

The Infinite of Tullio Pericoli

As I see it, four seasons mark Tullio Pericoli's works: that of the cartoonist and his famous satirical strips designed with Emanuele Pirella, the portraits, the dreamscapes, and the landscapes which I would term tactile. The first made him affectionately well known, but the second made him famous worldwide as the finest portraitist of all (in my opinion he surpassed Levine in the *New York Review of Books*) and this would be enough to ensure Pericoli a chapter in the history of arts of our time. His portraits had a twofold virtue: making a character recognizable and memorable and, at the same time, deforming it, occasionally verging on the comic (but never the disrespectful) in order to define his style, his thought, his imagination, sometimes his soul – one only needs to think of his Einstein on a bicycle.

Then it was as if Pericoli had walked around his characters, looked behind them, and discovered landscapes. The first landscapes were surreal, woods inhabited by more or less probable animals (I must say that I liked them very much and am sorry he has given them up), but in a second phase – represented by the paintings on display here, and running from the 1990s down to the present – he set aside the fairytale vision and focused on landscape as such, with a realistic approach (but without a realistic effect).

It is as if he had started to see the valleys and hills just as he had spied the wrinkles of his characters: he did not portray the landscapes but delved into them.

While in his comic strips and portraits Pericoli looked at the wide world and the universe of culture, in his landscapes he withdrew as if to a personal Caprera to rediscover nature, the nature of the land where he was born. And, with a move typical of the Marche, *si parva licet componere magnis* (but he did it with confident candor) he named one of his exhibitions *Sitting and Gazing*. So, sitting and gazing, he gazed at his infinite. And since he was dealing with the infinite, from then on, and for the years that followed, I imagine, Pericoli has never ceased exploring new prospects and new valleys and hills and new woods, and new skies, crouching behind his hedge and shipwrecking happily in his sea of soil.

In fact, it would be wrong to speak of it as landscape painting. Pericoli did not draw inspiration from Claude, Constable or the Impressionists. Rather, gazing in perspective or from above, he reduces plots of land, tiny plowed fields, woods, hills and skies to endless variations on a patchwork that he tones down into successive abstractions; and yet, while abstracting, he questions the material he explores. Gradually we discover that his landscapes from visions become dreams, and perhaps, as in this exhibition, we have to see them all together to follow the reveries of this interpreter of the face of the earth.

Umberto Eco

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