

The land belongs to everyone, we must cross the limits.

To observe the rubble.

Two little boys hold their hands, they are bare-chested, and they stand on sharp mountains and look straight ahead. Towards the bottom stands a magnificent city where you can see modern buildings that recall the great contemporary metropolises. *Emigration Made* is the title of this work by Giuseppe Stampone: a hyper-realistic drawing on graph paper. A representation of a utopian aim of feeling good. These thin, elegant illustrations, made with BIC pen on pink graph paper, are light and meticulous. The stroke is different when compared to the other drawings by Giuseppe Stampone. Here, the line is lighter, thinner, the long and narrow buildings are blurred at their top, as if symbolic clouds were getting through to cut off some of their parts. Stampone has deleted some content, he has lightened it, or perhaps he has hidden it.

There is another version, *Alla ricerca del tempo perduto*, which is more defined and darker, made by the artist on the prepared wood always with the black BIC pen, which is his stylistic signature after all. The buildings are different, the children are fully dressed - this time they do have the t-shirts -, they are not bare-chested and they have white skin. However, the position is the same: they hold their hands, one is older than the other. The one on the left, perhaps the elder brother, protects the tiny figure on the right of the beneficiary of the drawing. Stampone forces the gaze to an almost cinematic vision: we see the subjects from behind, in the manner of the authorial incipit made by Luchino Visconti in "Osessione", which shows the protagonist only after a few minutes, by channeling the sight into a subjective angle that wants to be that of the protagonist of the story in whom the viewers identify themselves. It is like Orson Welles' voyeurism when he writes the screenplay, all personified by the camera lens, of Conrad's novel "Heart of Darkness". Indeed, the viewer of the film becomes part of the narrative. In the same way, the observer of Stampone's works becomes the protagonist of his drawn stories. An interlocutor of episodes and scenarios that are forced into a narrow visual space, very dense with matters, historical-political-social episodes, autobiographical quotes, mythological characters of our culture, from the popular to the "noble" one of the history of art of the past. Here, the user sees the children from behind by taking on an active responsibility and a story that is not going so well. It is the *Wanderer above the sea of fog* of Friedrich (1818), but it is from the overturned eye of the witness who becomes the

protagonist by scrutinizing the subject from behind and by becoming the creator of a common thought.

This narrative fragment drawn by Giuseppe Stampone has activated in me, since its first impact, a direct cross-reference to the memory of the first time I watched Rossellini's "Paisà" (1946). There is a scene where an American soldier, drunk and tired of the unfinished war, talks to a child whose shoes have just been stolen. They are both seated on the ruins of a neighborhood of Rome, a bombed city, already freed by the allies. There is nothing left in that context: you can see a tower, perhaps it is a bell tower of a church that the Nazis were unable to tear down.

The kid and the soldier do not speak the same language, but they understand each other. *"The city is full of lights and music and it welcomes him with the smile of its most beautiful girls... no, that's not true. Who wants to go back home, paisà. I am a hero paisà, a hero. The dream is over paisà. I don't wanna go home"*.

The war has broken out.

The figure of Mussolini made with blue BIC pen is one of the works included within the itinerary of the exhibition. It is an important critical signal in a delicate historical moment. The Duce is portrayed by Stampone in a real and vivid way: he raises his right arm and points upwards with his finger, the expression on his face recalls the cry for power. The fabric of his uniform is almost tangible to the touch: it looks like heavy felt, the one typical of military uniforms. Stampone presents that gesture - the finger raised to the sky - which acts as a matrix and as a link to this body of works in which he creates portraits of famous people loosely based on his own cultural knowledge and on the history that he has studied: from Benito Mussolini, indeed, to Tina Turner, Michael Jackson and Diego Maradona, to whom he attributes the punch of strength and of victory, instead of the index finger. They are all actions of celebration, but also of a harmful power that re-emerges throughout history. Maybe because we never learn enough from the past. In his black and white, in blue and in pink, works, Stampone wraps episodes in ever-current space-time capsules. As a matter of fact, to work on the past means analyzing the present. In these small tableaux vivants Stampone concentrates thoughts and reflections developed in the last few years of his research. Mussolini does not just point to the media war that the artist has so talked about since the mid-2000s, anticipating and criticizing the burnt potentialities and the problematic issues of a media that we have not yet learned well to manage. By looking now at some of his characters, the cross-reference to the wars that civilization has

experienced becomes natural. Those studied on books at school, those seen on television and read in newspapers. The war that is around the corner of everyone's home nowadays. This is precisely the reason why that Mussolini who raises his arm as a sign of satisfied power elicits fear.

The sky belongs to everyone. The land does not.

"Why does the sky belong to everyone and the land does not?" Stampone asked himself in an exhibition at the Ciac - Italian Center of Contemporary Art in Foligno - created with Ugo La Pietra, in 2018. It is a current and burning question that recurs in the hours in which this text is taking shape. In the aforementioned exhibition and in its publication, the artist elaborates artistic strategies related to the concept of language - the archetype at the base of each of Stampone's works - analyzed under the most diverse and meticulous aspects. The war and its protagonists are shown and gutted through geographic maps, the flags of the countries of the world, the covers of international magazines - from the weekly "Time" to "The Economist" - and the abecedaries. This group of works, which originates from a letter of the alphabet that Stampone draws on the sides by placing a figure in the center, branches out into images and portraits that conceptually refer to subjects hailed from different fields. The fruition is often cheerful, the image to solve as a rebus also recalls historical beauties and myths, from Dante Alighieri to Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags*, from the concept of "beauty" to the ambiguous "artist's shit" by Piero Manzoni, forefather of contemporary and conceptual art.

