

What was said of him (1979-2016)

*When a person meets a madman
two things can happen: the madman remains mad
while the sage can remain sage or...
he can go crazy too. However, the madman thinks everyone else,
except he himself is mad. Which side are the madmen on?*

Giuseppe Diomelli, 2013

Many have spoken of Giorgio Dal Canto, although the most recurrent voices are those of Dino Carlesi, Ilario Luperini and Riccardo Ferrucci. Alongside them, Michele Feo, Nicola Miceli, Salvatore Amodei and Nello Chetoni also made their opinions heard. Here, we will attempt to reconstruct his path, and that of the critique connected with him. Through the succession of numerous exhibitions a relentless growth of the artist Babb emerges, until the peak of his artistic expression in the years from 2007 to 2012. From the early years, in which his works portrayed reality through personal criticism of places, professions, hobbies, weaknesses and characters, he gradually moved on to the cutting condemnation of a universal, and no longer local, reality, with allegories that are sometimes obvious and sometimes hidden, which make the works suitable for generating questions and interpretations. This critical and latent aspect makes Dal Canto's painting exciting at the height of his maturity.

"Il Pisanello", Pisa, 1979

After the first exhibitions in Pontedera and Pisa, previously mentioned, in 1975 in Via Pal-



estro in Pontedera, in 1977 at Galleria A5 in Via Roma in Pontedera, in 1978 at 'Il Pisanello' in Pisa and again in the same year at Galleria A5, in November 1979 Babb's works were hosted thanks to Laura Barbani once again at the art gallery 'Il Pisanello' and on this occasion Nicola Miceli wrote a critical text entitled 'Venti situazioni in forma di vaso' to accompany the exhibition of twenty paintings characterised by the motif of the decorated vase. Miceli

writes: *'With the vases, Giorgio Dal Canto seems to have intended to fix in episodes or mirrors of neat painting twenty stations of an ironic, bitterly disenchanting itinerary through the vicissitudes of man, who is engaged in constructing nothing less than history (with its deeds and misdeeds) while living the disarming condition of the narrative - transitory certainties, an act that is perpetuated by the movements and gestures of existential necessity. It must be said at once that Dal Canto does not believe in history, unless it is understood as a chronicle of lived events. History is a final balance sheet, drawn up on the skin of those who will not appear to illustrate its pages other than as an undifferentiated and amorphous quanti-*



Il Potere (Power uses culture), 1980
oil on canvas 40×55 cm

*The intellectual in the mouth of Power. Power uses culture
at will.*



La matresse (The mistress), 1981
oil on canvas 40x60 cm

Power seeks the place where it can “settle” by acting insidiously.

ty; and it is a biased, profoundly mystifying balance sheet. *The chronicle* is truth, however temporary: it is breath and palpable sweat of anyone engaged in the daily struggle for existence, which is a struggle for power. It must be added that the artist from Pontedera does not see any possibility of breaking the circle, of breaking the chain at the ends of which the oppressors and oppressed are bound: the plates of the scales eternally at play. Keeping these theoretical premises in mind, one immediately has the key to understanding the general meaning of the twenty works on display at the "Il Pisanello" gallery. Above all, we have the parameter that allows us to grasp in their touching authenticity the numerous occasions on which the artist ends up contravening (out of love) the rigid pre-judgments of his scepticism. He paints wonders and tenderness like flowers of hope that blossom between the meshes of fatalism to save the world at the point of maximum fracture, to call into question the inhuman balance that seems to bind everyone to their own destiny, whether winner or vanquished. Micieli analysing the works reveals the score of Babb's symphony and the artist's mastery in conducting his 'orchestra of brushes': 'Dal Canto rejects the illusory beauty of art that keeps itself detached from the moods of life. However, one should not believe in his populist vocation. Rather, the artist strives to capture the disenchanting truth of reality, which he expands into metaphor on the level of the image, so that the story is never merely anecdotal, even if some gentle detail tends to bring a smile or pathetic tenderness to the attitude of the figures caught in their helpless creaturely state.

The image is a mirror of feelings, observations and rigorous judgments.

In other words, the chronicle becomes history when it becomes a symbol of the human condition. It is the artist who performs this miracle. He does so with the subtle magic of signs, colours and volumes subtly organised for the observer in unexpected conformations, capable of drawing him into the mechanism of ambiguity. Dal Canto leads the dance with enviable mastery, but not with coldness, where between the laces of an irony calculated to its effect, sometimes even blatant; between the imaginative alchemy of formal solutions (kept in diligent equidistance from the pitfalls of surrealist combinations as from metaphysical suspensions; from the captious popularesque enchantments of Viviani's engravings as well as from the biting satirical topicality of so many excellent artists), you always find a vein of sympathy, understanding and even gentleness, which makes you bring image and story back to concrete terms of a mirror of life.

Seeing so much art 'one is taken aback by the enchantment of apparitions: a crowd at the market or on the beach, a tree adorned with rosettes, an immense dome-hat animated by tiny human efflorescences, which is a symbol, as we can guess, of the centralised power around which revolve ambitions and careerism, competitions and courtier clamour, compromises and servility, the summed-up miseries of the never-ending struggle to conquer a place in the sun, in the overcrowded ark of the world adrift in the universe. Moreover, in the immense madhouse of the vase-shaped mirror packed with little men,

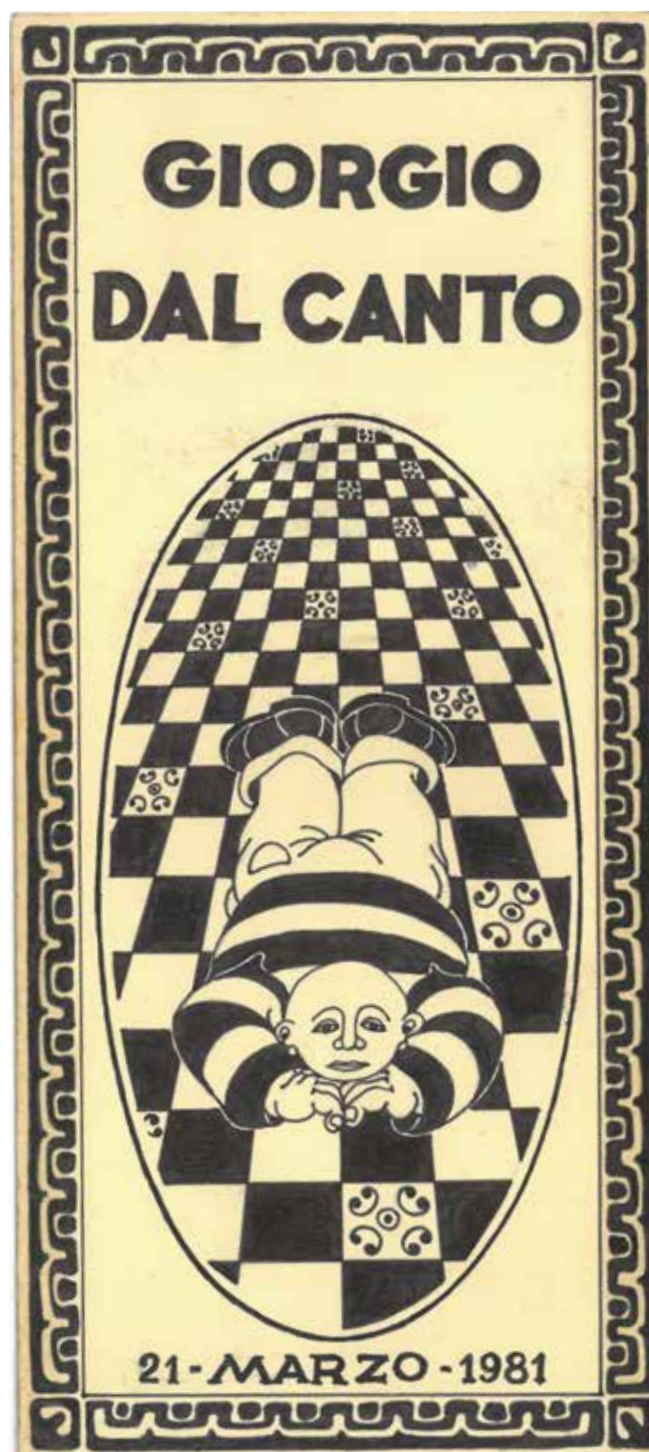
what do the vicissitudes of time and the alternation of the individual matter?

Dal Canto plays well with the wisdom of his scepticism when he repeats that man is always the same because his basic needs remain unchanged over time. Therefore, Dal Canto's man is only a type-figure, who personifies power, with statuesque and anonymous features, or who gives the last of the poor men a body to be dragged into the fray of the world. In the end, it is not the man that is depicted, but his qualities: his vices and virtues (more than these), his consolations and sorrows. Hence, the interest in the chronicle, as far as it expresses what is authentically human; hence, the vein of sympathy for those who are most unarmed at the dawn of life. But the ideological value, which is undoubtedly inherent in Dal Canto's sympathy, does not translate into politics, and rightly so, since politics is precisely that, a game of the powerful, a mirror like precious inlays that show the illusory aspect of reality. Values, if anything, are for the artist from Pontedera in the human capacity to defend oneself with love, exemplified in the image of the couple that makes a square of bodies in embrace, to begin the adventure anew'.

The exhibition includes the folder with five etchings 'Le carte', which was created for the exhibition at Gallery A5.

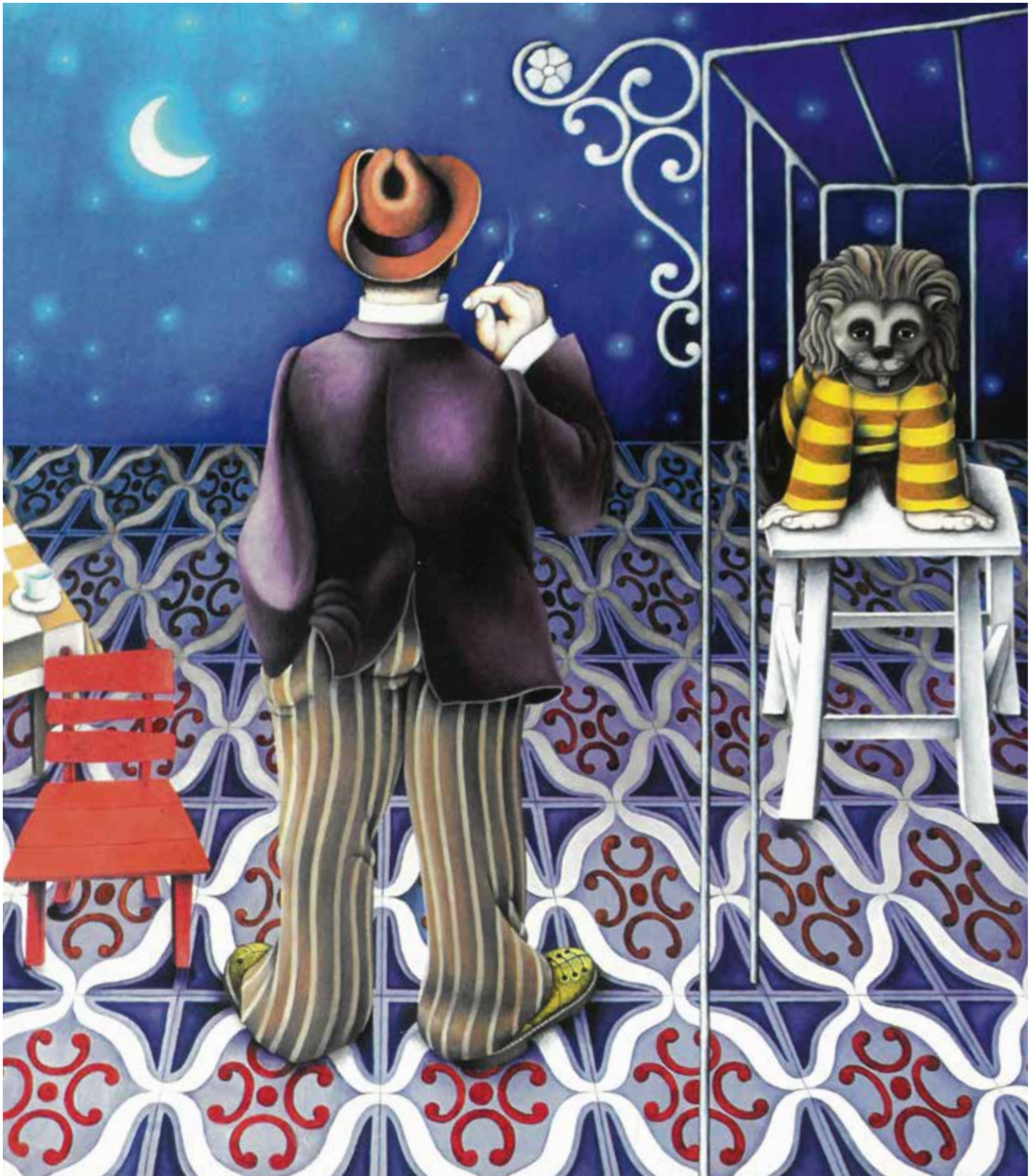
Il Gabbiano, Pontedera, 1981

From 21 March to 3 April 1981, Giorgio Dal Canto 'flew' to Grazia Puccini's art studio in Via Saffi in Pontedera, **Il Gabbiano**, and in the brochure accompanying the event, visitors could read a text by Dino Carlesi: *Il disincantamento*.



Sketch for the exhibition brochure

The title echoes Micieli's remarks when he speaks of Babb's ability to 'grasp the disenchanted truth of reality'. Carlesi begins his contribution with a reflection on the 'simplicity of artists', which often meets and coincides with the great themes of sociologists, philosophers and politicians and, eventually, a common air of pessimism dominates the works of the former and the theoretical



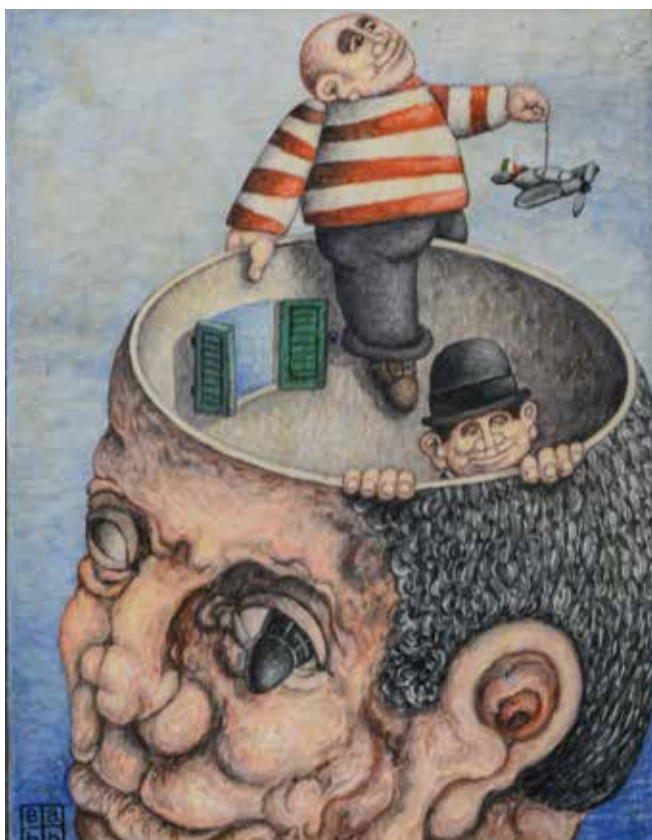
L'indifferenza (Indifference), 1979
oil on canvas 70×100 cm

The Lion represents “natural” life but has been caged by this artificial world we live in. The elegant character, seen from behind and smoking, represents indifference.



Servilismo (Servility), 1981
oil on canvas 40x50 cm

*The "anonymous" (faceless) Power is carried by the common people as a sacred image.
The usual Harlequin acts as witness.*



Vuoto di testa (Empty Head), 1980
oil on canvas 19×25 cm

A very complex work that highlights Power, the one responsible for the emptying of people's brains, who contentedly sits on the top edge of the empty head, resting his foot in the eye socket. This situation conditions those subjected to the interference of power not to notice the serious situation of emptiness, as they play, contentedly, with a plane on a thread. The head remains empty and exposed to the weather that can enter through the open window.

conceptions of the latter'. And, looking at the works, all of which are 'technically resolved with great skill and loaded with ironic meanings and provocative illusions', he analyses 'Babb's simplicity' which is not expressive immediacy or formal naivety, but a mediated sensation that stems from his natural ability to create 'situations' and to decant them through pictorial inventions that find their best ally in colour. This colour is not materially stretched but smooth and dry (apart from a painting made with mixed media and sand), as befits the narration's conciseness, combined with certain graphic caricatured deformations that are intended to exalt the characters' flaws, bordering on the limits of a certain twentieth-century surrealism: even if the excess



Solleticato (Tickled), 1982
oil on canvas 40×50 cm

Power enjoys tickling (trying to encircle) the boy and Harlequin witnesses what happens. The boy tries in vain to defend himself from this action.

of meticulousness and clarity in describing the painter's ironic intentions can sometimes remove ambiguity and mysteriousness from certain aspects of his critical discourse'.

The critic who followed the painter from his beginnings found him 'improved in formal assurance and eccentricity of layout'. He went on to say that Babb now 'quietly succeeds in suggesting a reading in an ironic key, even conceding something to sarcasm, and his scenes are easily captured in their simplicity of relationships and analogies. Man is always in a 'cage' even if the gilded world around him seems to entice him with its baroque or neo-classical scenery: the 'arm-chairs' show how the world and man - their 'dark evil' and irreversible tendencies to de-

struction. “The ‘beach’, seen from above, is one of many human anthills, with only the desolate waving of multi-coloured umbrellas: ‘Power’ is always there with its characters of obligation (bourgeoisie, prelates, gendarmes, magicians), ready to marginalise the usual derelicts.

These are always identical under all the powers that be, with their rages hidden under the forced striped shirts. The ‘utopian’ continues to dream and peer through the telescope into a world that no longer exists and will never return: a kaleidoscope of common life, seen under the guise of play and fun, captured with wit but also with deep pity, amidst trees finished with human clusters and mischievous processions. With women’s breasts and little men cavorting in them, with kings and knights, totems and pyramids of figures. A sorrowful humanity presents itself with winks of the eye and resigned submissiveness. The painter seems to be avenging - with his mark and his colour - all the humiliation, the oppression, the violence suffered’.

Carlesi needs no more than that to carve out the critical outfit for Babb to wear. He wrote, ‘It seems to me that Dal Canto’s work finds its unity and cohesion precisely in remaining faithful to his initial bitter discourse on the world and men, in his insistence on sketching and exasperating their contrasts, and in his attempts to dilute their fierce tensions in poetry. In this sense, I said at the beginning that his “simplicity” encapsulates the profound truth of things, or at least that which

IL PISANELLO Galleria d’Arte

GIORGIO DAL CANTO



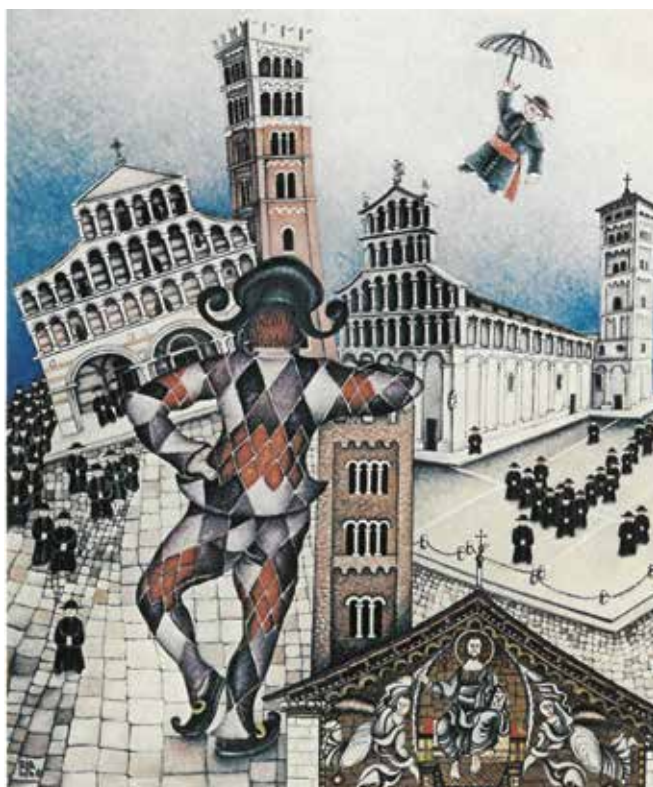
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appears to us in the social and existential context at hand. His ‘symbols’ show the degree of his participation in that pessimistic context, as I said, and his artistic knot of disenchantment with images and colours’.

“Il Pisanello”, Pisa, 1982

In January 1982, he returned to the Il Pisanello Art Gallery with a very special theme: ‘**Harlequins**’. For the first time, he used a mask that would later return numerous times in his art and his ‘analysis’ of the mechanisms that govern society.

In the introduction to the exhibition’s small brochure, the gallery owners write: ‘This ‘hidden painter’ returns, this inventor of situations bordering on the absurd, this silent commentator on a chronicle that can only be saved by his astonishment, combined



Viaggio immaginario (Imaginary Journey), 1982
oil on canvas 50x60 cm

with the grotesque and satire. He exhibits a series of Harlequins, a theme very dear to him'.

For the exhibition, a folder entitled 'Imaginary Journey' was produced with three etchings with a text by Dino Carlesi evoking the 'harlequin's irony, the rages appeased in the play of the fable' that animate the artist's mark. *Harlequin* is only a pretext and an emblem:

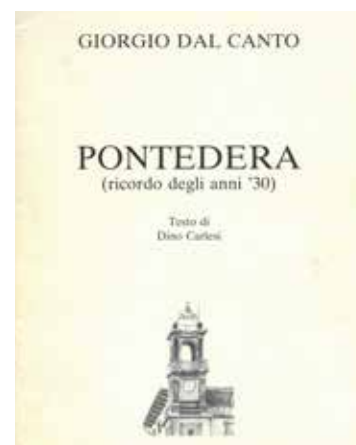
and the aquatint acts as a tenuous veil to the rigid etchings of truth, once again maliciously uncovered. The world is at the mercy of the maneuverers of the day, and it is now possible to make a cathedral disappear or change the architecture of a city or force power into the absurd game of its childish roundabout. All it takes is an invention of the pen to scratch a slab, but above all History. The invention prompts the residual hope of being able to take man's precious documents away from him - by entrusting them to a mask - before man destroys them with bombs or forgets them in the folds of a financial report.. The idea strikes me as excellent, at least in its the graphic execution'.

