

Once upon a time... Giorgio Dal Canto

- Once upon a time...
- A king! - my little readers will immediately say.
- No, boys, you got it wrong. Once upon a time there was a piece of wood.
It was not a fancy piece of wood, but a simple piece from a woodpile,
the kind you put in stoves in winter,
and in fireplaces to light fires and heat rooms.
I don't know how it went, but the fact is that one fine day this piece of wood
landed in the workshop of an old carpenter,
whose name was Mastr'Antonio, except that everyone called him Master Cherry,
on account of the tip of his nose, which was always shiny and purple,
like a ripe cherry.

Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio. Story of a puppet*
Paggi, Florence, 1883

There was once an artist, we could say this time. Once upon a time... Giorgio Dal Canto.

What you are about to read, however, is not a fairy tale, but a true story, although the elements of the fairy tale are all there and Pinocchio is not missing either!

Whenever I am asked to tell a story, and especially when it comes to illustrating the life and art of a man, I cannot help but try to include in the narrative every aspect that might help the reader get a peek at the uniqueness of each existence. This action implies what I call 'gigantism' from which I have always suffered: that little philosophy that produces publications with a substantial number of pages, richly illustrated and trying to gather all the rays of action of the subject matter.

When Giuseppe Diomelli expressed to me his desire to produce a book presenting the story of Giorgio Dal Canto, aka Babb, I immediately felt pervaded by various energies: pride, boldness and a lot of satisfaction.

I had been following this artist for years and knew his work, both pictorial and graphic, from having seen his masterpieces on so many occasions.

In addition, through my continuous frequentation of the Bandedecchi & Vivaldi printing house, I had also been able to appreciate all of his published works and breathe in an environment that he had lived in for a long time and that inevitably spoke of him.

In the work that you are about to leaf through and read, there is the first attempt to combine the life, work, criticism, and various arts of a man who lived in Pontedera, and whose life spanned almost the entire 19th century and fifteen years of the 21st century. It is a complex parabola that until now had been illuminated, only



Il Ponte Napoleonico
(The Napoleonic Bridge)
illustration for the periodical *Er Tramme*

On the previous page

Ignoto (Unknown), 1977
black and white watercolor 38x56 cm

Watercolor that Dal Canto had in his home in Pontedera, Viale Italia. It is not known who was represented in the image.

Illustration for a publication
(Vivaldi family archive)





for its artistic side, by prestigious critics who have been able to grasp the thought and evolution of a person who is difficult to describe or to inscribe in clearly defined boxes.

Here you will find the heart, the mind, the language of the craftsman Giorgio Dal Canto and the fairytale he designed, almost always consciously.

When I think of him and of my city, of our city, I believe that he is in the Olympus of the greats and that, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, but also afterwards, he was the architect of a fundamental transition. If Bruno Pasquinucci gave Pontedera poetry; Mario Montorzi, Paolo Morelli, Roberto Cerri, Adriano Marsili and many others, history; Babb, art and colour.

Until then, this place was 'anonymous' despite some great ingenuity, and only in those years did many works flourish that allowed us to learn about its past and begin to appreciate its 'beauty'.

To understand how effective his action has been, one only has to enter the home or office of some *Pontaderese* inhabitants and discover how many of his works depicting Pontedera stand out on the walls of these rooms.

However, to think that Dal Canto was just that is a mistake not to be made, because the themes he addresses are simply universal and the message he delivers can be read in every corner of the globe.

Its mastery, its genius, has only on a few occasions crossed regional borders, but it speaks to everyone and is powerful and revolutionary as soon as you discover its keys.

I hope that this book will serve, for those who knew him, to remember and for those who were not so fortunate, to begin to appreciate him.

I tried to save as much as I could, but my Ark could not really contain everything.

There was too much colour, too much art, too much thought and too much life.... Now, however, we have used up too much time... Let us begin!

Once upon a time... Giorgio Dal Canto...

Michele Quirici



Giorgio Dal Canto in 5th elementary (second from the right in the first row squatting)



Giorgio Dal Canto in I^a Starting work (first to the right of the first row squatting)