And then the drawings made by the children. How to explain to them that the land belongs to everyone, but it must be defended and cared for every day? How to tell them that even the sky today is chaotic and everyone wants it? The children look at us¹, but Stampone teaches that they are the ones who must be looked at. It is through the remarkable and laborious collective project *Global Education* (2004-2018), that the Abruzzese artist has created a "totem" - as Lucrezia Longobardi highlights - of images that are valid only in their own whole. As in a puzzle, if Stampone subtracts a single drawing made by the children involved in this great workshop project - which the artist developed together with Maria Crispal in the elementary schools of Lille, Rome, Seoul, Osijek, Częstochowa and Vicenza - the work is incomplete and its message therefore no longer valid. It is like a house under

¹ "I bambini ci guardano", film directed by Vittorio de Sica (1943).

construction from which a piece is subtracted. It is no longer universal, but the point of view of the individual is in force. Which is weak to be able to fight.

An intimate room.

The attitude to go from the global to the individual reflects a further conceptual approach present in Stampone's work. The artist deals with universal and recognizable themes through stratifications of various eras and episodes - real or fictitious, lived or imagined -, always by using the medium of drawing or painting. Stampone has a great regard for past history: he treats it through a recognizable and precise style. These universal themes conceal a strongly intimistic thought and of latent loneliness. The characters drawn on the prepared woods are created and subsequently viewed as individual parts who, once seen as a whole, become formal elements of a global unicum. The small dimensions of the drawings already show the urgency of sheltering in a tiny place, in a well-kept corner. Like a disturbing alcove in the BIC on prepared wood work entitled *Maria Crispal (2021)* which restores a suspended time and a feeling of restlessness and necessary quiet. This time fragmented into episodes, each individually isolated and interrupted, is also visible in *I love Bergamo (2020)*, which the artist chooses as a place to portray his young subjects - two children to whom an adult, probably Stampone himself who often portrays himself into the most different environments, is speaking - alongside the figure of Pasolini who is seated to the side. A tired, blindfolded intellectual who observes the scene together with the user. What does he want to convey? What message does he want to bring? Of this series, *Maria Crispal in the studio (2021)* also interrupts the vision for the first few minutes of fruition: here, the space that welcomes the subjects - two painters and a third person, perhaps an assistant - has a wider breath. The large room with an antique floor and two large windows through which light enters is reminiscent of the paintings famously made by the Flemings, from the domestic spaces of Vermeer, to the darker rooms of the convivial episodes painted by Caravaggio. Beams of light that cheer the context up, empty chairs and frames without images on the walls. It is a setting shaped through light and shadows, it is indeed deprived of its own content. Stampone is hiding something while leaving us clues. We see him from behind, in a small size, as he is painting in another room while looking out of a grated window. He is the "Man with a Movie Camera" by Dziga Vertov. He is the witness who documents what is happening. But, once again, he does it without showing himself to his observer. All three subjects are in fact represented from behind. They do not want to be seen. Yet again, each work is a puzzle to solve.

Real people and false myths. The language of Stampone.

There is a cinematic sequence that recounts an important and negative historical character who, aesthetically speaking, has both a romantic and ironic output at the same time. Only cinema and visual art can exchange roles by playing between irony and drama with a subtle intelligence and poetry. In "The Great Dictator" (1940), Charlie Chaplin plays Adolph Hitler. The German chancellor, stereotyped and recognizable by his mustache - the same as the director who played Charlot - and by the Nazi uniform, plays softly with a large air-inflated globe that floats in space, just like a basketball handled by a child. However, that kid is an adult, namely Hitler, and that ball that goes up and down the room stands for the entire globe that is rearranged and ruined with a lightness that only a dictator can impress. It is the exact same accurate and meticulous lightness that Stampone takes up and overturns positively within his black drawings. To do so, he depicts the greatest villains of history: from Mao to Mussolini up to Hitler. The latter is in fact contextualized by the artist in an abecedary in relation to the letter "g". "G" stands for "game over". Gesture after gesture, stroke after stroke, Stampone draws the subjects, contexts, geographies, environments, the letters of the alphabet, temporal stratifications, ending up creating very dense fragments and micro-worlds. Moreover, he realizes narrative sequences, often developed through a dialogue between image, letter and word, in order to create a personal language made up of codes to be deciphered. The artist, always present as an alter ego of himself and as a witness of the past, has thus archived a whole ever changing imaginary, which is in a perpetual transition between what has been, but which has not been of service to us as an example from which to draw and learn, and a utopian future that seeks to mutate, to fix mistakes. All the steps that the artist has been taken up to now - from solo exhibitions to huge projects such as the one at the Cyber Park Architecture of Intelligence (2008); from the actions and the appearances at the Quadrennials, to the collaborations with realities such as the European Union - they all document an immeasurable media archive, both analogical and digital, from which Stampone draws every now and then, always showing something new which is undeniably linked and in dialogue with our history. Between irony and pain, Stampone has "remastered historical paintings"² by involving gimmicks from a classical past - let's think about the references and quotes from the great masters of art history, such as the recovery from the perfect

² Quote from a dialogue with Giuseppe Stampone.

balance of Piero della Francesca, up to the political chaos by Géricault. Giuseppe Stampone uses only the BIC pen. It is a cheap medium that everyone uses and that remains indelible. Thanks to the pen and its obsessive and meticulous use, the artist has created intimate and small-format locations characterized by a perfect perspective. He has contextualized his subjects into a time that he tries to slow down, forcing the gaze of those who enjoy the work to observe every detail from different angles while freed from any judgment.

The artist testifies his "origin of the world"³ that cyclically goes back and forth and stages some episodes by mixing imaginaries and critically re-appropriating its moment.

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³ Gioconda con Baffi, Giuseppe Stampone (2020).