Pontedera (memories of the 1930s), Pontedera, 1983

Then came a homage to his city: Pontedera. In October 1983, the Printshop of Walter Cecchi in Livorno produced 6 etchings on Arches Paper in 60 numbered copies (from 1/60 to 60/60) hand-coloured by the artist. This was a homage to his town: *Pontedera (memoies of the 1930s)*. The works are included in 2 folders of 3 works each with a text by Dino Carlesi and a 1930 news report printed on the occasion of the 'City' award given to Pontedera.

The critique was entrusted to Dino Carlesi, who wrote a contribution entitled 'Roads and Men'. *'Dal Canto continues to delve into the roots of his small town, perhaps for two reasons: to evoke the memory of houses, streets and people in the hope of alleviating the feeling of a definitive temporal loss, and also to amuse himself at the level of fantasy in the mischievous reconstruction of a reality that seems to have passed but is in truth very much alive, if only because of the poetic charge that time has lavishly laid upon it. One could not explain it otherwise Dal Canto's stubborn consistency in ideally linking past and present, to the point of merging them in a witty and lyrical game that elevates this graphic evocation to the dignity of a modern theatre, capable of framing in its scenography the light-hearted images of eternal landscapes and the melancholic geometries of aged architecture, albeit noble in its history and events'.*

With this work, Dal



Riflessioni (Reflections), 1983 oil on canvas 50×60 cm

A very surrealist work, it is not clear in retrospect what Giorgio Dal Canto wanted to represent with this very complex and articulated painting. No hypotheses are ventured.

Canto contributed to the slow recovery operation that the city was putting in place. In those years, there were very few texts available for those who wanted to learn about Pontedera's past, even though that year saw the publication of an extraordinary book by Pietro Giani, 'Sognarsi il pane' (Dreaming of bread), which drew heavily from the river of town memories that Dal Canto also drew on. Then, in 1982, Roberto Cerri's notable publication '*Pontedera tra cronaca e storia 1859-1922*' (Pontedera between chronicle and history 1859-1922) came out, and Daniela Tartaglia's '*La Piaggio di Pontedera 1944-1978*' (Pontedera's Piaggio 1944-1978) came out in 1981. Scholars and connoisseurs of the town's history tried in those years to provide an apparatus and recovery that gave an idea of what Pontedera was. Together with them, the work of Bruno Pasquinucci ('Bistino' or 'Osso' as the people of Pontedera used to call him) was fundamental. With his sharp pen and tasty vernacular, he sketches men and past events, publishing *Ricordi di Bella di Mai* (1979) and *Pontederesi noi siamo* (1980).

With this series dedicated to the 1930s, Babb broadened the collective imagination and provided his fellow citizens and 'outsiders' with material to immerse themselves in the same place but moving along the 50-year time axis. As far as the style of the works is concerned, Dino Carlesi was precise: '*On these memory-rich sheets, the mark is thick to give consistency to the forms and almost everything wobbles and curves to take away the hardness of the pavement or the corners of the houses. The colours then fade into faint veils, with blends of pink, green, and grey, almost as if to render more magical a reconstruction that is entirely guided by the imagination, which overpowers reality - although moving*



from it - to the point of overturning it and enriching it with illogical additions, sarcastic flourishes and polite stylistic deformations. Moreover, above it all, clear and solemn, the singing of the narrative fairy tale that creates a unique atmosphere between things and characters, united in a common situation of painful nostalgia. A sequence of exteriors that punctually brings all the events back onto the road, a place of transit and resting, a meeting place of vitality, a public exhibition of private everyday events, on which the artist casts his eye with shared humanity.

It is only in this spirit – scenically expanded and open to the joyful adventure of forms and meanings – that the Piazzetta dell'Orologio can overlap in space with the night musicians, according to a benevolent interpretation of the most recent chronicle, just as the priests, leaving the Misericordia Church, can endlessly repeat processions and litanies, or the ice-cream man can wait sadly for his customer on the old Piazzone (when Andrea was still there, watching the modest barrow traffic), or the courriers of yesteryear can pause on



the Piazza della Stazione before venturing into the dusty surroundings. And beneath everyone's feet - animals and people - the noisy cobblestones, a graphic and human weave of bumpy but neat stones, to take us back decades, to a season that had still not taken away man's taste for silence and listening.

Drawings, oils, coloured inks, inventions, memories: a lyrically cohesive discourse that winds its way through the narrow streets and the Duomo and almost tempts us to run to keep company with the roast chestnut seller who used to stop - and still does, if memory has any meaning and value - at the corner of Piazzetta dell'Erbe and Via del Campanile”.

We can safely say that with these works, Dal Canto gave memory 'a sense and a value' because he reconstructs places that have meanwhile been transformed in spite of themselves, some offended by the war, others by 'modernity', however changed, and he populates them with sad faces, almost as if to tell us that the past has not been for many that mythical

era. Perhaps Babb was nostalgic for the monuments, squares and buildings of the 1930s, but not for the atmosphere in the city. His city loves him and will always be ready to welcome his art with open arms.

The Games and Bets of Man, Pontedera, 1985

The Games and Bets of Man was the title of the exhibition held at the Pontedera Municipal Library in October 1985. A text by the ever-present Dino Carlesi commented on the 32 paintings on display: 'Dal Canto did not even think that there could also be a “game” that was part of ethics that did not aim to profit and was an ends to itself.

It is a pure game, without interests and goals other than its existence and its unfolding as a satisfying game in itself, almost like that of the child who invents the rules of his game, his emotions, his fantasies, and who draws gratification from them - from them alone. It is not for nothing that Aristotle placed this kind of play among the 'virtues' and Kant even included the sublime and disinterested 'play of thoughts' in aesthetics.

Dal Canto, on the other hand, has chosen only those 'games' in which a player engages in order to achieve a 'stake', a concrete result, distinguishing between games that depend exclusively on 'chance' (bingo or dice) or those that depend on the player's skill (billiards, cards, etc.). In addition, in this overview of games, he may have wanted to represent a situation of custom, and of rampant irrationality and, indirectly, a crisis of hope. This is because it is not clear whether the artist is looking at his people with pity, resentment or irony.

Today's society is so competitive, economically.

In his small world, the artist seems to tell us, the man on the street throws the dice every day, tries to redeem himself and risk his life, loading his actions with all his strengths, choices and surprises, and takes a risk, charging his gestures with all his emotion and anticipation.

Because playing - in this case presupposes the orgasm of waiting for an event that may or may not happen. When the 'dice' are thrown, the wait for a number is triggered, which in this example is quite unusual, but not dissimilar to the waiting of the 'boules' player who accompanies with his eye and step the path of his ball as soon as it is skillfully dropped from his hand. In this thrill lies precisely the 'sickness of the game', the one capable of creating absolute addiction in the ceaseless rhythm of chances, risks and defeats.

Because not even victory, possible and expected, is the decisive reason for gambling, but it is gambling itself, with its perverse rules accepted a priori by the gambler with an act of sacred obedience, which translates into the incessant succession of bets and gambles. In fact, even defeat is in its own way an incentive to continue, an incentive to risk again.

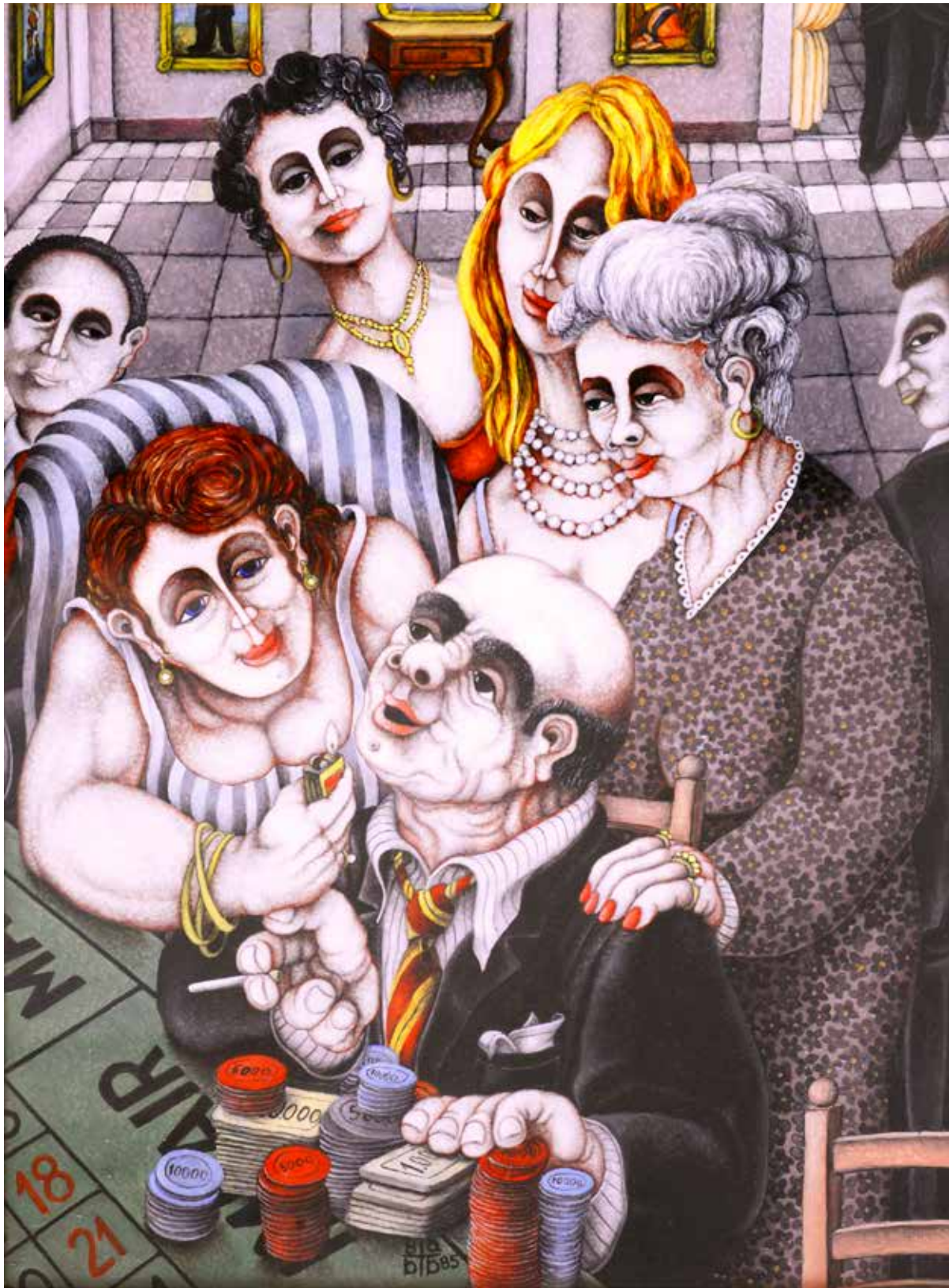
Dal Canto approaches the world of players with an ambiguous participation, drawing, through the expression of faces and the static nature of figurative compositions and environments, a rather suspicious convergence of passion and rationality. The irony does not tend to disqualify, but is almost comprehensive and pained, and although the

situations and games vary, a unified, common, astonished and silent vision emerges within which the players consume their resurgent hopes. He captures significant moments of the game, linking characters and scenes to village squares, fanfares, aflutter balconies and colourful balloons: the game sometimes also tends to the atmosphere of ritual and not just the opaque, smoky lights of the backs of shops. But hardly anyone seems to be happy, even in the 'Prize Giving' the cups are a mournful counterpoint to the sadness of the winners, and the green carpet of poker or baccarat appears as a false orgy of money and chips. In the streets, a few gamblers, bend over the ground, knock over cards or watch the whimsical rolling of the dice. But these 'outsiders' seem as obsessed as men by the regular rhythm of the cobblestones, now grey, now pink, which, together with the houses behind it, forms an unnatural, physically illogical space, in which a blue sky sometimes heralds a distant landing place of tranquillity. And then, as if to brighten up the whole, some witticism or chromatic accent: the red-and-white striped shirt of a player who never gives up on us, the checked tablecloth of the 'scientific scopone', the upturned numbers of the bingo, the hidden omen, the black cat, the blind man, a priest. Just as there are the winners, hefty and full of chips, there are the losers who despondently abandon the place. The unfashionably coiffed ladies, the 'three-card stud' who tricks the passing gonzo, and, finally, the 'fantastical landscapes' in which that the 'Azienda Italia' (the hidden one of dreams, meanness, hypocrisies, illusions and hopes) is all un-



Scala 40, 1985
oil on hardboard 38×45 cm

A serious 'Scala 40' game where even non-player attend.



Il vincente (The Winner), 1985 oil on canvas
30×40 cm

The winner attracts people pleased with his good fortune, always ready to be helpful.

folded in a crescendo of numbers, cabals, lotteries, horses and lotto games.

The artist plays on two levels: Firstly, on the psychology of the characters, whose drawn and silent faces betray the anxious adventure of the game. Secondly, on the pictorial one, which offers us an evocative and obsessive repetition of emotive chromatic alternations depending on the whitish inner light of the cafés or the sunnier outer light of the neighbourhood streets, all gathered within a mental space which may contain either everything or nothing at all, but is certainly made suggestive by a passion that is coloured by the intensity of personal stories, their evolution into satisfaction or despair.

Perhaps the somewhat unreal synthesis of this series of 'tales' suspended between expectations, hope and disappointment, is represented by the gambler who plays his 'solitaire' with himself on a public bench in a cold, arid winter landscape. He is the everyday man who in all situations of life always bets with himself on how to survive. Man has always gambled: with his peers, with himself, with the sky and the earth. He has thrown his dice, dealt his 'solitaire' to go beyond his present discomfort, to understand it, to overcome it. Dal Canto's players seem to be dissatisfied players, who, by the way, do not seem to have any scruples, ready even for a little cheating, subterfuge or brawl. Nevertheless, the gambler who plays with himself cannot cheat: he is a n honest gambler who runs the daily risk of his own existence and who on the canvas - to the artist's credit - tries to conceal his own distress in the icy composure of gestures and the cold

SANTIERI DELLA PITTURA



**CAVALLINI
DAL CANTO
STRAZZULLO**

RIVISTA GHIBLI
ARCI POESIA
COMUNE DI PONTEDERA

hue of colours. However, this last miracle is the painter's typical 'gamble': because he too risks and attempts to transcend banal reality, he too bets on colours and forms to describe emotions and find the hope of living in painting. And he often succeeds in winning'.

Closing the catalogue is a piece by Riccardo Ferrucci for the Cultural Activities Committee, who emphasises how Dal Canto is 'an artist deeply attached to his city, his Pontedera, and it is no coincidence that he is presenting his most important exhibition in Pontedera'.

Paths of Painting, Pontedera, 1986

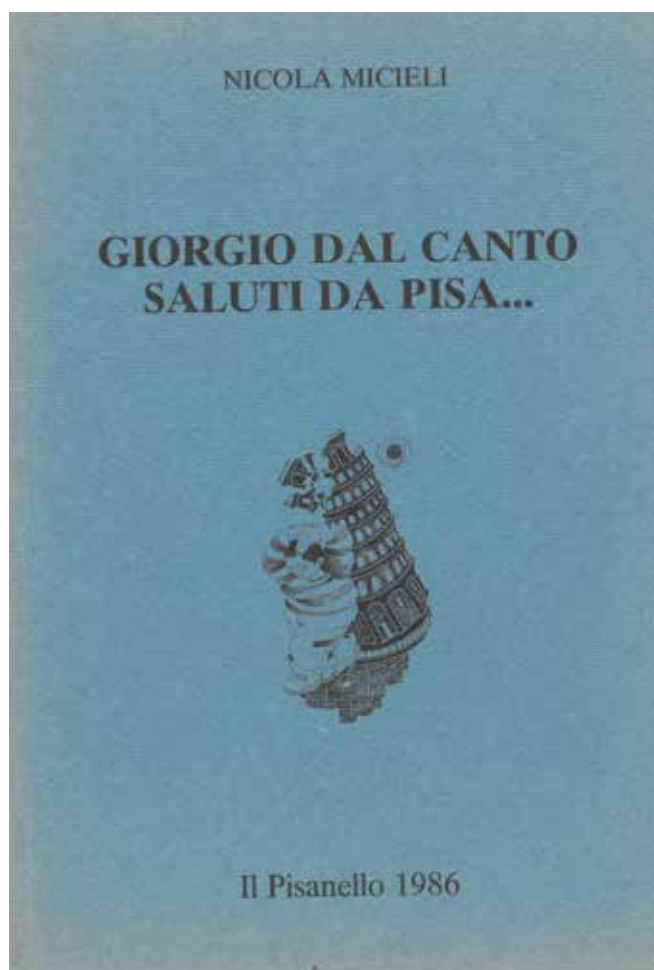
On 15 November 1986, the painting and graphics exhibition **Sentieri della Pittura** was opened at the Logge della Pretura.

The exhibition was promoted by the magazine Ghibli, Arci Poesia and the Municipality of Pontedera and featured three artists: Bruno Cavallini, Giorgio Dal Canto and Gennaro Strazzullo. In the critical review of Dal Canto, prepared for the brochure by Riccardo Ferrucci, we read: *'Roland Barthes used to say - now we have to admit it - only the images of my youth fascinate me. This youth was not unhappy, thanks to the affection that surrounded me; however, it was quite ungrateful because of loneliness and material worries. It is therefore not nostalgia for a happy time that holds me spellbound before these photographs, but something darker. Dal Canto, too, is fascinated by the past and ceaselessly recreates episodes and places from recent Tuscan history on canvas. In his paintings dedicated to Pisa, the mental encounter with a strange past, perhaps*

only the result of a dream. For Dal Canto, the past becomes a very indiscreet place because it offers the 'underneath of his body' to be read, and at the same time discreet, because the characters painted are not himself. The painter manages to provoke a sense of unease in the viewer. His mental performances tell stories that we all have written on our own skin. In an etching from 1978, men can be seen looking up without knowing what they are looking for. It is an indicative example of his style, which proceeds between gentle regrets and subtle provocations. We never know where the artist wants to lead us, and we ourselves are those people who look upwards in search of the truest meaning.

The novelty of Dal Canto's painting is right here. He proposes figurative and nostalgic painting to conceal the most important and secret thoughts. On closer inspection, the images of these recurring characters, priests or men, confirm that the thematic play is more mental than real. Everyone can recognise their own memories, but the memory is very ambiguous and brings with it opposing desires and feelings. Dal Canto's little theatre of characters becomes a real labyrinth that is easy to enter, but difficult to escape from.

This double composition should be seen in his painting: simple from a figurative point of view and complex from a conceptual one. Dal Canto does not tire of graphically retracing the usual streets and familiar places, but we are not sure that the journey will be repeated, because the fascination of the past plays strange, sometimes surprising tricks'.



'Il Pisanello', Pisa, 1986

The following month, Dal Canto was again at the Il Pisanello gallery with an exhibition entitled '*Greetings from Pisa...*', curated by Nicola Micieli, who exhibited the painter's work in a delightful publication: *'I have had two encounters with Giorgio Dal Canto's paintings and graphics. Both of them ended up taking on the character of a journey, undertaken by means of writing and in a way that I would say was independent of my own will. Critical exploration is always also a journey, especially when the figurative world under investigation lends itself*

to psychological projections and the play of associations on the thread of fantasy. Critical reading is also an excursion parallel to the itinerary of the artist, who has already made his wanderings.

*The artist's work is based on the idea of collecting here and there - from life and from the memorial repositories in which the mind stores impressions of the phenomenology of everyday life - the materials that nourish his imagination. In Dal Canto's case, they turn into a story with thoughtful implications, into a tale of uncertain taste between the fable and the chronicle of popular life, where critical irony is not lacking. A **Traveller** he is, Dal Canto, by vocation and poetic choice. Of course, his excursions have a very limited range, from a geographical point of view: they preferably revolve around Pontedera, and often focus on one place in particular, say a bar or a small square, an alley or a corner of a public garden. But the ideal expanse is almost boundless, since from his observatory Dal Canto focuses on the intricate, even complimentary and intricate panorama of life: a labyrinth of thousands and thousands of paths, of tricks and puzzles in which prosaic humanity becomes entangled'.*

The reader's journey, once he has entered the labyrinth, is then obliged; it is a requisite for access to the pictorial form. No matter how hard one tries to evade the suggestions of the fable, which traces the progression from station to station, from one image to the next, gazing with the malice of humour, they continually return to confuse the somehow identified guiding thread. The result is precisely your journey by way of analogical activation of the imaginary, which

introduces subjective reading paths, perhaps diverse and alternative, if not arbitrary. Or else they coincide with those of the author; in any case, they are always inevitable, which allarms those who, out of habit, want to identify the contents in retrospect, as a logical consequence of observations of a different order, relating to the aesthetic peculiarities of the pictorial form. Yet, the journey in the wake of the account, as well as a superficial level of reading, even when the story unfolds with frequent anecdotal delays, proves to be anything but a literary digression in Dal Canto. On the contrary, I would say that it represents the legitimisation of the painting itself, as well as the reason and poetic dissolution of its contents. The story returns, in short, to the central assumption of these images of astonished disillusionment, of smiling bitterness; and better yet: of a deeply human understanding based on the clarity of skepticism, which is a multifaceted crystal on which reality is reflected and refracted, decomposed into a colorful ephemeris of the human condition.

In addition, please note that the image loses nothing in concreteness, and I would say in realism, in order to be linguistically mediated to the captivating forms of the humorous tale, which has its own poetic and ideological depths, its devastating poisons and consoling narcotics. On the contrary, the secular 'Via Crucis' without redemption staged by Dal Canto (with a technical care, in an exquisitely pictorial sense, equal to the finesse of the figural invention and of the references of meaning, passing from the notation of custom to the consideration of practical philosophy) finds in the allusive language in the imaginative expansions its own poetic dissolution, its own communicable duplication. Thus, those who would find it difficult to accept a re-

alistic transposition, being immersed in the existential situations and contingencies to such a degree as not to distinguish the features, would recognise its veracity.

