismissal of geography. They were celebrating the end of the twentieth century and the opening of the third millennium, promising widespread wealth, rights and pleasures.

We would perceive crepuscular shades. Something was wrong.

The Yugoslav Wars were just over the border, for instance.

*The apocalypse is here.*

Over the years, the bodies have vanished, together with the youth of which they were an expression.

At present your eyes gaze at the architectural bodies of our rapidly obsoleting modernity and you now paint the time of abandonment. What sets the scene and defines the space now is the social body of a dying civilization – an unstoppable decomposition. Even where concrete structures exist, unmistakable signs of failure emerge from within.

We are facing an anthropological mutation, sustained by a clear will to trivialize any spiritual trait of human existence. The sense of sacredness has gone amiss, fomenting a materialistic management of all human relations, both public and private. Serial pleasures for an exasperated mass-consumption are supposed to relieve or at least control the dejection of the approaching void. On the decline, we find a civilization, the prodigious synthesis of Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian faith. This defeat, not by external forces but by corrosion of its spirit from within. The scientific magnificence of its appearance, the progressive switch to technology – degenerate and beloved child of our time – are the form and substance of the individual void we humans are sinking into: an everlasting present, wired, linked, and shared; resentment and hate that bring us together; discounts and prizes for regular co-op customers.

I am no art critic. I am not interested in art's predicaments and I shun the debate on its state. I remain indifferent to the evolution of fashion and styles in time. For me, their function is just to establish and regulate the art market, which is merely a consequence in its turn. That's it.

I can draw upon an immense historical heritage – many a life wouldn't be enough to enjoy it fully. I have to come to terms with the contemporary only if it affects my daily life.

In your being an artist, I praise that you have moulded your talent into a daily self-discipline. You set yourself clear limits in the choice of subjects, technique, and range of colours. It is thanks to an absolute devotion that you can master your vision and your hand.

Your eye disassembles and your hand reconstructs. You unveil and reveal.

Yours is no casual glance; your contemplation leads to investigation. For this, aptitude is necessary – but not only... You need training and perseverance, too: a lifelong dedication to discipline, day in, day out.

I got clear proof of that when you sketched my little stable in the woods. On the spur of the moment, right in front of me, using minute but effective strokes. I was stunned; it is my stable, true, the hut known only by a few. However, it is also the portrait of my soul; I recognize myself in it.

I have heard of a commission you once had. A wine-maker and a fellow-countryman of yours – making Lambrusco wine, Langone is right in this as in many more things – asked you to paint his portrait, and you painted his winery building. My compliments to you, unyielding, and to Him. And to Camillo, too.

It is as if you were painting bodies with a sort of prophetic insight; you paint their disappearance, their absence – realism steeped in epics, imbued with cosmic melancholy in which I see the disappearance of man reflecting the death of God. God's is a public death, first announced and then remarked in the century of revolutions, and now apparently questioned by Islamic terrorism: we'd rather deny the evidence than accept our bleeding wounds. A death trivialized by D.I.Y. religious creeds that change creatures into creators, and loots on creation itself through scientific experimentation and manipulation, heedless of both the past and the future. The disappearance of man follows inevitably from the death of God. The superhuman now falls within the category of bionic implant; cloning is a branch of fancy goods production.

To me, this book, containing a selection of your oil on canvas paintings from the third millennium, shares the nature of theological reflections and devotional texts: *the book of abandonment*. From the latest abandonment to the succession of those gone by: industrial archaeology is a recent and rather stretched notion; the postmodern is an on-going hotchpotch *Abandonment is a subtle throb of life which your paintbrush penetrates with obsessive precision*. Your gaze is serene, compassionate, materic, suffused with that sort of melancholy which does not bear any grudge and allows hope at the same time.

I close the book and return it to where it belongs; I have so many things to do. I do them more willingly, singing to myself, perhaps.

Thank you for everything

*antefact*

After years of postponed promises, I have finally paid a visit to your home and studio. One always feels some kind of apprehension on passing the threshold of somebody else's domestic intimacy. In any case, a judgement follows. In any relationship based on mutual knowledge and respect, much of what is suspended – and rightly so – finds factual answers to never asked questions.

First impressions are the ones that stay; it's hard to erase them. They might be even completely reversed in time, but nothing beats the tremendous force of the first glance.

I got to your place last Autumn. My place already smelled like winter, but as I travelled downhill, I could feel the long dry summer lingering on the plain, which only some September rain had saved from drought. A short, quick journey; descending a valley from its ridge to the first plain. When I realized beyond all doubt that I had reached my destination, a child's joy seized me: you live in a vegetable fortress, a dark green quadrilateral, dense with tall trees crowning and shading a nineteenth-century villa located at the intersection between Modena's farthest suburbs and Carpi's countryside.

*... Emilia of overexcited nights to fill your life ... Emilia of souvenir nights bringing back no happiness.*

A vast area of tilled fields – freshly ploughed up, the soil turned over – bordered to the city side by an ever-busy road junction and to the other side by the agricultural and industrial plain extending to the feet of the Alps as far as the eye can see.

A dirt track; just take it, leaving the long tailback on the ring road behind, and you will be plunged into the countryside. You can now breathe deeply. The traffic quickly drifts away until it blends in with the horizon, and its echo gets fainter and fainter; on passing by some rows of beehives, the buzzing sound of the insect takes over. There, beyond some farm buildings, stands the side gate and the triumph of vegetation – a shady, teeming vegetable chaos like an abandoned private garden growing unchecked but for some scant basic maintenance. Abandoned like the villa, the main farmhouse is now your studio and home. This is where you stopped painting bodies.

Just a quick glance towards the orangerie next to your house was enough to capture the vital essence and the quintessential reason of your painting now. All the rest becomes realization and consequence.

*Painting stands alone* Words are mere frills.

Thanks again.

Giovanni Lindo Ferretti, August 2018