I mentioned two occasions of my meeting with the works of Dal Canto. The first was for the cycle of paintings 'Venti situazioni in forma di vaso' (Twenty Situations in the Form of a Vase). It was a metaphorical journey through the unusual iconography of urns, decorated with as many scenes from everyday life: feelings and resentments, existential entanglements and melancholy, tenderness and abandonment, gambles, hypocrisies and mystifications exemplified in the evidence of the typical, but with the shifts in meaning that the wit of humour induces, as I said. The fiction introduced with the expedient of the vase was a solution of considerable interest, as it allowed the artist to place his stories in an indefinite time, recognisable as present or datable in retrospect. In short, undefined, and not by chance, since it was a matter of communicating the sense of the continuity of a common destiny in the mutability of the present time; and, at the same time, the author's congenital distrust of history.

Allow me to quote an excerpt from what I wrote on this subject, so as not to repeat in different words concepts that are also valid for this trip to Pisa. 'With the vases, Giorgio Dal Canto seems to have intended to fix in episodes or mirrors of neat painting twenty stations of an ironic, bitterly disenchanting itinerary through the vicissitudes of man, who is engaged in constructing nothing less than history (with its deeds and misdeeds) while living the disarming condition of the narrative - transitory certainties, an act that is perpetuated by the movements and gestures of existential necessity. It must be said



Ricordo (Memory), 1986
oil on hardboard 23×30 cm

Couple posing for photos in front of the Baptistery in Piazza Dei Miracoli in Pisa.



I premi (Prizes), 1986
oil on hardboard 40×40 cm

The committee has awarded the prizes and the awardees shake hands.

at the outset that Dal Canto does not believe in the-history, if not understood, precisely, as a chronicle of events experienced. History is a final balance sheet, drawn up on the skin of those who will not begin to illustrate its pages otherwise than as an undifferentiated and amorphous quantity; and it is a biased, deeply mystifying balance sheet. The chronicle, on the other hand, is truth, however temporary: it is the palpable breath and sweat of anyone caught up in the daily struggle for existence, which is a struggle for power. It must be added that the artist from Pontedera does not see any possibility of breaking the circle, of breaking the chain at the ends of which oppressors and oppressed are bound: the pieces of the scales eternally in play (...).

My second encounter was brought about by a real journey, a folder of engravings entitled 'A Greeting from...' like the present series of paintings: three delightful 'postcards' from three Tuscan cities: Florence, Lucca and Pisa. A touristic journey, then, but one-of-a-kind: not flowery and pompous, or 'intelligent', but cynically cunning, ready to pin down the glories, the dignities celebrated by history, the plight of art that is elevated to the precipitation of contemporary consumption, to the profanation of the man-mass, in turn nailed to the stereotypes of industrial culture, spectacular politics and functional anthropology, when in reality his addictions and monomania and ancient frustrations remain intact, as always wearisome and prosaic, but authentic and irreducible to the statistical motifs devised by the machine to placate people's moods.

The eighteen paintings of the Greetings from Pisa..., a journey that the artist made from the industrious province to the em-

blazoned capital city, which boasts illustrious monuments suitable as a backdrop for the adventure of the curious and shrewd gaze, are a coherent development of those three panels. The city opens up its living rooms. It even indulges in a topographical version of a medieval scroll, summarised in the 'poena merlata'. And full of surprises and bewilderment is the iconographic overlap between the noble forms and banal reductions that the city assimilates from the perspective of tourism, the oleography of carriages and group photos, of improbable nocturnal serenades from the boat on the river. Nor does the repertoire of popular Pisa seem any more credible, evoked as in a calendar of modern-day prints, where types and figures circulate with an absorbed, almost inebriated air. Better is the city that Dal Canto mediates to the artists' imagery, doubly evocative and ironic: Viviani's interiors with their tables and decorated soup bowls, the small alabaster bell towers, the popular prints hanging on the walls. Or, on the outside still Viviani, the ornate, long-lived urinal, a small monument to the ephemerality of surrogate sex, more than just a physiological needs, to the defenceless outbursts of epigraphy rather than to the decorum of the civilised city. So flirtatious is Dal Canto's Pisa, so sly is the gaze that remains suspended between enchantment and disillusionment, or rather the sharp provocation of the bitter implication that every story hides behind the sumptuousness of the façade. There is no desecration in these 'postcards' from Pisa, but rather a clear, albeit singular, intention of love and sincerity that Dal Canto sends

us with his disorientating smile, that existence is a play of parts, a seesaw of truth and fiction: in Pisa as everywhere in the world. Love lies in declaring our own disenchantments, in entrusting them to an emblematic character who represents us, so that he can carry them around from station to station. On the wings of a world, that is our world, where the human comedy is played out, a comedy that does not change with the change of scene, since the rules of the game remain unchanged. In time, the race to conquer a space in the overcrowded ark of the planet will be repeated. Power and dignity, human ambitions and miseries will clash again. And a poet will continue to give us signs of this, with Pirandellian humour’.

“Nostalgia”, Pontedera, 1987

On 21 November 1987, Giorgio Dal Canto invited everyone to the Villa Comunale Crastan in Pontedera for an exhibition of graphics and painting where he presented a portfolio of nine etchings: ‘Nostalgia’. The text that accompanies the event is by Riccardo Ferrucci: *‘The Geography of the heart and feelings, the one Giorgio Dal Canto stages in these nine etchings. The theme is Nostalgia and here art becomes more “serious and thoughtful”.*

What Babb was doing here was a new journey through his beloved Pontedera. Strolling, guided by his *‘geography of the heart, of memory’*, he *‘moves between Piazza Cavour and Via Ranieri Gotti, from Via Palestro to the Ponte sull’Era, and in the process encounters familiar and well-known characters: from the little boys on bicycles to the old men on the bench, from the water vendor to the coffee vendors’.*



Piazza Cavour, arrivo tramvai
(Piazza Cavour, tram arrival), 1987
hand-colored etching cm 35.5x26
(Malloggi family)



It was a work that continued the '*Pontedera anni '30s*' (Pontedera in the 1930s) graphics folder and that made use, as in the first case, of the observation of historical photos published in books or lent by some collector, I imagine Sergio Vivaldi or Sergio Castellani, his lifelong friends. The colours in some of them '*seem to echo the sepia colours of the old photographs*', causing '*the colour tone to fade and so immersing the drawing in a more melancholic dimension of acute regret, almost in search of lost time*'. Ferrucci adds: '*The outings within the walls of Pontedera, Pisa, Tuscany that were previously done lived in a sunny atmosphere, amidst strong, vivid colours. The realm of dreams and desires was materialised. Now the traveller is tired and aged, he feels the weight of his years, and his heart opens to memory and nostalgia.*

Places are not real, living environments, but postcards snatched from oblivion, in a frantic fight against time and the cancelling of memories'.

"The irony and grotesque, themes dear to Dal Canto's pencil, give way to deeper, more human feelings, such as pity and emotional

Ponte sull'Era (Bridge over the Era River), 1987
hand-colored etching cm 34.5x25
(Malloggi family)



empathy. These images of ageing and death are contrasted, however, by a vital image of future and hope. We are talking about the engraving 'Bridge over the Era', where a large group of storks fills the sky and heralds new life and new worlds. It is one of the highest and most poetic moments of this Pontedera journey: feelings really become symbolic images. Today's metropolis, with its factories and smog, is absent, but a necessary presence. Only progress and change make it possible to look back with regret and nostalgia'.

The sky of Dal Canto's soul is full of clouds and very little light filters through: '*There are still ironic motifs (a magnified detail, a false perspective, a lost look), but by now the journey is becoming more serious. Childhood is distant, lost and discoloured; the image of death looms up before us, disturbing and dramatic. In the artist's hands, the amused and bewildered world is being transformed into an enigmatic and obscure place; the amused note turns into a lacerating confrontation with the past and one's own dreams.*

Dal Canto's art changes radically and the fun takes on the connotations of the tragic.

Carrozze in attesa (Waiting carriages), 1989
oil on panel 40×30 cm

Sharp contrast between the old means of transport and the steam engine revolution. The carriage attendants are quiet and wait for customers (who are taking the train).





It addresses the strongest and highest of feelings. Regret and nostalgia often rise to the dimension of the sublime and the poetic, in a major key.

The arrival of the tramway, the procession, and the priests on their bicycles are happy and harmless images, but behind them there seems to be an abysmal emptiness, an ancient terror. Exorcisms of artistry to oppose an increasingly cruel and threatening world. Childhood is far away and the rigidity of old age and death approaches. The painstaking and detailed excavation of faces presupposes the path of history and time that ravages and lacerates bodies.

None that has stiffened (grown old) will win, the hope of the future is given to the weak and light (childish) flight of storks'.

'Little Stories', San Gimignano, 1989

On 13 May 1989, Giorgio Mancini from Cerreto Guidi, a journalist and owner of an art gallery in San Gimignano, presented the 'Little Stories' of Giorgio Dal Canto in collaboration with Arci Poetry. Ilario Luperini, who was called upon to exhibit the works, masterfully writes a critique that allows us to orient ourselves on the artist's path by codifying the themes and symbols: *'To name a cycle of paintings 'Little Stories' already seems to be a poetic choice. The meticulous observation of men in their everyday appearance, with all their contradictions, myths, affections, fortunes, the sadness of their illusions, the emptiness of their behaviour, the melancholy of their struggles defines a precise field of investigation, a humanity that can be looked at with ironic detachment and sometimes with bitterness and scepticism.'*

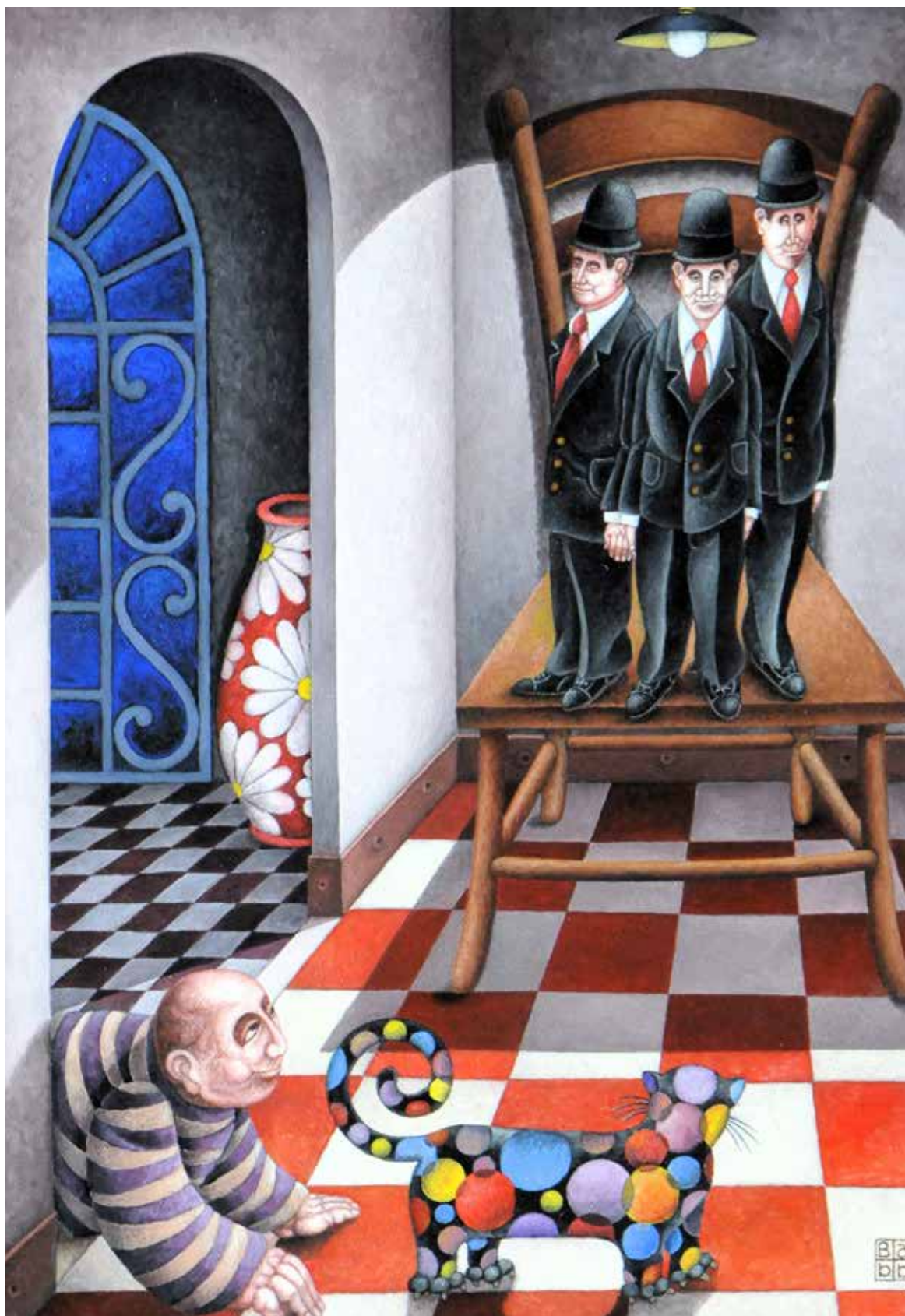
The salient themes of the pictorial and graphic work of Giorgio Dal Canto do, in fact, lie within these outlines, as has been well noted on other occasions. Nevertheless, the artist is never the same; his path of research, within the framework of an undoubted unity of style, is enriched by discontinuity, because from one time to the next he captures different aspects of his being as a world actor.

This time, Giorgio Dal Canto rediscovers with great satisfaction his provenance as a decorator; to whom he owes the sure elegance of his mark and the excellent skill of chromatic composition, in order to immerse himself with greater determination and obstinacy in the scenarios he depicts. Moreover, the little people he depicts are defined, more openly than before, in symbolic images of a larger and more complex, more absolute

whole: humanity. His stories become 'history', the tale a metaphor; and then we move away from contingent situations and towards emblematic dimensions. The human whole is polarised: on the one hand, figures denoted by uniform layers of a black colour that accentuate the stylised physiognomic and anatomical deformations, on the other hand, images with characteristic horizontal stripes and diversified colour combinations. The world, Dal Canto seems to say, is made up of 'bowler' men (from the characteristic hat of the black figures) and 'striped' men; some flat, uniform and inexpressive, the others more colourful and differentiated, but with more tense, sometimes desperate physiognomies. Surrounding them, solidly fixed in carefully constructed compositions, is usually a similarly blocky backdrop of elongated architectural backdrops suggesting medieval building structures, fantasy settings yet so resembling real glimpses of urban realities as to make the observer uneasy. In this layout, which is teeming with *symbolic objects* - the bowler hat, the umbrella, the open window (is it closing or opening?) - the effigies of animals occupy a place of their own: they repeatedly enter the field as protagonists, they stand at the centre of the composition (which they determine by occupying a large part of it), they are treated in such a way that they lose their substance as living beings and become elegant backgrounds of dense decorative textures. There are also clear references, even blatant allusions, to a reality that continues outside the picture (the finger crushing a 'stripes' under the surface of the water; the large hand breaking through from the right and in front

of which another 'stripes' withdraws in fear; the chains holding the large crowned bird), all according to the classic relationship between field and counter-field that connects a fragment of reality (the picture defined by the frame) and its undefined and indefinable 'surroundings'. Each work, therefore, is a '*little STORY*' that, however, cannot be read in isolation; it only acquires a complete meaning if it is correlated with the others, if the cycle is considered not as a summation of parts, but, in a systemic key, as a whole in which the individual elements interact continuously with each other. The relationship between the individual work and the cycle is the same as that between a life and life itself. The essential components of Dal Canto's figurative culture have already been mentioned on other occasions, but the current cycle, it seems to me, poses the problem of the 'sources' in broader terms. Not only his contemporaries, who are linked to him by territorial and stylistic affinities, but also the classics of Italian figurative culture from *Giotto to Piero dei Franceschi* and the expressionist modes of northern figurative contributions. It does not matter if this happens, perhaps, more through historical sedimentation than through conscious choice.

Dal Canto's painting, therefore, nourished by a profound figurative experience and supported by the dexterity of a hand finely trained in the art of decoration, is imbued with symbols and allegories that raise all sorts of interpretative questions: do the '*bowler hats*' indicate the power structure? Are the '*stripes*' the submissive ones? Are the umbrellas protective shields against the adversities of life? Do the big animals rep-



Simulazione (Simulation), 1994
oil on canvas 35x50 cm

Power watches over the passage of anything from the heights of its seat of power. He who has no power lowers himself to the role of an animal, represented by a cat, which precedes the passage of the person who simulates, making himself similar to the beast, the movement of the animal.

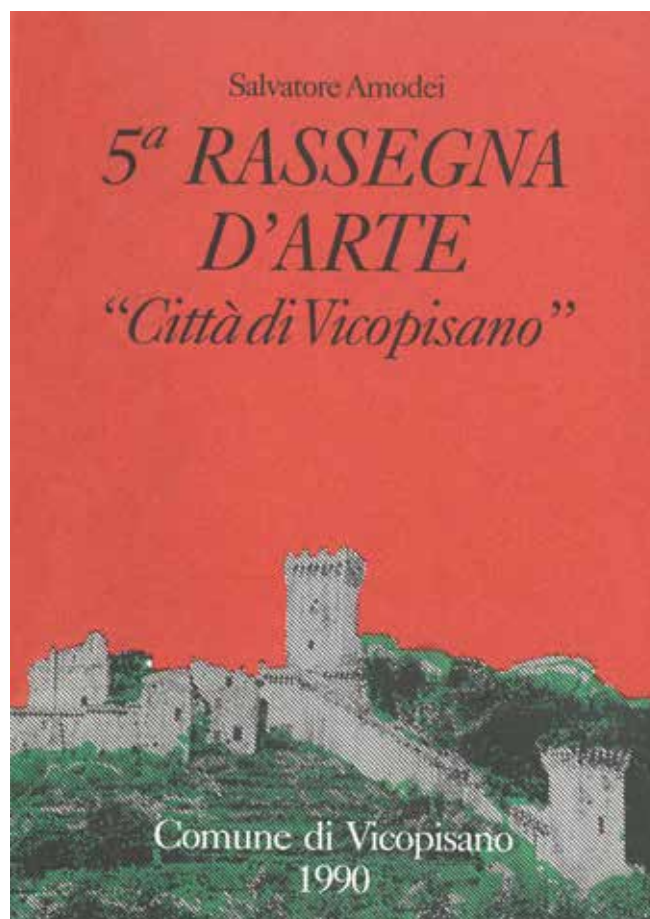
resent the dominion of passions and instincts, which, however, sometimes prevail, reducing man to a puppet at the mercy of chance? (the big cat plays with some 'stripes' reduced to the condition of a ball of yarn). The legitimacy of these hypotheses does not exclude others; and it would be useless, as well as ineffective, to propose a single and incontrovertible line of exegesis. The importance of Dal Canto's work lies precisely in this: from the apparent simplicity of the contents emerges a pressing invitation to reflect and discuss the complex human condition. But he does not stay out of the problem, he does not simply present without suggesting answers.

This time, his is not just irony; he seems to feel that man's crisis is approaching and that salvation presumably lies in a return to solidarity, which can give great strength to the defenceless meekness of the 'stripes' and a human face to the compact presumption of the 'bowler hats'.

Ultimately, however, Dal Canto is, at least emotionally, on the side of the 'stripes' and suffers from their marginalised status. One only has to look at the painting in which a theory of 'stripes with emaciated faces and bare legs sit fixedly, while a few bees stand on them and, high up on the wall, a teddy bear appears, perhaps a glimmer of lost serenity'.

5^a 'Città di Vicopisano' Art Review, Vicopisano, 1990

In October 1990, Salvatore Amodei organised the 5^a 'Città di Vicopisano' Art Exhibition and Giorgio Dal Canto was among the five artists who exhibited at the 'Domenico Cavalca'



Study Centre together with Giovanni Aiello, Ennio Formigli, Sergio Freggia and Stefano Ghezzi. For the occasion, Salvatore Amodei wrote a long and extraordinary critique in which he highlighted many aspects of the work not yet noted by those who dealt with Babb.

The artist studies the 'reality of his time' and 'profoundly experiences its problems (...) expressing - through the language of painting - his passionate participation'. Few, however, in our opinion, are the artists who manage to do this without falling into the banal, in an interesting and personal manner, so as to make the discourse compelling both narratively and compositionally. Among the latter is without a doubt Giorgio Dal Canto, whose need to produce works that do not give the impression of a cursory, if not convenient, consideration of certain situations, but are a clear yearning for more morally acceptable and socially just living conditions, such as the contemporary world can no longer give us. We believe this to be the central fulcrum of his entire work. It is undeniable, in fact,



that Giorgio Dal Canto, beyond appearances, substantially focuses on a painting that is strongly expressive of 'internal' situations and feelings.

The critic calls Babb a revelation that in the his path 'has deliberately set aside the lyrical self in order to develop a type of figurative-symbolic language with which to link up with themes of the contemporary world, to analyse people, events, customs and feelings; he has programmatically neglected what is usually called visual pleasantness in order to continue to give life to mostly grotesque characters with strange faces, astonished faces and a strange, unconventional and unconventional character.

With an ever-interlocutory gaze, through which he denounces the existential malaise of our times, the lack of dialogue between men, the impossible dialogue between power and citizens, he, above all, expresses his own personality. In other words, Babb uses painting as a means of psychological investigation, as a means of investigating human relations, political and social realities, in large and small towns (there is no difference today: the planning of values and feelings is now almost total).

Babb waged 'a *silent* battle (his own battle) against the spread of corruption in all areas of public life. Not being able to express his aversion to the countless human events characterised by injustice verbally or in writing, he entrusted his condemnation to his paintings (a kind of pictorial diary that touched on everything and everyone): an indignation that never remained an end in itself, but was transformed into social, political and moral discourse'.

In spite of the many accolades he has received, 'he has remained opposed to all forms of exteriority and faithful to his commitment on the human and social scene, determined as ever to denounce, with a subtle and pronounced sense of irony, the existential anguish that characterises the social reality, the human conflicts of our time. One of Giorgio Dal Canto's greatest merits, we believe, lies in the subtle irony (an irony that is sometimes funny, sometimes sad, and sometimes even tragic) that pervades his entire production.'

In Babb's art 'There is, above all, an attempt at the *'humanisation of art'*, in open opposition to the concept of the 'dehumanisation of art' introduced by Ortega Y Gasset. In one of his books, 'Mnemosyne', Mario Praz quotes an aptly poignant passage from Ortega Y Gasset: 'From the point of view of ordinary human life, things appear in a natural order, in a definite hierarchy. Some seem very important, others less so and others, finally, completely negligible. To satisfy the desire for dehumanisation, it is not necessary to alter the intrinsic nature of things. It is enough to upset the scale of values and produce an art in which the small facts of life appear in the foreground, with colossal dimensions'. For Giorgio Dal Canto, on the other hand, the things of human life do not follow a natural order; unfortunately, nor do they have a hierarchical order, according to importance; the intrinsic nature of things is already altered and the scale of values consequently upset. The facts of life, however small or colossal they may be (or appear to be), all deserve to appear in the foreground, to be highlighted, because in them - in all of them - lies the truth, the truth that Gior-

gio Dal Canto seeks, finds and denounces in all his works and that everyone should seek, find and denounce (or at least those who consider themselves good witnesses of their times)'.

"If we had to give a concise description of Giorgio Dal Canto's work, we could only call it, in fact, a bitter realism of human relationships. Like any other form of knowledge, art has or should have as its source the real world that exists objectively, independently of human consciousnesses."

Amodei points out that with the passing of time, Dal Canto's language 'has evolved more and more towards a realistic-satirical painting in an ironic key, but has also become more and more refined on a technical level, until it has reached peaks of poetic intensity, with truly engaging results'. By producing '*snapshots of the contemporary world*', the artist generates a 'stimulation of self-consciousness and self-criticism' and 'the condemnation, a little like Grosz, of the dramatic condition of 'social' man'.

'As a keen observer of everyday life and social life, in order to denounce through satire the deterioration of our society, Giorgio Dal Canto is not so much concerned with form as he is with communicating with his audience, whose taste he shows he understands. He always seeks to arouse their curiosity, to win over their minds and sympathies. He does this 'without necessarily lowering himself to the level of the undeveloped user, but rather by constantly trying, with very cautious gradualness, to raise their cultural level, as Lenin used to say.'

'Attention to detail does not interest him that much. Rather, the underlining of cer-

tain situations is one of the most electrifying weapons in Babb's work. Here, the balance of content stems from the search for, and the successful combination of, narrative requirements (deriving from a modern view of life and relations between men) and stylistic requirements (imposed by the need, as well as the desire, to create technically acceptable works). There is, it is true, a certain uniformity of timbre, of compositional rhythm, if you like, even a certain repetitiveness of colours, but this - far from being a flaw - it represents the characterisation of Giorgio Dal Canto's painting, the unmistakable stylistic feature of his world: a little good-natured, a little ironic, but always full of pungent truths'.

Amodei emphasises 'that whoever is devoted to a creative art cannot ignore the moral aspect of its endeavour' and Babb is very clear about this postulate.

Then in the critique, the relationship between chronicle and history emerges, which other writers have already addressed 'in service' of Babb and the 'provincial' world of which he 'sings'.

The truth is that history is made up of many different and contradictory times, and that it is mystifying to reduce everything to a single denominator, or to insist on talking about 'global' history. There is no such thing as history: there are stories. We believe that these are the prerequisites for the close look that Dal Canto takes, for example, at the Pisa-Pontedera area, a world that in his opinion requires its own temporality and special investigative tools. It has rightly been said that, in addition to front-page history, there is a more modest, secret history that the former regards with mistrust, as if it

Paesaggio n. 1 (Landscape No. 1), 1985

oil on canvas 70×100 cm

A myriad of situations in the anthill of life where one lives, works, has fun...

were nothing more than chronicle. But, as Dal Canto seems to say, it is from the chronicle of everyday events that we need to start if we want to go further, if we want to understand the meaning of human affairs, at least those of the people who surround us, who are dear to us, and among whom we live.

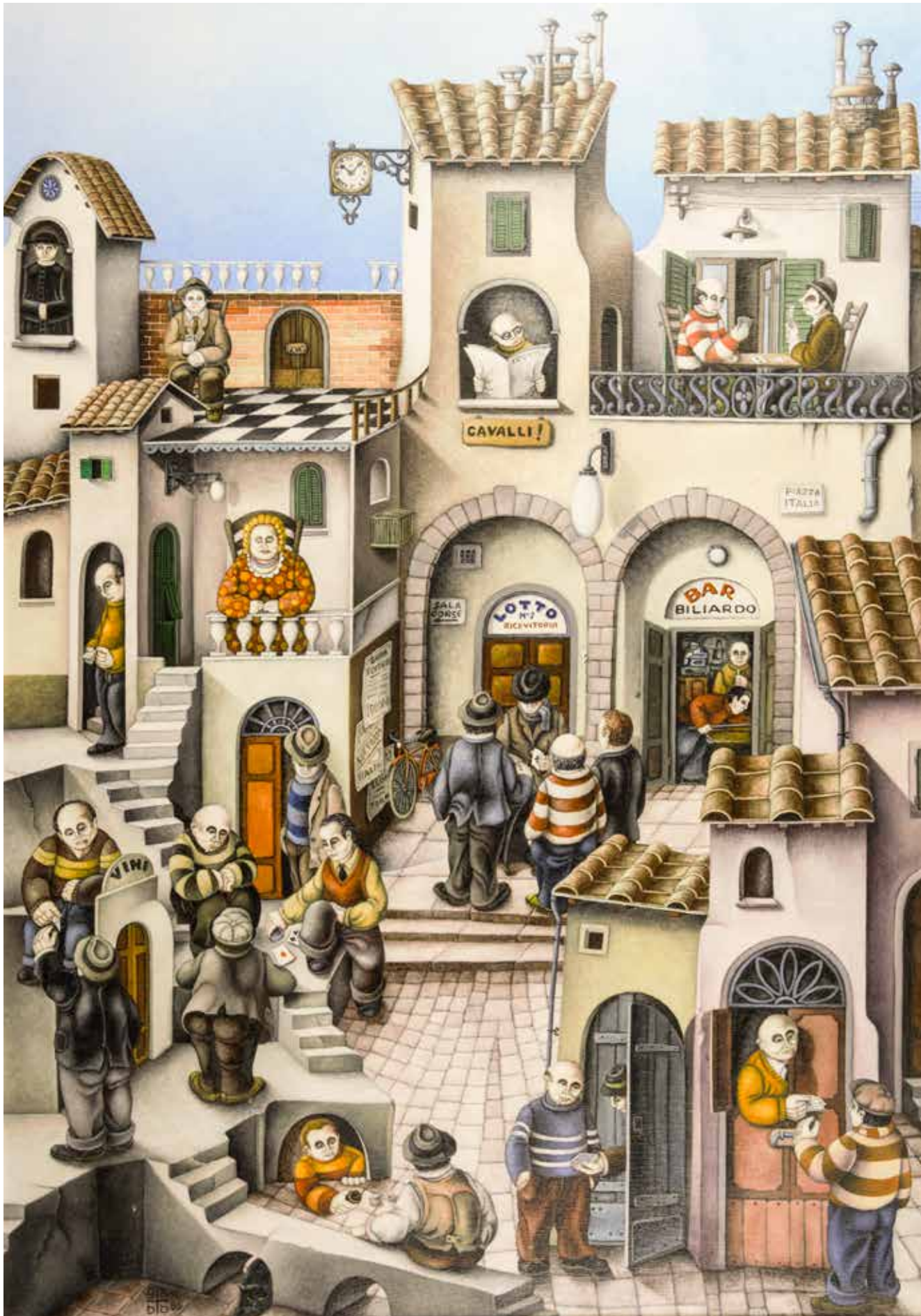
Certainly, the humanity Dal Canto is looking at seems untouched and uncontaminated by the rhythms of industrial and post-industrial civilisation, even though in the analysis of gestures and behaviour, it seems to reproduce the atomisation of relations and alienation of that civilisation. The suspicion arises that Dal Canto wants to suggest that the condition of his characters, even if it is partly caused by the alienation and marginalisation to which they are subjected in peripheral areas (compared to the great high points of the modern world), reveals a universal existential void. It is the same as it would be in New York or Rome, if only one would stop the hands of the clock for a moment and look around and inside. Dal Canto's analysis starts with an X-ray of the immobile provincial life with its days dressed up as days, and suddenly denounces a more general emptiness and suffering in everyone, both in small as well as larger towns. Dal Canto is living proof that when one has something to say, the means to do so descend naturally upon them. The satirical intent is evident in the stylisation of the faces, bodies and ways of dressing, and yet one never senses in Dal Canto a harshly critical attitude because the tics, the repeated gestures of his characters usually refer to a human drama that transcends the responsibilities of individuals. More often than not, one senses an attitude of human understanding, if not of affectionate participation. Dal Canto seems to want to say that he too, we

too, are like his little men. Of course, we can be more conformist, more sordid and actually wear bowler hats and a grey suit, or we can walk around in striped shirts and declare greater irreverence in our intentions, but in either case, we would then inevitably be reabsorbed into an asphyxiated, closed universe with no way out. The sense of existence in the background, in its precariousness, in its real drama, is the same in New York as it is in the least of provinces.

"Games are many, but in the long run they all mimic the game of life, from which none emerge, neither winners nor losers. *The fact that Dal Canto's characters are frequently very busy is a way of masking this tragic reality. Wherever the rhythm is interrupted, whenever we pass from looking at things to looking within ourselves, well, then a gateway opens up, the way to despair opens up, which only the constructions, conformisms, the 'games' to which we devote ourselves as individuals and as a community prevent us from seeing*".

Moreover, Dal Canto's works reveal 'the unspeakable fragility, tenuousness and lability of appearances', managing to investigate 'beneath the crust of modern civilisation and consciousness (since interest is always directed at the historical condition of the moment)' where 'passions, desires and impulses are stirred'.

Amodei was the only critic to describe the relationship between Dal Canto and **Maurits Escher**, the creator of the 'impossible worlds': 'We do not believe, however, that the impact of Dal Canto's works would have been as effective if the terms of a construction, or better, of a very personal invention of the image had not been present.





Bricco (Jug), 1986 oil on canvas 38×34 cm (Piero Frassi)

Babb's universe is also figuratively a closed, asphyxial universe, in which there is no place for perspective, for an ordered space, precisely because there is no possibility of a space that acts as a measure of order and rationality. City centres, streets, neighbourhoods seem to function as a sort of Machiavellian and diabolical cage. Above all, they do not function as indications of any kind of human rationality. Dal Canto concentrates his stories in the squares and alleys, but these are squares and alleys without a story, and here it seems to us that the critiques made about this painter, although often very sharp and subtle (think especially of Ilario Luperini's texts), has left out a

pictorial reference that we consider fundamental. Let us think of the Dutch engraver Maurits Escher. Escher, as we know, built fantastic staircases with his works, where one goes up but finds oneself further down, corridors in which one finds oneself at the starting point, places that are nowhere to be found. Escher is the imaginative poet of the ambiguous: of a world that branches off or multiplies into thousands of possible worlds. Escher's suggestions can also be perceived in Dal Canto, especially in the architectural décor of his works, even if the quotation is then turned into a personal direction. In Dal Canto, too, we have houses with strange staircases that seem to func-



Vagone di seconda classe (Second Class Wagon), 1988
oil on hardboard 35×23 cm

Scene of a crowded compartment of a 1970s train. Different characters and different attitudes. Note the muscular legs of the girl looking out of the window, a BABB classic.

tion outside the usual spatial logic, and in Dal Canto, too, certain constructions, piled one on top of the other, seem to invite us into passages that do not actually exist, only that Dal Canto's world, unlike Escher's, does not open, but closes in on itself, and, above all, locks up, suffocates, the poor human anthill that lives there. In Escher, the game is intellectualistic, even if fully enjoyable: our secret existential anxieties are not brought into play. In Dal Canto, on the other hand, ambiguity denounces once and for all a human condition from which we cannot

escape. The fact that Escher has been a precise iconographic point of reference for Dal Canto is demonstrated by the explicit, declared quotations, such as the flock of birds in 'Fantasie' (1986), the black/white ambiguity in 'Il mio mondo' (1979) or the impossible architecture in 'Visioni oniriche' (1986), on the understanding that this time the play is characterised by the tragic everyday and existential drama'.

For Amodei, Dal Canto's painting is militant and intends to 'put the whole of society on trial', reminding us that 'revolutions are not only



achieved with barricades, transformations are not only achieved with armed struggle, but also with paintings'. Moreover, Babb's paintings are an 'authentic expression of social restlessness and 'a way of seeing history in the light of conscience and culture'.

'The artist cannot isolate himself, contemplate, judge: what happens in his internal time is also what happens in a historical society from which it can distinguish itself and in whose responsibilities it fully participates.

Moreover, Babb's is a painting in which the real, the everyday functions as a vehicle for echoes and suggestions that, although stylistically may have more than one resemblance to this current or that school, are content-wise a symbol of the present. All his figures, each in their own way, seem to be shouting "No!" to the acceptance of a reversal of values, with the consequent establishment of ambiguous and elusive relationships and "yes!", instead, to a more critical and lucid meditation on the condition of men, on human relationships today. The colour is peculiar, repetitive (...) while the stroke is decisive, even a little robust in some cases, but there is a justifiable reason: both serve to better highlight the moral, rather than physical, violence that men, most of them at least, suffer nowadays.'

Controfiaba, Pontedera, 1991

On 9 March 1991, the exhibition **Controfiaba** opened in the Logge della Pretura in Pontedera, which remained open until the 24th of the same month.

In the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, Giuseppe Menichetti, Councillor for Culture, and Enrico Rossi, Mayor of the city, emphasise that during his 25 years of activity, Babb 'has been able to create a fantastic image of places for Pontederans and Tuscans, creating a kind of painting that is always tinged with a subtle nostalgic mood and recovery of the past'. According to these two city administrators, in this exhibition, 'Giorgio Dal Canto's painting expresses a more attentive reflection on the contemporary world, a difficult search for non-basic answers to the discomfort and deep malaise of today's civilisation, soliciting emotions of sympathy for the humble characters of the people, for the lives of marginalisation and suffering'. They conclude that 'With this exhibition, the Municipal Administration intends to bear witness to Pontedera's affection for this artist, who never tires of questioning the deviances and faults of society, while maintaining an ironic and disenchanted gaze'.

In the text that walks arm in arm with Babb's work, Riccardo Ferrucci analyses the *Controfiaba* painting cycle, which in his opinion 'brings confirmation and at the same time opens up new interpretative perspectives on the work of one of the most talented and sensitive artists on the Tuscan scene. The measure of the cycle of the stage action to be performed in several acts has always belonged to the painter'. The critic continues: 'The feeling is like moving through a theat-

Al cospetto del Potere (In the presence of Power), 1994

oil on canvas 45x20 cm

The respectful greeting, almost veneration to the statues of power in whose presence one arrives after having made a long exhausting queue controlled by the court master of ceremonies who controls the flow.



rical universe, where the various characters play their parts, intent on constructing a complicated and disturbing final message. The new Pontedera stories of 'Controfiaba' also respond to the twofold need to construct, on the one hand, a unique narrative dimension and, on the other hand, to arrive at a complex cognitive investigation, which is not exhausted in a single meaning, but has in its various paintings the fragments of a multiple and enigmatic mosaic. The paintings analysed individually may appear simple, sinning in naivety, but an overall letter of the entire pictorial cycle confirms the hypothesis of an overall narrative construction and subtle content indications. The painting becomes a particle of an organic whole that aims to achieve emotional involvement and an in-depth exploration of man and his dramas. The structural construction appears to be the newest, yet most important element of

this artistic procedure, which moves in a semi-plexity with clear references to a satirical and primitive figurative tradition, but arrives at a polyphonic dimension in the references of the various images, in the play of mirrors of the situations, in the reiteration of characters and scenes.

The last cycle indicates its defamatory nature, fiercely ironic in its title, in fact the one told by Dal Canto is a personal 'counter-fable', where the nostalgic and sentimental elements of a journey into Pontedera's memory lose their charming and positive capacity. The happy ending of the fairy tales is eliminated, the tale closes on an upturned world with characters who plummet, with worrying feet to crush the city'.

The past exists only in memory. This is a journey with no return and 'the decision to recollection thus becomes an accusation against a present lacking in authentic human values and a true sense of solidarity'.

In Dal Canto's painting, says Ferrucci, there is a backward flight as *'the only possibility to create fantasies and constructions that do not have living space in everyday life, where ephemeral and vulgar values dominate'*.

The 'bowler hats' and the 'stripes' are still there, but *'The two human categories into which the world is divided, the simple characters in their striped jumpers and the arrogant ones in their dark suits and bowler hats, have lost part of their importance. The journey into the past makes us overcome this Manichaeian division and only meet with the most sympathetic and beloved faces, with the 'stripes'.* The most obvious stylistic feature

is the large form, the circularity of the portrayed figures. The bodily abundance indicates a movement of sympathy and affection towards the characters, who have become a visual symbol of gentleness and love.

In some earlier works, the figures became thin and emaciated, almost signifying a suffering and imprisoned humanity. Some hollowed-out faces seemed to be part of a sad and painful historical memory, such as that of the lagers and prison camps. Instead, the doors of memory open the way to a happier and dreamier depiction, the fat characters are captured with good-naturedness and amusement, and they become an obvious



Monumenti dimenticati (Forgotten Monuments), 1991
oil on panel 33×22.5 cm

Men of power enjoy the pleasures of the table and forget the monuments that take on the dark colour of oblivion.

symbol of the happiness of human and social relationships. However, the sunny openings and the sympathy of the protagonists cannot make us forget that this happy humanity is doomed to disaster, to fall into the emptiness of the upturned landscape.

The sweetness and warmth, found in the cupboard of memories, thus take on a temporary value, a carnal sense of contact with this gallery of faces, which, however, are already destined to corrupt themselves in the present time that erases visions and beloved places. The protective figure of the circle, of the circular form, is not only realised in the human figure, but also the streets, churches and houses are curved as if to protect and enclose the characters, creating a closed and reassuring form for the movement of the painting. The colours become calm, quiet, and warm ones dominate, like browns, yellows and purples. The evident intention is to create a calming atmosphere and to structure a compact colour scheme, without interruptions and strong contrast. In addition, the opaque, dusty colour contributes to evoking the idea of the past, as in the old postcards with their brown hues. The great skill as a drawer, which finds splendid confirmation in the engravings, is also of primary value in the oil paintings, where the colour is always controlled and guided by a meticulous, detailed drawing. The decorations on clothes, tablecloths, street pavements and other minute objects feed the idea of a maniacal painting that finds, in the repetition of graphic initials and ornamental embellishments, the confirmation that it is moving in a known and adjoining universe, where every fragment is deliber-

ate and necessary. Giorgio Dal Canto enters totally into his fantasy world, he relives it poetically, his wandering leads him to find these graphic patterns that are both familiar and reassuring'.

The unpleasant becomes invisible and our eyes remove it, but in Dal Canto's painting, 'the figurative precision presupposes a process of knowledge of the past, which, through its light, also brings out those areas of shadow that we would like to remove. The anti-clockwise journeys, their maniacal duplication, have the task of bringing back to life, of preserving, feelings that have been lost and obliterated by the march of progress. We continually try to remove all unpleasant and lacerating images from the visible, but the disturbing is within us and, between the lines of the pictorial texture, and emerges with great dramatic force. The postcards of the past thus become worrying signals for a world which no longer includes others, the outcasts, the bowler men, the simple people. The street vendors, the non-European immigrants are just the latest example of a host of weak people, removed from our vision, but the artist's task becomes that of re-proposing to us even this less happy and less conciliatory aspect of our world. In the packaged scenario of the television show, there is no place for the different, the unusual; on the contrary, Dal Canto's world is totally occupied and dominated by the irregular, by those who oppose rigid conformism. His fat people, more than a poetic image, are a protest against a society that lays down rigid rules even on physical appearance, which does not accept diversity. In the 'contrafiaba', there is a place



Controra (Contrast), 1992
oil on panel 40×50 cm

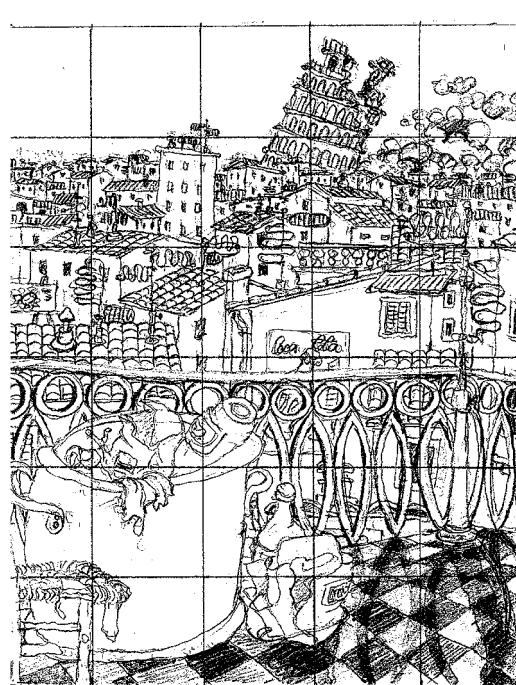
...while time is already beginning to crumble it away from our happiness. Degradation and filth produce devastating effects that destroy our country's most beautiful monuments.

for those who have no space and power in reality, and everything that is denied, that lives in the shadows, appears in the lime-light'.

Again 'in Dal Canto's painting what is out of the ordinary is often the possessor of the most authentic values of solidarity and humanity. The underlying logic is to create a strange and fantastic world to oppose the cold and rigid mechanisms of society.'

'In 'Lezioni americane', **Italo Calvino** writes: "Today we are so bombarded by images that we no longer know how to distinguish direct experience from what we have seen for a few seconds on television. Memory is covered with layers of shattered images like a rubbish dump, where it is increasingly difficult for one figure among many to gain prominence'. Our painter's endeavour is to give meaning and value back to the image, to make it meaningful again and not giving in to the chaotic spread of waste. This explosion of images affects modern art, and abstract and informal painting often becomes the comfortable refuge of an uncertain and confused language. On the other hand, absolute fidelity to figurative language becomes an extreme attempt to preserve meaning, to make one's own poetic universe comprehensible. The decorative effort and attention to detail are a conscious attempt to create a complete depiction of the world and nature. In this figurative line of a painting of simplicity, Dal Canto becomes the heir of other artists, such as **Giuseppe Viviani** or **Alberico Morena**, who desperately tried to preserve the poor sentiments of production as strong values to oppose a cruel world.

The protagonist of Lynch's latest film says 'it



is a cruel and merciless world that contains within itself a wild heart'. For Dal Canto, too, the cruel world of today must find in its memories, in the smallest things, in the humblest professions, the profound reasons for a less violent and crazy life. The dreams/nightmares of the American and Tuscan provinces come together to express a common uneasiness with regard to the slow race towards the destruction of feelings. The fat priest, the two hugging policemen, the man with the umbrella, the little man in the striped sweater are the eternal emblems of this game with time and reality, of this sentimental journey that attempts to preserve the shadowy areas, the marginal elements of our distracted and confused world. The



Distrazione (Distraction), 1992 oil on canvas 35x25 cm (Mauro Pinori)

impression created is that Dal Canto's characters are about to become symbols of our new imagination, visions that have accompanied us through the years with their evocative and poetic power; universal messages of a lost world, as are the figures of Viviani's sad dogs and the ice cream man'.

The last contribution is by Salvatore Amodei, who again picks up the themes of the exhibition in Vicopisano.

The finished story, Pisa, 1993

In 1993, from 20 February to 7 March, Giorgio Dal Canto's exhibition, *La storia finita*, was held at the Teatro Verdi in Pisa.

The exhibition counts 26 paintings all 'dedicated to the **Leaning Tower**' and the President of the Verdi Theatre Association Maria Paola Ciccone observes: 'a game ever poised between irony and the surreal, between dreams and the grotesque'. However, there is more. In fact, 'his dreams, his nightmares remind us of another great Pisan artist, Giuseppe Vivi-

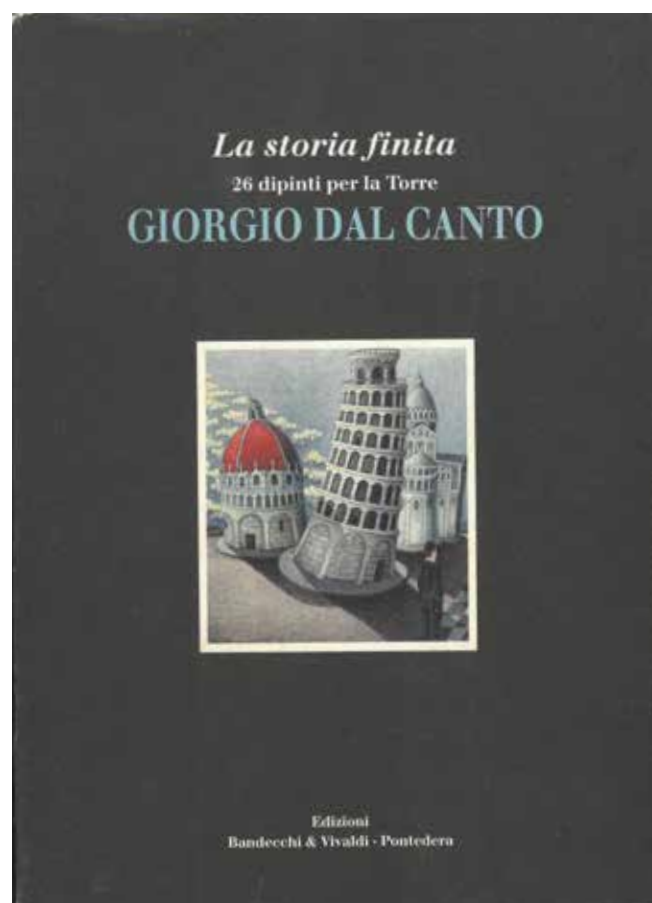
ani. In both, a nostalgic vein prevails, a desire to compose daydreams, to bring to the surface secret feelings and wounds'. Ilario Luperini in his discussion 'Ambiguity of irony' starts with a reflection on the 'civilisation of television', which 'is perhaps the most extraordinary machine that technology has invented. It is a magic box, a fairy-tale instrument, a box in which you can see the things of the world, while things are happening.

Moreover, thanks to numerical images, for the first time we can create figures that are already synthesised, images of nothingness that are simply modes of calculation. The image thus becomes self-referential in that it is not the double of something, but is the reality of itself. The false reality effect of TV produces a world that is less and less real: the Gulf War on TV was a video game, it had lost its substance. The danger is that of losing any critical relationship with reality and living in a dimension of hetero-direc-

tional infidelities. Is it possible to react to this risk? Giorgio Dal Canto, behind a sly and mischievously disenchanted exterior, has been asking himself these disquieting questions for some time now and has been searching for a solution within himself, without pre-occupying his poetic world with tasks, duties, mandates and maieutic functions that he feels are far removed from his way of thinking.

He constructs a conflict: on the one hand, supposedly truncated figures in black with the classic bowler hat, the obvious symbol of an opulent bourgeoisie. On the other, tender, pathetic men in horizontal striped shirts, seemingly subject to the symbols of power (clergy, military and third state), actually striving to achieve their own dimension of freedom, without any relationship to a world built on myths and dehumanising illusions.

But the conflict is ahistorical in its absoluteness, almost theatrical, magical, ironic, enchanted, and sometimes disturbing, peopled with figures and symbols of great communicative significance. For the most part, the conflict takes on the tones of a soft, fairy-tale-like and dreamy surrealism rather than unbelievable and disturbing. For some time now, especially in his latest cycles, Dal Canto has been evoking atmospheres that transcend the reality depicted; he constructs a kind of extraneousness from reality; there is almost like a magical slowness of the world; a pending, almost metaphysical silence envelops the figures and scenes depicted. The gaze of the individuals and crowds is distracted, dreamy, as if lost in an indefinite distance.



They are constructions obtained through skilful colouring and refined calligraphic meticulousness, at times supported by a solidity of plastic structure, all of which are aspects that remind us of his origins as an expert decorator. The delicate analytical refinement, and the skilful insistence on details never lapse into descriptivism. They are sublimated into formal syntheses of rare expressive intensity and refer back to the sources of his inspiration: not only, as is easy to see, his contemporaries (near and far: from *Viviani and De Chirico to Dalí*), but also the classics of Italian figurative culture, from Giotto to Piero della Francesca, without excluding references to Flemish descriptive minutiae.

In this last cycle, the absolute star is the Leaning Tower of Pisa, treated with caustic irony, almost with the desire to strip away a myth, to purge it of all its mercantilist scum in order to re-propose, in full, its beauty. But precisely in tackling a theme of such immediate relevance, Dal Canto reveals more than ever the profound urgency of abstraction from the

contingent in favour of a picturesque world crowded with symbols, objects, figures, animals immersed in a fantastically constructed aura.

Yet the narrative structure remains, indeed develops. The cycle must be read in the inter-relationships between one work and the next. It is a story that unravels through virtuosity and symbolism and reminds us of those analogical constructions that represent the most vivid legacy of artistic research at the beginning of the 20th century. A giant can of Coca Cola in front of which even the Leaning Tower of Pisa seems to withdraw dejected and frightened, almost as if to escape the corrosive action of the common good, which risks homologating it to the 'throw-away philosophy'. A story that ends with a lonely, small, contracted, bewildered 'stripes' in a scenery of leaning towers that merge with meagre, timid hints of landscape.

In the middle, other twenty-four scenes of a fantastical representation whose pivotal element is the painting reproduced in the poster: a leaning tower-vessel that reproduces the geared structure of the world imagined by Dal Canto on the inside. The fixity of the representation, the stylisation of all the composite elements and naturalistic references, and the obvious symbolism give a sense of the artist's conceptual operation: having realised that the world is dominated by the powerful, there are few weapons left to attempt the emancipation of the humble and honest.

One of these is humour, a kind of humour that sometimes is bitter and defiant, but never willing to pity itself without attempting its own affirmation; it is certainly not

with it alone that the world is saved, but it is undoubtedly without it that the world is doomed to damnation. A light and soft, melancholic and biting, pitiful and desecrating irony runs through the entire cycle, giving it stylistic unity and aesthetic relevance. However, Dal Canto does not propose any solutions, he only suggests possible paths to salvation, immediately withdrawing, however, into the reposition of ambiguity, of the enigma; it is as if the suggestion of mystery, of the enigma was at the basis of all his creative acts, it was at the very origin of creativity itself.

In this creative process, there ample are moments of intense and fascinating lyricism: from the silent and composed beach sonata, constructed with 'classical' measure, to 'Una storia finita'. Here we see the assailing repetition of the 'bowler hats', compressed and crammed within the confines of the tower, on which they end up overlapping and erasing its identity (power that takes over the tower and reality, and restores it in his own image and likeness?). All is observed with curiosity by some 'stripes', who remain, estranged but serene, at the edge of the scene. In the next picture, on the other hand, the 'stripes' are busy climbing the tower, but in a frenzy that is never frantic, maintaining the characteristics of estrangement. The interpretative possibilities are many and all legitimate, but herein lies the great importance of Dal Canto's work: from the apparent simplicity of its contents emerges a pressing invitation to reflect and discuss the complex human condition. Art as a process of self-awareness, then, in which lucid intelligence and disquieting

ambiguity are integrated, mutually enriching and substantiating each other.

However, when Dal Canto's cycles enter into the communication circuit also they become something more: divergent references, antagonistic to a customary system of visual enjoyment.

The analytical meticulousness, combined with the pictorial essentiality, compels us to reflect, to go to the origin of the message, to try to grasp its constituent elements and the reasons for its being. The fact that we do not find answers, but more doubts, should not cause too much anxiety: doubt is a value in itself, it is a generator of knowledge; the search for the meaning of existence is an individual path, and it is already a great deal if someone helps us to put the questions in the right terms.

For this, we also owe gratitude to Giorgio Dal Canto. Nevertheless, we must be grateful above all for the absolute originality of his research and the stimulating stimuli that come from it'.

*Riccardo Ferrucci writes about 'The Subtle Game of Utopia': 'Giorgio Dal Canto's painting with the cycle of paintings dedicated to the Leaning Tower is only the last episode in a long allegiance to the **craft** of **painting**, still understood as a craft to be built moment by moment, detail by detail. The Tower, travelling on a kind of Noah's ark, the collapsed Tower symbolising the failure of a civilisation, the Tower as a prison for a humanity divided into sections and limited spaces are the last dreams, nightmares, of Dal Canto's painting, which no longer finds room for fantasy and utopia, but seems to sense the unease and pain of our time.*

The journeys through Tuscan memories, through medieval times, in artistic myths resolve themselves in journeys with no return, man is no longer able to fly immersed and submerged in an increasingly barren and desolate land. Even symbols of irony and amusement, such as bowler men, witnesses of a grey and miserable power, do not become a motif for jokes, at most a motif of fixity and the inability to change.

It is a world that does not change and a humanity that fails to grow, that is depicted by the artist in all its tragic appearance, but through an incisive and biting design.

The collapsed tower becomes a symbol of a larger and more devastating collapse.

Man heading into the third millennium still carries within him his fears, his violence, his wickedness. This social and customary criticism is made with the simplicity of a decipherable figurative construction, but also with a particular and unmistakable style that makes each painting an important adventure, which must be experienced with great emotional participation.

*Like Viviani, Morena and **Possenti**, Giorgio Dal Canto also believes that in order to see and understand reality, it is necessary to distance oneself, as Calvino's story of the rampant baron suggests. To observe man and his stories from above with detachment as well as participation, with love and rejection. Even Dal Canto seems no longer to understand the feelings and desires of modern man. He no longer wants to return to earth, but to fly with his balloon in the blue sky, forgetting the grey and darkness of our years, entrusting the creation of a world that does not exist, of an island of utopia, to colours and pictorial signs'.*

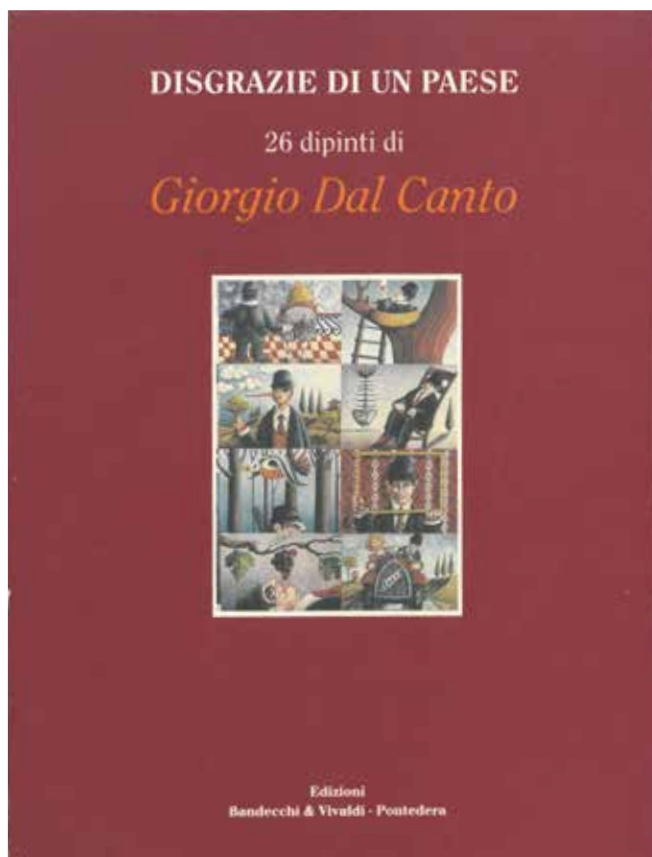


Potere spezzato (Broken Power), 1995

oil on canvas 70x100 cm

Power has been lost, it has cracked and therefore no longer works like a mirror that at a certain point cracks and breaks in an instant.

It seems all over but the symbols of power: the manual of power; the telephone and the puppet people (in the drawer) and the dancers remain firmly in the service of the new power that will arrive.



One journalist wrote: *'Thus ends the exhibition 'La storia finita, 26 dipinti per la torre' (A finished story, 26 paintings for the tower), which the Pisan artist Giorgio Dal Canto has dedicated to the famous Pisan monument and to the 'disease' it suffers from. This seems to be a consequence not of its venerable age, and thus the inevitable weariness, but of the men who hang from the columns of the noble artefact with their curiosity, manias, myths, vain ambitions, cynicism, vanity and indifference.*

This, at least, is evident from the painter's polite and pungent observations, whose satirical spirit can be translated into pictures that are highly enjoyable in terms of image

and good painting, and are always tinged with a certain poetic estrangement that removes them from the realm of comic illustration and the category of comic and consigns them to the realm of surreal invention. Each painting is a fantastic glimpse of human comedy set on the grandiose stage of the Piazza del Duomo.

The tower is, of course, the centrepiece of the action, which is not an evasive and serene game, but a serious and demanding one: a game whose stakes are much higher than those apparent, and which concerns life with its betrayed promises. Because of its structural precariousness, the tower is a metaphor for life. Dal Canto reminds us of this with his congenial irony, using the image of the tower in fetishistic and vulgar versions, in postcard reductions and objectivity in bad taste, to remind us how on this relic of civilisation the imaginary of our time is exercised as if on a projective symbol, and thus betrays its historical identity to make it a mass contaminant object. In this is precisely the tower's illness, according to Dal Canto and the 26 stages of its 'history', or rather the overblown postcards it sends us from a dreamlike Pisa'.¹

This important occasion was the beginning of an intense relationship with the city of the Tower. When Babb exhibited in Pisa, everyone fell in love with his art again, starting with the players of the city's football team.

The president of the latter was Romeo Anconetani, who was the first to buy a work by Dal Canto, and his gesture was followed by that of the players who wanted to take home a valuable painting that had captured the soul of the place whose colours they bear. The meeting with An-

conetani was textbook; the two men studied each other and after this quick phase it was a joking contest, until the handshake as is customary between gentlemen.

Disgrazie di un paese, Pontedera, 1995

In October 1995, it was the turn of the exhibition *Disgrazie di un paese* with 26 paintings, held in the loggias of the Pontedera Magistrate's Court. The exhibition recounted the 'long pictorial adventure' that accompanied the town, which in these works became a bitter reflection, an uneasiness about the present time and, in any case, an invitation to reflect by looking at his works.

Enrico Rossi, mayor of the city, and Fabiana Angiolini, councillor for culture, noted that Babb's 'latest stories' 'have a sadder and more painful note, as if, with time and social changes, it had become more difficult to capture moments of joy and serenity.

Giorgio Dal Canto's bitter reflections can be useful in trying to understand our society and its dramas, the stories of loneliness and marginalisation that hide behind the apparent happiness of brightly-lit cities'.

In the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, Ilario Luperini writes in his article 'Righe e Bombetta' (*Stripes and bowler hat*) between disenchantment and concern: 'The cycle this time is called - *Disgrazie di un paese* (A country's misfortunes) - and the reference to one of Italo Calvino's most enthralling stories is explicit. The town, this time is not Pontedera, nor Pisa or Italy: it is none of them and all of them together. In fact, the artist's field of enquiry shifts to an increasingly socio-cultural side. He tackles some of the major knots of social dynamics and focuses

on themes that have always been dear to him - loneliness, isolation and the somnolence of provincial life, the conditioning of economic power, subjection to the stereotypes of common sense - but which, on this occasion, take on a universal character.

In these works, according to Luperini, there is 'a sense of absoluteness, which in past cycles was shot through with ironic overtones, now seems to disappear, at least temporarily, to make way for bitterness and discouragement, never, however, bent towards drama, but sustained by stubborn patience'. Here, the 'stripes', the poor 'christians', his people and the 'bowler hats', the 'proud symbols of power', 'seem to be united by a sad common destiny, the inevitable fall towards individualism in a society that homogenises everything and everyone, which leaves no room for the valorisation of the individual in a system of developed social relations'. Nothing seems to be able to save and everything is characterised by a general disorientation'.

The extraordinary element in this paper and in Babb's work is the **prophetic** and light-hearted **nature** of the analysis of the future turns of society. Let us remember that it was 1995 and that we are at the beginning of the Net revolution. In that year, the first webmail service was developed and the following year, only 10 million computers were connected to the Internet. Luperini has no doubt that: 'In some of his works, Dal Canto seems to envisage the now imminent scenarios of a society governed by **telematics**: the individual will be able to communicate with all the entities in the universe, satisfy life's desires and work needs without leaving the family home. Our



Marina vostra (Your Seashore), 1994
oil oil on canvas, 50×35 cm

The aristocratic lady's aperitif, next to a representative of Power, is made up of a small person without power, like the one in the glass. The rich drink and the poor eat, one might say, but we must be careful of the contradiction represented by the table with a transparent tablecloth and therefore the table setting presents an enigma, the same as the paint labyrinth works

present-day metropolises, structured on the rigid difference between public and private space, will be transformed into cities in which their inhabitants will be able to live and work from the comfort of their own homes, but connected to the rest of the world via an immense multimedia network (*The Building*). Theoretically, the divide between solitary and communal life will be eliminated; everyone, while remaining alone, will be able to meet everyone else, interacting operationally - and therefore actively - with them through a screen. Undoubtedly, the advantages: no more downtime for travelling, no more traffic and pollution, huge savings in social costs. However, what costs on a human level? In terms of quality of life? What will happen to the sense of community, of coexistence, of sociability? What form of civil conscience will be formed? Dal Canto formulates these questions and pre-

sents more doubts than answers. One thing, however, seems to be certain: we will lose the direct encounter with things, with animals, with our fellow human beings, with their face, with their gaze. The face, the intensity of a gaze cannot be replaced by a virtual interface. Everyone runs the risk of also losing their subjectivity, because subjectivity is formed precisely in direct dialogue with others, with the outside, with the warmth of real relationships. One can find oneself in a dangerous process of total alienation. The entire history of images, the production of images, has always been accompanied by an awareness that the representation of a thing can never replace the thing itself. With new multimedia technologies, there is a tendency to do just the opposite: it is no longer a matter of representing the world, but rather of substituting reality with a virtual world, within which one can

move, operate as if it were the real world and thus do without it. But if this entails, as can be imagined, the loss of the unpredictability of the real world, then it is not a matter of representing the world, of events, the loss of the ultimate meaning of life, then that kind of communication runs the risk of being poor, and thus, of immiserating the human dimension.

Beware, Dal Canto seems to warn, the stakes are really high, the question must not be underestimated, on pain of being condemned to perpetual isolation, to the deepest solitude. That is why, in *'Disgrazie di un paese'*, his vision is no longer a disenchanted one; the artist begins to really worry about what might happen to humanity and comes out of it pensive, still ready for the ironic joke, the mocking smile, the caricatured emphasis, but decidedly concerned'.

Babb's bitter tale is illustrated instead by Riccardo Ferrucci, who reconstructs all the chapters of his narrative and the homage to Italo Calvino. *'The pictorial cycle 'Disgrazie di un paese' by Giorgio Dal Canto presents the production of the years 1994/95 by one of the most original and mature artists on the Italian painting scene.*

The painting 'Disgrazie di un paese', from which the title of the exhibition derives, is inspired by an old story by Italo Calvino from the 1950s. The meeting between these two artists seemed to have been written in destiny, a similar restlessness and bitterness shines through from the poetic world of Italo Calvino and the visionary universe of Giorgio Dal Canto.

This is how the story begins: 'There was a country in which a strange electoral system

had been adopted. The votes for the government counted twice as much as those for the opposition. On polling day, the government voters watched with fond affection as their ballot papers, as fat and bulging as eggs, slipped into the ballot box slot, from which broods of petulant MPs were to be hatched. The poor opposition voters, on the other hand, held their breath every time the ballot box swallowed up one of their fragile, wafer-thin ballot papers, which would have to be piled high to send a single minister into parliament. In this paradoxical situation, there is a deep criticism of the malpractice of Italian society and a world based on injustice and inequality.

Even the distinction between men, as made by Dal Canto, responds to an identical value of discrimination: on the one hand, the empty bowler men who hold power, on the other, the overwhelmed humanity of the striped men. Dal Canto's increasingly desperate and bitter narrative attempts, with ever new figurative and compositional solutions, to describe the cruel law of life, its mechanisms, its march towards destruction and emptiness.

The path of Italo Calvino, a writer with a refined literary taste, arrives at increasingly bitter and disenchanted solutions: from the comic and sad situations of Marcovaldo (a typical striped man) to the emptiness and loneliness of Mr Palomar (an adult example of a bowler-man). He is unable to act, and a pure observer of a world he is no longer able to decipher. In Dal Canto, an identical process of thematic deepening and, at the same time, development of dramatic situations takes place: In the 1991 pictorial cy-

cle 'Controfiaba', set in his Pontedera, the situations of loneliness and sadness are, as if tempered by the play of memory and remembrance. In 1995, the cycle 'Disgrazie di un paese' more openly recounts the malaise and dissolution of a civilisation based on false values, controlled by the media, manipulated in every way, in which the values of selfishness and violence prevail. In the cycle 'La storia finita' of 1993, the arrival of this most tragic feeling, this most desperate cry of pain could already be felt. In paintings such as 'Procession', 'Controra' and 'Binge', the story of the Teaning Tower became the instrument to portray the indifference, violence and arrogance of mankind that succeed in corrupting our most beautiful dreams, in denying us any idea of happiness. In the series of paintings 'Disgrazie di un paese', Dal Canto's desperate cry becomes visible: the violence, arrogance and cruelty of power are depicted with greater force. (...)

Thus, it is the bitter tale of a world that has lost hope, where beauty is relegated to the background (monuments, squares, churches) and civilisation seems destined to flounder in a sea of telematic waves, antennas, televisions that take away space from human relationships, feelings and life.

The poor and marginal images of prostitutes², of urinals, merry-go-rounds and old bicycles are the only positive values we can find in this pictorial world, the weak signs of life and humanity that are trying to contrast the intrusive and cold technological civilisation. In Giorgio Dal Canto's painting, the stylistic research, the decorations, the skilful play of colours are tools that make it possi-

ble to tell such a painful story, to capture, at least on a figurative level, some notes of beauty in a place dominated by cruelty and power.

In the painting 'The Choir', singing is the expression of culture and civilisation, but the other elements of the painting emphasise the prevalence of the most negative instincts. Even in 'Cultura', the world of knowledge is as if imprisoned within itself and the people vainly try to approach the volumes of this symbolic library, the power of culture is relegated to a few hands.

In a painting from the previous cycle, 'Am-mucchiata', a group of striped men sought the same ascent to power and culture of a symbolic leaning tower, but the attempt was in vain in a world governed by rigid rules and increasingly fierce category divisions.

'Disgrazie di un paese' is a series of stories where the violence of our society, the return to coercive mechanisms and intolerance become more and more evident. How can one not think of our contemporary Italy, dominated by strong powers, an increasingly arrogant right wing, and an increasingly powerful and intrusive media civilisation.

The play created by Giorgio Dal Canto makes it possible to describe the most tragic situations with lightness and levity, to confront the hell of the contemporary world: artists such as Franz Borghese, Antonio Possenti, and Francesco Musante use similar procedures to express their unease with the present.

The characteristic feature of Dal Canto's work is that we sense a special feeling in his work, a total participation in the misfortunes and misadventures of his striped men,



Labirinto (Labyrinth), 2002

oil on canvas 70×100 cm

The temple of power smiles, always!!!

The curious one, who has nothing to do with the one he is sitting on, looks down on the umpteenth aspirant who enters the temple through the door; depicted as a silhouette of the Milan Cathedral. The entrant, already dressed in the symbols of power (dark suit and bowler hat) shows his bare bottom because to enter the circle of power one must make important personal things available. The temple of power is depicted, as in other paintings by the artist dal Canto, as a labyrinth.

a poignant malaise: an authentic pain that finds a natural reference in the work of the great Pisan painter Giuseppe Viviani. There is a painting 'Landscape with moon' where we seem to fully grasp the profound emotion aroused by Dal Canto's painting: the moon, a striped man with his old bicycle and a woman of the people with a flowery dress and a large fish in her hand. The prevailing feeling is one of great sadness, even though the numerous decorations make the figurative structure rich, but the tale is as if suffocated, resting on the sadness of an imminent end, on the pain of a civilisation at its epilogue, a journey that proceeds towards night and darkness.

*The decorative richness, the waves of the sea, the flowers on the women's dresses, the wealth of detail, and the beauty of the monuments are means used by the artist to deal with a tragic story, to try to enliven a world full of death and ferocity. The path chosen by Giorgio Dal Canto to face its nightmares and the malaise of contemporary society seems to us to be the most courageous one, as suggested once again by a page from Italo Calvino. In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino makes his character Marco Polo speak as follows: 'the hell of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is one that is already here, the hell that we inhabit every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways not to suffer from it. The first is easy for many: accepting hell and becoming part of it to the point of no longer seeing it. The second is risky and requires constant attention and learning: looking for and being able to recognise who and what, in the midst of hell, is not hell, and making it last, and giving it space.*

*If Dal Canto's bowler men have now accepted hell and are part of it, even to the point of not seeing it any more, his striped men continue their **unsuccessful**, desperate, losing, but nonetheless courageous **revolt**. Dal Canto's affectionate homage to Italo Calvino, ten years after his death, is also an ideal continuation of a laborious and obstacle-ridden task: trying to find in the midst of hell what is not yet hell and make it last and give it space.*

Dal Canto's entire pictorial work is moving in this direction, but his latest ones are the highest and most painful testimony of this arduous search for humanity and life, amidst the cold technological world of computers and television antennas. A technological and clean image that is, however, only the latest gimmick of power, the latest and most modern image of our everyday hell'.



Visioni oniriche, (Dreamlike Visions) Pontedera, 2004

In 2004, from 14 to 29 February, the Centro per l'Arte Otello Cirri hosted Giorgio's dream-like 'Visioni oniriche'. Paolo Marconcini, mayor of Pontedera, introduced the exhibition, observing *'the delicacy with which the artist manages to denounce a world that he does not like, and that we do not like. His figures are not 'angular' but almost good-natured, plump, yet they effectively denounce human weaknesses. The pictorial style is naïve and at the same time surrealist according to an original synthesis that gives rise to the image of a dreamy and disenchanted Magritte, but at the same time anchored to urban reality, the Tuscan territory and the places of memory'*.

Dino Carlesi for Visioni debates Giorgio Dal Canto's 'artistic and moral lesson'. He begins his paper by lamenting the fact that Babb's art could have had better fortune: *'In today's society, the speed of communication is such that news no longer takes space and time into account, and this makes it possible for many artists to make their mark - even without merit - outside their own area of work and to make themselves known in the most diverse circles. However, it also happens that other authors - artistically gifted - remain closed in their environment of origin and create a discrete market there, resulting in a positive local critical appraisal. This often gives rise to a sense of contentment and satiety.*

This also includes Giorgio Dal Canto, whose value deserves much more critical and public attention: for several decades now, he has been serenely leading a life of his own as an artist, producing works of great

interest, both from a technical and pictorial, as well as a satirical and social point of view. For years, a strong need for human revolt has been fermenting in his work, a polemical attitude towards a world full of contradictions and injustice, which at first seemed to be directed more towards the petty intrigue of the daily news, only to become increasingly in keeping with his personal life philosophy. We could make a few small reflections on this 'philosophy': as the ancient ones (Aristotle) said and Baudelaire repeated, 'nature often appears incomplete and imperfect, to the point that the artist must intervene to complete or correct it.' The denunciation of such behaviour has always been a fundamental requirement for Dal Canto in his work as an artist, always expressed without vulgarity nor malevolence, but almost with a spirit of pity and resignation. Before us, as always stands the man, powerful or wretched, master or victim, in either case always deserving of an almost impossible forgiveness.

A crowd of defenceless citizens revolve around Dal Canto, who experience the most unpredictable situations, and the artist captures a close relationship between the situations and the most curious ways of dealing with them. Thus, "life situations always arise that never end with 'logical and compensatory answers, but get stuck at the exact point of the unresolvable contrast. One man shouts and the other is silent, one man glows with power and cunning while the other - the petty man - suffers! In addition, the roles could be reversed in an act, in a game of complacent exchanges and apparent and false supremacies. The

result is a depiction of human problems so intense that it arouses anger and indignation, but also hilarity and compassion. Evidently, the irony must have arisen even earlier in the mental preparatory phase, i.e. in the reflection that the artist devotes beforehand to the sacred affairs of human life. Man is constantly grappling with his role as a 'co-existing being' and his destinies are realised in a society of men who are generally constantly striving for their own goals: goals that generally tend to feed on the self-absorption typical of a society bent on its utopian well-being. Dal Canto captures precisely with the critical and disturbing eye of the dissatisfied the contrast between Power and the common man, illuminating situations in the light of comedy and, often, sarcasm. In every age, - classical or romantic - criticism has sought to capture the irony in the representations depicting a burlesque or disparaging attitude towards the social context from which those representations came to life. This implies a general judgement - positive or negative - on that context and particular evaluations that may arise in various situations.

Dal Canto happened to live in one of the most typical situations tangled up in the logic of selfishness and moral unscrupulousness, and he took full advantage of this, capturing the vexation and deceit, the subtle violence of the cunning and the brutal violence of the vulgar. The artist has engraved graphic sheets that seem to be intended to capture situations that are both real and paradoxical at the same time, to the extent that we can speak of his artwork as an acute reportage of truth around studied attitudes to evil. Obvi-

ously, this is not merely literary or implied irony. It is genuine satire that penetrates the situations narrated in his stories, to the point of emphasising - directly or through metaphors - the sense of mockery, and even a negative social and existential critique. In fact, the artist plays good-naturedly with mankind as if with a toy that serves his allusive artistic purposes: Power continually creates new 'heroes', new 'saints' who oppress their subjects in ever new forms with blasphemous magic or everyday offence. The feet seem to know a new way to trample and the subjects a new way to obey! They adapt, they play along almost happily, they smile, they lift their fingers, and they barely turn their heads to the spreading malaise! Masses of suffering men, all crowded together cut the bodies of the well-wishers with new shoes in two, as if to remind them that they exist. Sometimes Power can personally offer the poor a spoonful of soup, while the landscape becomes rich and grandiose to create suitable environments for the new predestined, all circling around to beatify themselves.

The faces take part in this triumph of exploitation by assuming animalistic and anatomically imperfect forms; often obsequious men on leashes return here with their tails or trousers down to suffer the ultimate scorn. The meanings of this painting succeed in making people smile, but would also stimulate them to distinguish mistakes and faults, precisely those responsibilities that men avoid taking. By chance, it will happen that a winged hat will attempt to save the existence of many good people in heaven, while Power will ascend in a hot-air balloon to its own hell. Nevertheless, many



things will have to happen first. The powerful will come to their own bodily breakdown after everyone has tried to partially take possession of it, and Dal Canto wisely succeeds in creating squares full of crowds at the same time as he succeeds in showing us a typical contradiction of this 'mass time', namely the rampant loneliness of contemporary man locked in his own despair. *In Baj's memory*, even his (less-than fairy-tale) 'generals' bend under the weight of their medals (almost all in the shape of a cross!) and the candles stand there to keep the memory alive of those who fell. What emerges is a picture of bitter condemnation of the violence of our time, of the violence of the past and of the present towards an organised aggression led by excellent 'heads of men' educated, in the noise of flags and the narcissism of mirrors that betray hidden hypocrisy. The 'republic sleeps' while man listens to the 'sonatas' of flowery women or hides in the little square of his own selfishness for reasons that are almost always 'not very noble'. The collection

Percorsi ciclabili (Cycle Tracks), 2004

oil on canvas 35x50 cm

It would be nice to cycle on tracks above the city!

Il Dado (The Die), 2009, oil on canvas 35x50 cm

The die, symbol of the game that is contaminated by mites, is in a fragile balance on the triangles. The common man covers his head to avoid being hit by the contamination. The Power, better organized, uses the umbrella to protect itself from the same effect. The cat has ousted the fish and crouches on the chair; also contaminated, by the effects of the decomposition of the same fish.

of derrieres makes a fine show of itself, while the 'remote-controlled' people juggle with the wires and antennas of the new culture, all caught up in a new 'game of the goose', where guards, judges and priests are always called to the 'post office' to keep watch. Attics, cellars and brains bow, and everyone seems to be waiting for inglorious endings, suffocated in cardboard suitcases or phoning banks to plot some scandal. Evolution seems to come to a halt, figures and things sway like reeds in the wind, as if we were participating in the end of a civilisation.

At this point, the discussion should move to the on the artistic aspect, on the exceptional ability that Dal Canto reveals to possess in the art of description in both sign and in colouristic aspects. The description already reveals the creative strength of this artist, as the contents are always new, linked to the contemporary and resolved pictorially and graphically with extreme precision and imagination. Each element is captured in its exaggerated narrative explosion so that the composition can be deformed just enough to make it functional to the confrontational spirit that suggests it. The composition corresponds to precise spatial locations and the colours are muted or brightened in relation to the desired sequences. The poetic atmosphere is triggered in the moment when, having overcome the enigmatic play of metaphors, the individual characters stand as if in front of themselves, laden with their own sorrow and arrogance. The artist changes each time in relation to the message he wants to convey, making himself the primary character in the function of a 'tale' that is both real and unreal, but always



a bitter commentary on those who look at humanity more with greed than with love. The red-and-white striped garments aim to place each being in its own penitentiary of delusions and anxieties, while the dress of the bourgeoisie remains true to funerary black, as befits their bad consciences. They move through questionable and risky urban spaces, with houses perched and out of proportion, dense together like the consciences of their inhabitants, huddled and fearful. White collars and cuffs stand in contrast to the jumpers of the dispossessed, and a few angels or butterflies intervene not so much as decorative elements, but as symbols of a blue sky that must one day rise to save the world.

Everything becomes, in that instant, rebellion, expectation, and inexorable future resurrection to the good and life of freedom.

If art must interact with the world and also act as a provocation in the face of ethically alarming situations - after having saved the simplicity and elegance of our artist's lan-

Il suonatore (The Piper), 2003

oil on canvas 60x80 cm

Communication is fundamental for Power, here represented as a magic piper who, supported by the TV showgirls, bewitches the journalists who are busy not to miss a moment of the piper's message. The media are at the service of power and the journalists are on the payroll marked by many numbers that emerge from their pockets or clothes. The bottom has been uncovered to characterize the movement of the tail that moves highlighting an excitement, like a dog wagging its tail, at the call of the sound of the piper (note the tails all turned upwards...). The sheep sniffs what emanates from the uncovered parts.



guage - then it can be said that the figural elaboration of human events that Dal Canto has been insisting on for the past 40 years is such as to prompt reflection and rethinking. It is a 'long story' written with the stubbornness of someone who does not just want to... recite the loving events of an existential situation that affects everyone, but who wants to take part in it 'live', giving the names and surnames of its winners and losers. Twenty years ago, I wrote that Dal Canto wanted to resurrect, on a memoir level, a season that touched the houses, streets and people of his city: now, the restlessness of his characters invests categories from other worlds, other

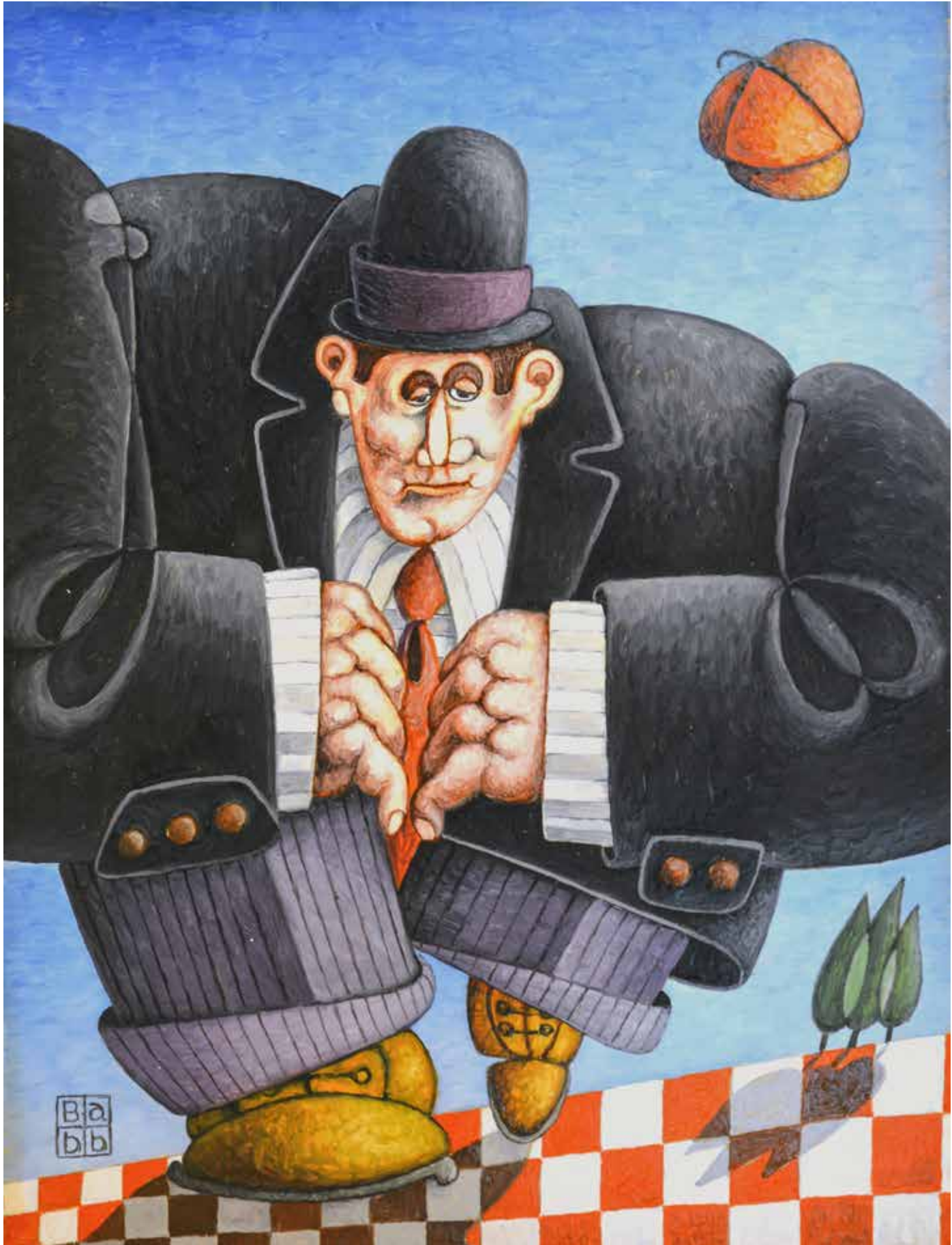
Maleducazione 1 (Rudeness 1), 2005
oil on cardboard 23×31 cm

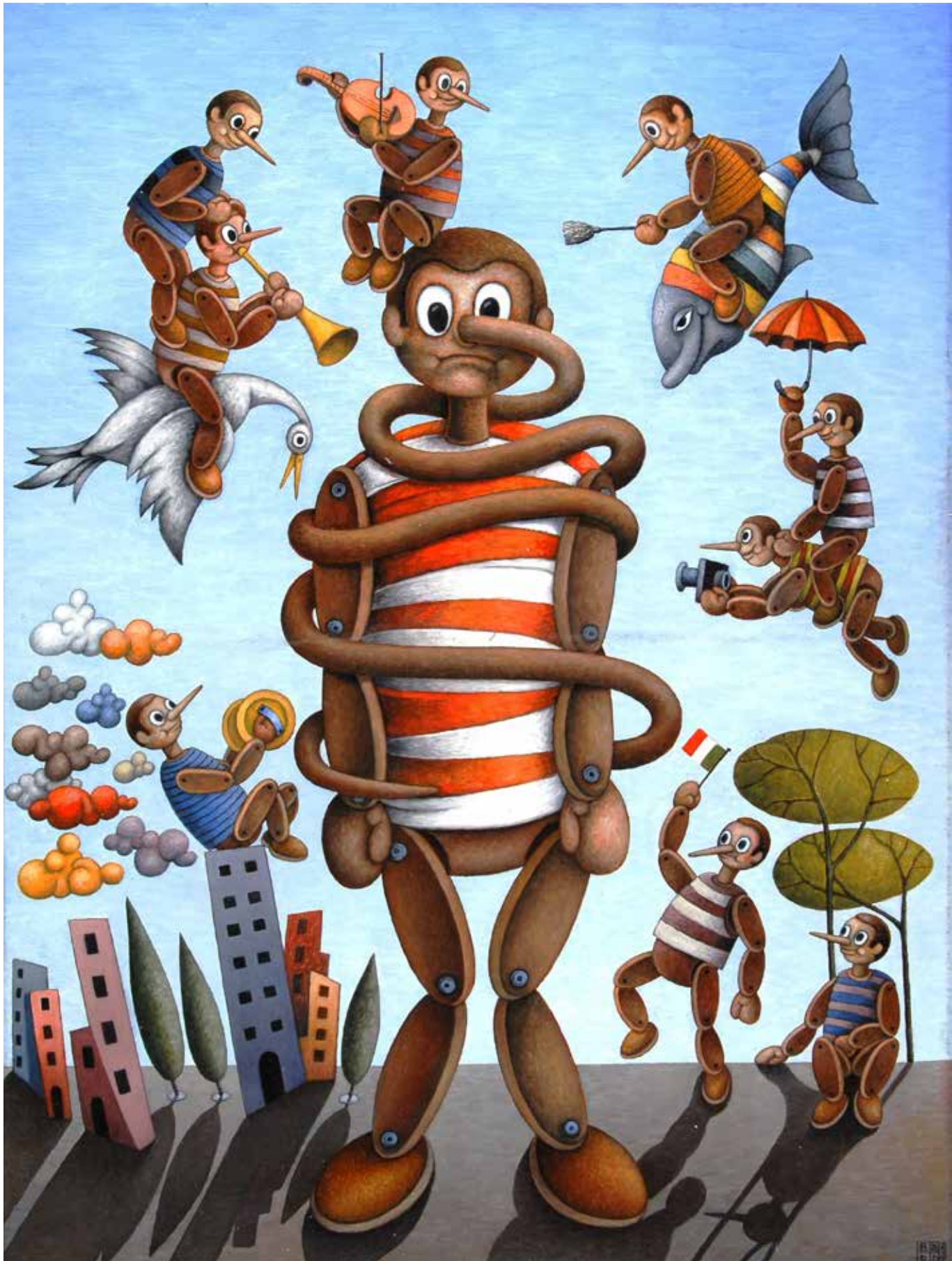
There is no more respect for anything. The attitude of the person is unequivocal with regard to what is behind him. This work is not dated, but it is assumed with great probability that it can be placed in the artwork of the year 2005.



Maleducazione 2 (Rudeness 2), 2005
oil on cardboard 19x25 cm

Power runs towards the goal without tiring too much. The chequered road is downhill. This work is not dated, but it is assumed with great probability that it can be placed in the artist's activity of the year 2005. It was in the painter's home together with another undated work: RUDENESS.





Le suonatine (Small musical motifs), 2008
oil on canvass, 60x80 cm

Pinocchio's long nose symbolizes enveloping lies.

global dimensions, also because the times do not seem to have changed situations for the better. On the contrary! His 'theatre' has only changed its name and streets, but the poetry benignly continues to touch these real and perverse chronicles with a delicate hand. If it was meant to be provocation, the artist's provocation has reached its target: it can be said that the artist paints a 'crisis' in progress, the discomfort of arrogance at all costs and the advance of a melancholy that is no longer sinister or vague, but capable of taking over everyone's existence. Dal Canto knows that he operates in a world where greed and the game of public and private robbery prevails. Only men who seem to have lost hope of changing the world for the better counter this situation. Nevertheless, on closer inspection, these men are the bearers of such an anguish that even the quietest of right-thinkers are compelled to indignation. To this indignation, the forms are adapted in ironic and bizarre ways, as if the feelings followed strange impulses of rage or opposing sentimental desolations.

There is no more respect for anything. The attitude of the person is unequivocal with regard to what is behind him. This work is not dated, but it is assumed with great probability that it can be placed in the artwork of the year 2005.

Therapy does nothing to heal such moral situations. Only the artist can benefit ethically from these artistic solutions, which can at least be liberating in order to rediscover lost balances and make art also become joy and zest for life'.

An appendix to the catalogue is the *Manichini* (mannequins) part that groups together "Carr-



ara marble works": "small sculptures in white marble" created for the Fabio Neri jewellery store "with which he has been collaborating for years as a goldsmith designer".

15th Exhibition for an art collection, Empoli, 2008

Superbabb landed in Empoli in December 2008 thanks to the Centro Culturale della Venerabile Arciconfraternita for the *15ª exhibition for a collection of art* together with Francesco Nesi. The exhibition was curated by Riccardo Ferrucci, and Ilario Luperini was also ready on this occasion to pay homage to the Pontedera artist by talking about his 'complex humanity'. **Pinocchio** enters the scene and the 'bowler hats' and 'stripes' are still studied, but in these works there is something more, another evolution: 'Giorgio Dal Canto's painting has acquired, over time, the characteristics of an unequivocal absoluteness: figures without space or time, the fruit of an unrivalled imagination. Characters, buildings and landscapes are



La pinza (The pliers), 2008
oil on canvas 40×60 cm

Caught by their own lies.



Equilibri (Balance), 2008
oil on canvas cm 60×40

Good thing this long nose is finished, otherwise how many would I have to bring???

all treated with meticulous skill. Controlled chromatic drafts create atmospheres of total abstraction, full of light and devoid of any projected shadow, except in very rare cases, where shadow is also subject to the same representational criteria. There are carefully studied colour combinations by analogy or contrast, almost obsessive attention to detail, even the minutest. There is incessant and tenacious control of the composition; the use of light, light and shadow in the painting, and the positioning of the figures in the space of the painting.

The language, therefore, is of a rare richness and effectiveness. It is capable of representing a world of idols and modern myths, of power and subjugation, of addiction and redemption, which is observed with biting and melancholic irony, but also with bitterness and, at times, ill-concealed anger. This is the bitterness and anger of those who, having gone from disappointment to disappoint-

ment, are unable to envisage (let alone expect) a gratifying future.

*The 'stripes' (the disinherited people, recognisable by their horizontally striped stripes of ever-changing colours) and the bowler hats (the powerful, portrayed with their unmistakable headgear, and dressed in black) that have characterised his work to date, defining a world in perpetual contrast between one and the other (power and its victims), become in this cycle the object of the same fate. There are woody bodies and limbs, the mechanical joints, the hands almost always devoid of fingers, and the *Pinocchio-like* long noses. The eyes are round and expressions are of astonishment, indifference, perplexity or amusement. These are true mannequins with well-defined contours, puppets at the mercy of a few unknown, undiscovered, unexplored manipulators who, perhaps, do not even exist as physical persons, but identify themselves with the ugly fairy tales that be-*

guile all the inhabitants of the small village that has become our miserable, quarrelsome planet.

The differences remain, but the contrast is softened. Even the black of the bowler hats tends to turn brown in some cases. The same features, the same intricacy of gestures unite them. Power continues to exert its diabolical action of subjugation, but fails to realise that it is subject to the same destiny, that it constructs with its own hands, heedless of the destructive and self-destructive effects caused by its incessant exploitation. Emblematic episodes from the fable of Pinocchio come into play, but they remain in the background, as scenarios. Dal Canto does not want to make yet another exegesis of the events of Collodi's puppet. Pinocchio serves him by creating immediate, universally known references without too much preamble. Pinocchio is the puppet par excellence; assuming his guise, the whole of humanity is transformed into a set of puppets. A clear example of this is the painting in which an intrigued striped man, seen from behind, gazes at a world of telematic objects (mobile phones, computers and the like) that have captured a humanity made up of cheerful women, serious 'bowlers', and distracted 'stripes' suspended in an atmosphere of total fantasy.

The enthralling fascination that emanates from his works is precisely due to the abstraction and, at the same time, the profound humanity of his people and places. A human abstraction, in fact, that reminds us from far away of the nightmares and utopias of Surrealism. This pervades and gives meaning to his figures, suspended and floating in a space that is as immobile and unreal as it

is usual: Stereotypical little trees, buildings that, in their grotesque transformations, recall famous monuments (one for all, an increasingly ramshackle Pisa Tower), perilous urban landscapes that have all the flavour of our desolate, dense town outskirts.

Dal Canto shrewdly observes his and our world and deduces a hopeless situation: mankind is definitely distracted by new and tempting mirages with few merits and many flaws. Technological innovation seems to bring enormous benefits to the quality of life. At least, so it would be, Dal Canto thinks, if it did not create new and increasingly distressing slavery that leads to the dulling of critical faculties and is detrimental to independent thinking. Moreover, so do all religions, and even the worn-out ecological postulates and idealistic utopias of redemption. Nevertheless, his inspiration and his entire artistic work cannot be reduced to such simplistic parameters: his is a very complex and articulated vision, full of things said and unsaid, of deep thoughts and simple intuitions, of lyricism and inspiration. The complexity of his feeling is a symptom of the complexity of the society in which we live, a complexity that cannot be reduced to a few reassuring watchwords. Complexity must be grasped and understood, rather than removed. Any reduction cancels out the most authentic human dimension.

It reduces us, indeed, to the condition of a puppet; a puppet that even becomes indifferent to the need to seek out and denounce its puppeteers. That is why Dal Canto's paintings are so full of symbolism and require meticulous and careful observation,



which must go well beyond the first amused impression. The paintings in which the 'stripes' stand out as melancholic protagonists - signifying that humanity is largely composed of the dispossessed - undoubtedly prevail. But, even the powerful do not escape their fate as puppets. This is shown in the painting in which a group of 'bowler hats', clad only in the symbol of caste (the bowler hat) and gaudy ties and tassels, belts and holsters, holding a truncheon, stands in an urban landscape formed by a likeness of famous buildings, as it reveals itself in all its mechanical nudity. Only the truly powerful (the pompous tycoon, the stereotypical queen) retain a semblance of human features, they stand above everyone else, they direct the moves on the chessboard, but they too are locked in the ambiguity and precariousness of their condition.

Beneath an easygoing attitude, as *a seasoned individualist anarchist*, he hides a rare depth of thought and a sincere concern for

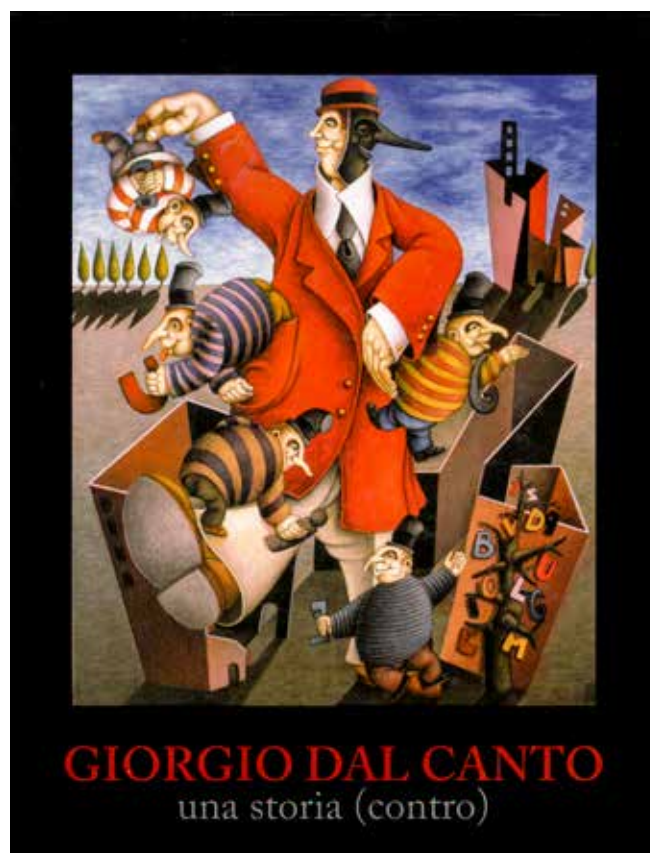
the fate of his fellow human beings, thoughts. This feeling that can only find its way to the surface thanks to the artist's ability to condense it into figures of great communicative effectiveness. They are deep thoughts and sentiments, articulated not through reason, but entrusted to the strength of the image - that Dal Canto invites us to observe with care and accuracy.

The deafening chatter of the talking crickets. The captivating merry-go-round of the deceptive fairies. The enchantments of the fascinating technological means. The hedonism of power. The loss of identity and the fallacious illusion of its reproduction in changed situations. The self-satisfied conceit of the police. The illusion of being able to regain human likeness. The hardening to being taken for a ride: these are all themes that Dal Canto develops with skill and sagacity. He observes and does not want to get directly involved, he tries to look down, but fails to maintain the ironic distance that has

characterised him at other times. His participation in the situations he portrays is more active: a strong sense of irony remains, but it is permeated by a greater sadness, or, rather, by the awareness that the time for ironic intellectualistic corrosion is over; and that he needs to roll up his sleeves if he does not want the current downward slope to lead to the ultimate disaster. There is one picture that seems to confirm these convictions: in an opaque setting, a frightening machine with open jaws is about to devour an indistinct, naked humanity, without 'stripes' nor 'bowler hats', reduced to a heap of puppets awaiting their fate without the perception of drama, their stereotypical faces crossed by a silent, serene indifference.

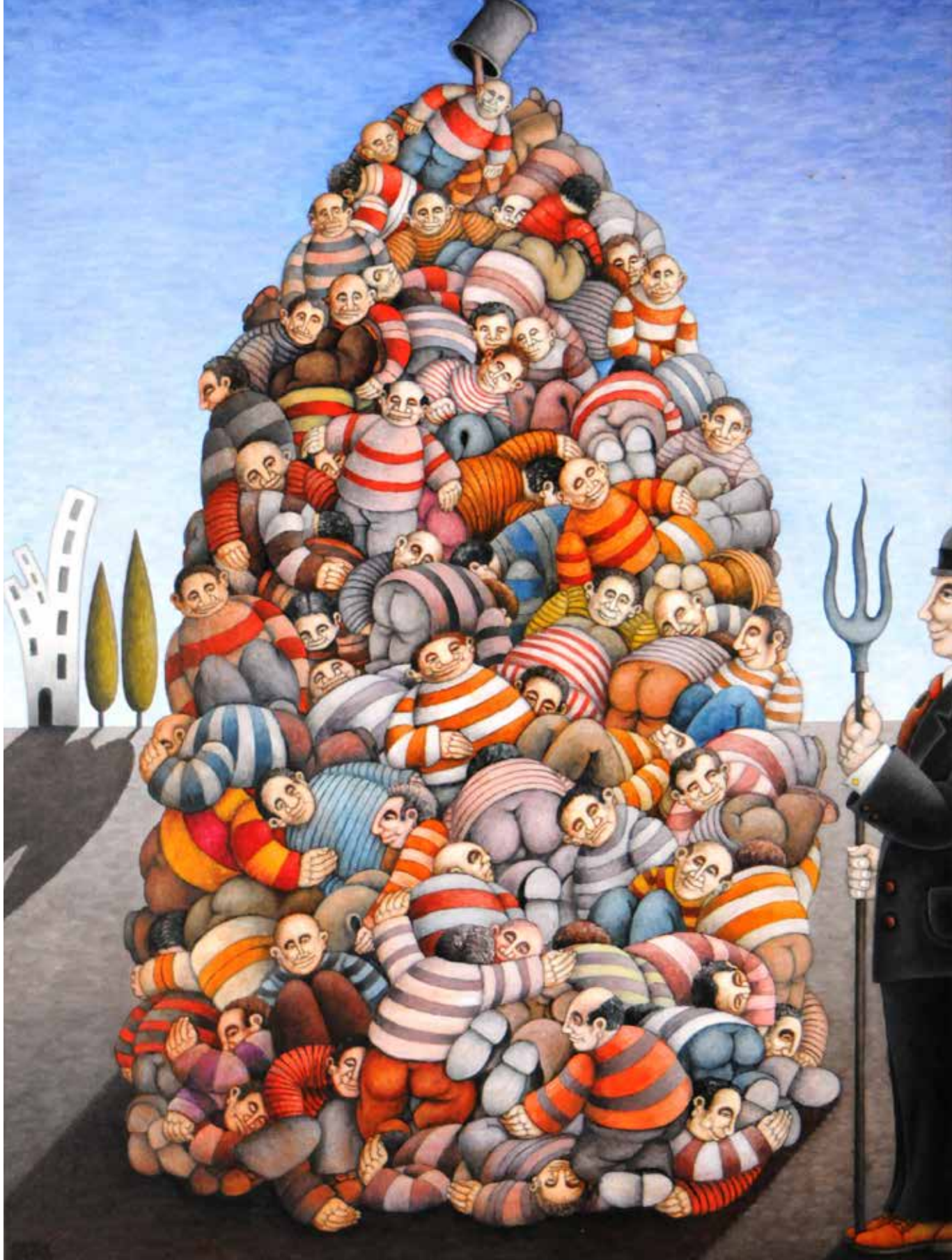
Each painting in the cycle lives an independent life, but is also a tile in a single mosaic. Just as, within each work, the figures are enclosed within their own defined limits, but interact intensively with one another; so too, between one painting and the next, there runs a thin thread that makes the cycle homogenous and coherent. Dal Canto does not tell stories, he does not depict events; he captures and fixes situations, concretions of thoughts that become universal axioms. It is only when they descend into the personal experience of each observer that they can be traced back to the concreteness of the everyday, and thus become stories.

In this cycle too, Dal Canto evokes atmospheres that transcend the reality depicted; he constructs a kind of extraneousness from the real world; there is almost a magical slowness of the world, a suspended, almost metaphysical silence envelops the figures and scenes depicted. The gaze of individu-



als and multitudes takes on an unusual fixity, as if lost in an indefinite distance. The fixity of the representation, the stylisation of all the compositional elements and naturalistic references, and the obvious symbols give a sense of the conceptual operation conducted by the artist: from the apparent simplicity of the content emerges a pressing invitation to reflect and discuss the complex human situation. Nevertheless, Dal Canto does not propose solutions, he only takes note of risky situations, withdrawing himself in the reproposal of ambiguity, of the enigma, and as if the suggestion of mystery, of the enigma was at the basis of his every creative act, was at the very origin of creativity.

As in previous cycles and, perhaps, more than ever, Dal Canto's works become divergent reflections, antagonistic to a customary system of visual enjoyment. The analytical meticulousness, combined with the pictorial complexity, forces one to reflect and go to the origin of the message, to try to grasp its constituent elements and to discover the reasons for its being. The fact that one does not find



Il pagliaio (The Haystack), 2008
oil on canvas 60×80 cm

Power, depicted in the person on the right holding a gallows in his hand, almost as if he were a devil, gathers ordinary people into an orderly pyramid that resembles a haystack. Note the socket at the top of the stool that farmers used to prevent rainwater from penetrating into the wood. It is a very cynical scene that transpires from the attitude of the face of the representative of power; deliberately cut in half in the painting, who stares with satisfaction at the work done.

Sedia elettrica (Electric Chair), 2008

oil on canvas 60x80 cm

The righteous is killed, sacrificed like Christ. The power standing behind the electric chair watches impassively and smilingly as everything that can represent the "contest" sitting on the electric chair, with its head bowed and its body exhausted by the oppression suffered.

In the background the clear allegory of American subjugation.

answers, but more doubts should not cause too much anxiety: doubt is a value in itself, it is a generator of knowledge; the search for the meanings of existence is an individual path and it is a lot if someone helps us to put the questions in the right terms.

Art as a process of self-awareness, then, in which lucid intelligence, detached irony and disturbing ambiguity complement, enrich and substantiate each other'.

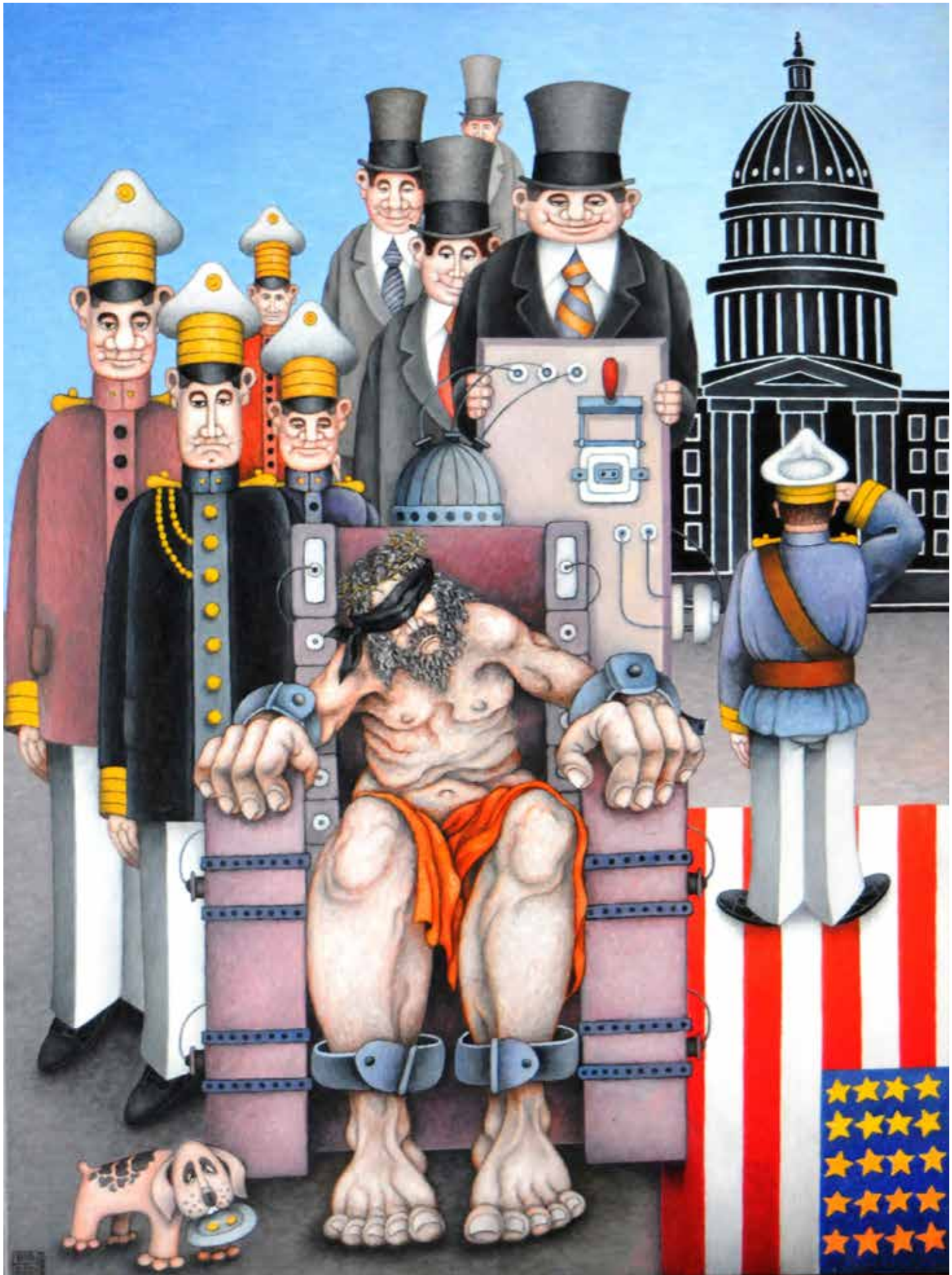
A Story (against), Pontedera, 2009

2009 was the year of the great exhibition *Una storia (contro)* at the Piaggio 'Giovanni Agnelli' Museum from 9 May to 20 June.

The mayor of Pontedera, Paolo Marconcini, opened the catalogue: *'In the series of pictures exhibited at the Piaggio Museum, Giorgio Dal Canto, known to the general public under the pseudonym Babb, does not depict different human beings. In sacred art individuals were not depicted, each with his or her own problem, but rather, through human figures and their symbols (halo, instruments of martyrdom), ideas were expressed. Similarly, here a social thesis is upheld and the whole of humanity is affected, highlighting the extreme intellectual flattening and the new symbols, one of which is the mobile phone. Babb's playful yet sharply satirical denunciation identified the theme of lies as the motif on which to focus his polemic. And we have to say that Dal Canto was truly masterful in his painting in making Pinocchio's long, thin nose a universal symbol of deception, the condition of 'simple' people who have allowed themselves to be deceived by the continuous flow of information provided by television,*

newspapers, websites and advertising. As the American writer Vance Packard pointed out at the end of the 1950s in his book The Hidden Persuaders, many information channels are propaganda tools at the service of industries and economic/political lobbies, which, through an alliance between advertising and analysis, subtly threaten freedom of opinion. The puppet man, therefore, the mechanised man, the man without a soul who is atrociously shredded like any organic waste and who floats lightly in the air because the weight of consciousness (ten grams) that would keep him grounded on earth is not there. Dal Canto is not Otto Dix, who illustrates the decadence of bourgeois society with deforming realism, or George Grosz, who is even more fiercely aggressive; instead, he follows a fairy-tale inclination, where life is told in a fantastical way. Nevertheless, from this way of telling comes satire and condemnation. Thus, Babb becomes a kind of poetic analyst of the movements of men who have no doubts, while according to Norberto Bobbio's aphorism, 'the task of every man of culture is to sow doubts, not to gather certainties.' In the hope that Babb's work, this ironic, critical surrealist naïf, can help to shake as well as ease our consciences'.

This exhibition was housed in the Museum that tells the story of the Vespa and the Piaggio world, and at the helm of the Foundation that manages the space and its prestigious activities was Tommaso Fanfani, a professor, an economist, born in Amintore Fanfani's hometown, Pieve Santo Stefano. In his speech he noted: *"It is precisely in the fifteenth year since its inception that the Piaggio Foun-*



dation accepts *Giuseppe Diomelli's* proposal and chooses to host the art exhibition 'Una storia (contro)' in the Piaggio Museum, in the old premises of the company's former tool shop, where the signs of man's work resist the passage of years and history. Giorgio Dal Canto is a well-known artist from Pontedera, recognised by critics for his great talent and known to most for his satirical cartoons in local periodicals and almanacs. With extraordinary irony, Dal Canto is a sensitive interpreter of contemporary society, with all its complexities, where the profound values of life seem to have been lost. His portrayals are messages that lead us obediently to reflect on the contradictions of life and human nature. We live in a world dominated by the lust for an often-corrupt power, which is pursued at all costs, even if this means wearing the mask of malice and holding evil in a way that is the opposite of what should be man's natural vocation: conscience and a sense of humanity.

The themes addressed by sincere and multifaceted artist are all topics of great current interest and Dal Canto always proposes them with an irony that veils deep concern and melancholy. The artist also pays homage to the Vespa, in the painting 'La gente allunga il collo' ('People stretch out their necks'), in which a problematised atmosphere is recreated for Piaggio's vicissitudes in an economic situation that has often been difficult in the past years: people stretch their necks, which is like saying they 'tighten the belt'. But it is not up to me to talk about the artist from the point of view of the content of his extraordinary and evocative poetics. It is, however, up to me to point out how the

Piaggio Foundation has come together with a man as enterprising as Giuseppe Diomelli, and with a local artist, with the sole objective of pursuing the guidelines of the Foundation itself, i.e. to give greater substance to the function of cultural promotion of our territory".

Babb portrays the Vespa in a few works: in an oil on canvas entitled '*La Vespa*' of 2005, where men ride the wonder invented by D'Ascanio, as Fanfani recalls, stretching their *necks* (i.e. tightening their belts), and in the work '*People stretch their necks*' of the same year, again underlining, with this metaphor, the 'company problems of Piaggio in Pontedera'³ at that time. The Vespa will return in some other Babbesque work, but as a characterising element of the town.

For 'Una storia (contro)', Dino Carlesi's critical text is powerful and precise. He does not miss the opportunity to emphasise strongly Giorgio Dal Canto's poetry, themes, artistic approach and much more. The speech is entitled: 'A poetic attack on power'.

"An exhibition by Giorgio Dal Canto always feels like a great lesson: of sociality, of ethics, of sympathy. His canvases become messages, or rather communications of meanings in which man is almost always the loser, obedient to a *Power* that in every situation tends to place him in the position of loser. The facts are intertwined; the events lead Power to always prevail in favour of that world that even the puppet Pinocchio tries to unmask on every page of the book. Power is not held by the crowds, by some politicians, by those with 'bare asses', by those who do not live in the centre, or by those who frequent the labyrinth. The Pied Piper, the power that 'stinks'

in every place and always in the same way, holds power. Power is not held by those who sleep, by those who become animals, or by the poor man drowning in a glass. Nor it is in the hands of those who hang on to their own little scenes, or those who settle for a fish, nor of those who do not reach the high limit of culture, or those who go to the gym to vent their anger; women, for example, who go for a walk with their Sunday purse.

But Dal Canto goes deeper into eras and seasons of an even older world, when copper figures taken from history and mythology were also then linked to human situations. Knights and pages, merchants, possible death, the awaited angel, became decorations and symbols, documents of an era and a culture lived in taverns, as well as in palaces. Dal Canto continues the tradition of these stories in today's customs. The 'King of coins' or the 'Woman of hearts' are renewed. The 'Jack of Clubs' and the 'Joker' set off on the 'Western Express' on their adventure in the game of life and death, always winners or losers, open to risk, to the tension of love and custom.

Carlesi then goes on to complain about the 'lack of' critical success of the artist and, on the subject of games, he repeats what he had written on the occasion of the exhibition *'I giochi e le scommesse dell'uomo'* (The Games and Bets of Man), reiterating the concepts he had expressed on the occasion of the exhibition *Visioni Oniriche* (Dream Visions). He goes on to analyse the **Pinocchio cycle**: *'The artist Dal Canto reveals his interpretative possibilities, all legitimised by aesthetic taste, as when he presents us with the cycle on 'Pinocchio'. In fact, the artist's latest endeavour*

is related to the twenty-three paintings on the Collodian work: Pinocchio. A harrowing sequence that, if examined in detail, would require an incredible amount of study and time. Elements of Power control an elegant apartment block from above and below (with curtains, dogs, trees, churches hanging in the balance), while the 'powerless' disappear into the sun-drenched wardrobe, the crowd (watched between pitchforks and paradises) trudge in a pyramid fashion as if caught between power and non-power in an extreme libertinism of posturing, while the religious authorities with their gold stripes bully and kill the poor Christ.

While the pinocchio-harlequins subvert and upset the real city, others are playing the tricks of the small procession in vain; others are preparing formulas so that the Power can better fulfil the indecent formalities of the landlord's trickery. When Pinocchio arrives, the crowd quickly tends to study the puppet's head, to become spectators and actors armed only with their gloves, and to flee in defence of their little house, while others defend different and bright dwellings and the Police - the real power - is mocked by Pinocchio's counterpower which wants to disrespect it. Unfortunately, Dal Canto's Pinocchio is caught and brought back by Gepetto. Naked and with long faces, they are all there with the power that dominates them. Therefore, almost all of them become Pinochios when - as usual - the powers-that-be allow everyone dances and cakes, even leaving freedom in the coils of the joyful, now all conquered by the false Power granted. The Pinochios fish, play sports, do business, run television stations, love beautiful wom-

en and gold coins, force others into silence, intercept every broadcast, move to the videos and form patrols.

Pinocchio's revolt is his rebellion against the quiet romanticism of the honest patriotic 19th century, in which Power constitutes itself as a self-creating power that directs the country and the world. It also builds downhill roads for itself, enters the cathedral with its 'backside' uncovered, in the 'polluted Arno', Power floods churches, bell towers and cities; the piper follows the magic of controlled communication. Everything flies and all powers intersect, while the losing 'counter-power' slumps down with its striped shirts, lined up in worship of the Leader. Power raises up its little myths (the shoe, the fish, and the socks), tries to take over the pseudo-culture and attempts a ridiculous critique of the world of the 'musclemen' of the day. It exalts the man in the bowler hat to again fill the city's drawing rooms, insists on computers that divide citizens and brains as well as penetrating the fibres as symbols and myths. They open bank doors, and forces are measured in the fair square with the old hotel making way for the new and women - beautiful and ugly - carrying around their flesh. Everyone thinks of Power as a benign mother, and this enchants an endless crowd, and monuments are inaugurated. Filthy things hide in labyrinths, Botticelli's 'Three Graces' rise up overwhelmed by a lovelessly painted physique, while politicians compare ugly faces with each other. In the Vatican, there are those who go up and those who come down, even though the dome of St Peter's closes in on its own subtle power, but the

misery remains, the necks stretch and the belts are pulled. History changes, the euro culminates in an ice cream offered to the poor, while those without power carry the man with tie and bowler hat on their shoulders. The corruption of football triumphs, with the crowd invaded by interested supporters. Everything with Power transcends all of space, because everyone's long nose tells the story of untrue events, directed by a Power that does not allow anyone to intervene, while all around them ideas, faces and attitudes change with trumpets, antennas, masks and countless other things that, like the characters in 'Miracle in Milan', fly on brooms towards a possible happiness, even if the wind continues to be against them'.

Ilario Luperini, on the other hand, focuses on the 'artistic journey marked by irony and bitterness, disenchantment and concern'. He takes care, like Carlesi, to emphasise the lack of attention paid to Babb's work, who for over forty years has 'been conducting creative work of a remarkable calibre, deserving of far more critical attention than his secluded work has so far attracted'.

The critic again analyses the conflict between the 'bowler hats' and the 'stripes'. A conflict that is the 'guiding motif of all his long and fascinating work' and that 'takes on different characters from cycle to cycle, almost as variations on the theme'.

Then 'some considerations on the characters and themes that make this author an example of linguistic coherence, intellectual rigour and creative richness' already expressed in the criticism on the occasion of the exhibition 'La Storia Finita'.



Il professionista (The Professional), 2002 oil on canvas 50×40 cm (Federico Nocchi)

The themes addressed are analysed below, which 'are all of immediate topical interest; they are treated with passion, in a whirlwind of suggestions from which the first to be involved is himself. Above all, there is irony, light and suffused, melancholic and biting, pitiful and desecrating to the point of sarcasm. It is an irony that is sometimes bitter and defiant, but never willing to bend without attempting its affirmation. It is certainly not with it alone that the world is saved, but it is undoubtedly without it that the world is doomed to damnation. It is precisely in tackling themes of such immediate topicality that Dal Canto reveals the profound urge to abstract himself from the contingent in favour of a motionless pictorial world, above time and space, crowded with symbols, objects, figures and animals immersed in a fantastically constructed aura. Here are the characters with fixed gazes and hollow eyes, hooked noses and flared nostrils, the mechanical poses of the bodies, the suspended

atmospheres, the clear, almost unshaded colours, the sharp contours, the uniform drafts, the compositions in unstable equilibrium.

As his artistic journey proceeds, the terrain of investigation shifts to an increasingly socio-cultural side; it addresses some major issues of social dynamics and dwells on themes that have always been dear to him - loneliness, isolation, conditioning by power; subjection to common-sense stereotypes - but which take on a character of ever greater universality. The figuration appears to be underpinned by a more explicit accentuation of tones ranging from dreamlike phantasmagoria to certain overtones of surreal symbolism. The decorative apparatus is increasingly richer, both in terms of composition and in terms of colour, and seems to preclude an explosion of *joie de vivre*; in reality, it acts as a counterpoint to an increasingly bitter vision of reality and the places of existence.

The brighter the colours and the richer the



environmental construction, the more the drama of existence becomes evident with increasing intensity. The colour scheme becomes more uniform, permeated by vibrant linear intensity, without this meaning that the drama of existence becomes more and

more intense. The colour drafting becomes more uniform, but that lead to any flattening or loss plastic consistency. The vision of the works is multiple and complex. The eye is first attracted to the emerging figures in their proportions and com-

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Arlecchino (Harlequin), 2008
oil on canvas 60x80 cm

Power disguises itself as a harlequin to signify the various aspects (heads) that the power that holds the ancient game of cat and mouse in hand can have in a scenario of denial of the cities represented by the overturned palaces and monuments

Tutti Pinocchi (All Pinocchio), 2008
oil on canvas 60x80 cm

posite solutions. Then, slowly, it spreads to the details, but never loses sight of the overall sense of the whole, even when the symbolism of certain details (strange animals, fruit depicted in an only apparently decorative function, glimpses of urban landscapes, lonely and silent distances) appears incomprehensible.

This is due to the artist's ability to bring all back to unity, through chromatic gradations and the evolution of the line, every detail that, in itself, is taken care of with extreme attention and precision. The result is that sense of absoluteness that is a constant feature of Giorgio Dal Canto's works; a sense of absoluteness in which the initial, undisguised irony seems to soften to make way, at least at certain times, for the bitterness and discouragement, never, however, leaning towards drama, but sustained by genuine patience and an indestructible desire to fight. 'Stripes' and 'Bowler hats' are again united by a 'sad fate' as had been seen in the 'Disgrazie di un paese' exhibition, 'especially in the cycles created in the second half of the 1990s, one only has to look at the faces of the characters, all equally melancholy or caught in expressions of apparent tragic gaiety to realise this, or the positions of the bodies, individually or in improbable tangles, denoting accustomedness and subjugation, almost a sort of awareness that the occult manoeuvring agents (the ecclesiastical hierarchies, the powerful few of the earth) condition humanity in the same way, regardless of social class.

Not even traditional culture saves us any more. Cities lose their original connotations: their monuments are crowded togeth-



er and, although still clearly recognisable, they are taken out of their context to indicate the common risk of loss of identity to which humanity is condemned by multi-media civilisation. In this context, the image of the Leaning Tower of Pisa often recurs, isolated or depicted together with other monument buildings. It is worth remembering, moreover, a cycle entirely dedicated to it, in 1993. The Tower is almost always treated with caustic irony, with the desire to strip away a myth, to cleanse it of all mercantilist waste in order to repropose its beauty in its entirety, to remove it from the corrosive action of the common good, which risks homologating it to the 'philosophy of disposability'. Since 1995, with the cycle 'Disgrazie di un paese', Giorgio's vein seems to be crossed by greater anxieties. The sense of powerlessness increases, concern grows, particularly with the awareness that a media empire is building up in Italy that conditions the very rhythms of existence.

Functional to power are, in fact, the easy means of mass communication that the powerful use to induce preconceptions, clichés

Sgombero (Clearing Out), 2011
oil on canvas 100x70 cm

Everything is transformed after being used and therefore emptied from the places where people work, where they live. People, monuments, furniture, bikes and even the symbols of the homeland (flags), which are on the cart and on the ground are removed. The mites have their place in this process and Pinocchio watches motionless.

This work is cited on page 693 of the publication of the Italian Pavilion of the 54th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale 04 June – 27 November 2011

and stereotypes. Power forces man to live in the day-to-day, losing his sense of history. Moreover, the news with which the media inundate us daily is either black or pink; one induces fear, the other stupidity. In addition, against this conditioning action of television, Giorgio Dal Canto frequently focuses his attention.'

As well as television, Babb's focus, starting from the period of 'Disgrazie di un paese', is on telecommunication, the Internet, the advantages, and many risks it brings to society.

'And his world becomes more and more a paradigm of the absolute, far removed from the temporary. The man, the artist Dal Canto is stilled with the will to fight, but he is also aware that he is faced with ever more arduous paths'.

Riccardo Ferrucci closes the critical section by speaking of the artist as 'in between light-heartedness and poetry', stating that 'Giorgio Dal Canto's exhibition 'Una storia (contro)' (A story (against)), through a vast cycle of works, fully demonstrates the artistic greatness achieved by this artist from Pontedera', who does not give up telling us about the mechanisms of power through the relationship between 'bowler hat' and 'stripes'.

'The characteristic and originality of Dal Canto's painting is that he is able to describe the existing power relationships and the ever-increasing progression towards a cold and technocratic civilisation, but telling the story in surreal ways that are always different. The magic of poetry and the craftsman's hands of imagination enable this Tuscan artist to find new figurative models to narrate the eternal game of life, history and power. His latest cycle 'Burattini' (puppets) once again demonstrates Dal Canto's rare in-

*ventive ability to create a vast tragicomic fresco out of the universally known story of Pinocchio. The artist's idea is not simply to tell and describe the stories of the Collodian character, but to traverse these well-known symbols with his own poetic and stylistic stamp, narrating a new contemporary tragedy that looks back to the past and illuminates the present. The images of the fable already contain a strong social critique and the idea of a power mechanism that nullifies the aspirations of freedom and individual choices. At the bottom of the poetic journey is the idea of humanity being enslaved and deprived of direct tools of knowledge. Television, computers and mobile phones are the symbols of a fragile modernity, but they become, for this Tuscan artist, the tools for manipulating consciences and creating a mediated and merely virtual reality. The popular striped men are unable to grasp the reality of the world, and are forced to live in a global and totally manipulated civilisation, like the one described by **Orwell** in his prophetic book '1984'. **The big brother** who guides and monitors our desires, impulses and emotions.*

It obliges us to talk along pre-defined paths, preventing us from living freely. We are made to pursue false myths of a utopia that brings no happiness, rather only tragedy and solitude. The painting of the puppets that end up in the rubbish bin is an exemplary story of our civilisation, which destroys our feelings and natural human aspirations. The tone of the tale is dramatic, authentic, tragic, but continually elevated by the poetic timbres of invention and fabulation, which finds new original ways to express the anxieties of our time with imagination.



In Dal Canto, we find the authentic and popular language of the tempestuous characters of another great Tuscan artist, Giuseppe Viviani. The latter succeeded in illuminating, with poetry and humanity, a world crowded with humble and marginalised characters. Dal Canto's striped men are an ideal continuation of Viviani's figures, the protagonists of a game that they do not fully understand and in which they are forced to endure the rules written and laid down by others. Dal Canto's strength is that he succeeds in creating a vision that is tragic and dramatic, but always written with a tone of humour and satire. In some ways, these stories remind us in their depth and harmony of the poetic worlds created by Antonio Possenti and Franz Borghese. These artists, behind a celebration of signs and colours, nevertheless conceal deep anxieties and uncertainties. As the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky reminds us, 'Those who will remain in the history of cinema as 'authors' are all poets. In

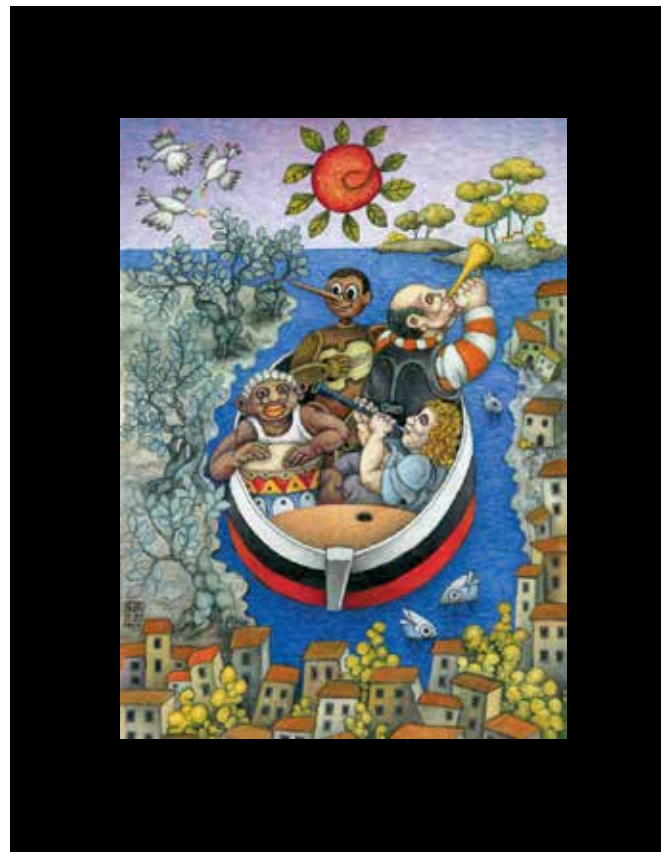
*my opinion, there is rule: arthouse cinema is a cinema of poets. What is a poet in cinema? He is a director who creates his own world and does not attempt to reproduce the reality around him. In painting, an identical law applies, and in this sense, we can say that Dal Canto is also an **authentic poet** who creates his own universe and does not attempt to reproduce everyday reality. The dimension of the fairytale, of the artistic creation is always strong, the world is divided into two large categories (Stripes and Bowler hats), but Dal Canto's story (against) pervades every narrative moment: from the recent puppets to the cycle of the players, from local memories to the stories around the Leaning Tower. The pictorial universe he has created, over decades of work and inventions, can be read as one large fresco dedicated to a sorrowful humanity that is losing its authentic values and is increasingly a prisoner of betrayed dreams and utopias. Faced with continuous poetic strain, our 'author' is like a*

Giorgio Dal Canto, *Pinocchi* (Pinocchios)
Ponte de Sor (Alentejo, Portugal)
5-22 June 2010
Centrum sete Sòis Sete Luas

demiurge. He is always coming up with new visions and combinations, as if pulling cards from his deck of tarots, realising that painting is perhaps only the rare ability to give voice to the indefinable, to mystery, to the secrets of life. Among the founding values for the new millennium, Italo Calvino indicated lightness: 'the images of lightness that I seek must not allow themselves to be dissolved like dreams by the reality of the present and the future'. By different routes, Dal Canto too, throughout his pictorial adventure, pursues a dream of lightness and lightheartedness that allows him to overcome the grey dullness of the present age. His gaze is ironic and disillusioned, but his compassion and love go out to the simple striped men, losers on canvas, but bearers of an indelible idea of humanity and truth. If we live in the age of television and digital technology, no one can make us forget the power of a smile, a piece of sky, or a sincere gesture of affection. This is the lightheartedness that the artist invites us not to forget, to find once more the fragile, delicate and refined images that can resist the logic of power and the false flattery of civilisation.

Thanks to his consistency and ethical commitment, Dal Canto has magically succeeded in finding that fragile balance between art and colour; between narration and song, which has enabled him to build an admirable universe of stories and illusions, of light and colour; which simply and mysteriously becomes poetry.'

Thus, Ilario Luperini closes the critique by discussing the 'complex humanity of Giorgio Dal Canto' in a contribution he wrote in 2008 for the exhibition in Empoli.



Pinocchios, Portugal, 2010

In June 2010, Dal Canto's art crossed national borders for the first time and, thanks to the Festi-val Sete Sòis Sete Luas, was welcomed to Ponte de Sor in the Alentejo region of Portugal with the exhibition *Pinocchi* (Pinocchios)

Venice Biennale, Venice, 2012

2012 was the year of Super-Babb's greatest art accomplishment. After having 'performed' in various artistic theatres, he arrived on the big stage of the 54th *Venice Biennale* on the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy.

The title of his admirable contribution in the Italian Pavilion '*L'arte non è una cosa nostra*' (Art is not a thing for us), curated by *Vittorio Sgarbi* was '*La Bugia, anche gli elefanti hanno il naso lungo*' (The Lie, even elephants have long noses)

This artistic adventure was included in the 'Avvenimenti Speciali' (Special Events) and consisted of two unconventional façades, numbers 101 and 102 of the 'Thetis' space in the 'Arsenale Novissimo'.

The compositions were produced with the artist Renato Menghetti, the curatorship entrusted

ed to Ilario Luperini and the directing to Alberto Bartalini. On his return from Venice, Babb's art came back home with an admirable exhibition at the Centro Otello Cirri and Babb talently created his own version of the Vespa scooter. Finally, his art continued its journey, ending up at Pisa Airport.

For the grandiose Venetian event, a catalogue was produced, in which the Prologue illustrates the plot of the whole artifice: *'It is a long, perilous and fascinating theatrical action that unfolds over an entire year. There are four performers: BABB, the creator of the works that form the incipit of the action; Renato Meneghetti, who subjects it to an extremely intense X-ray investigation; Stefano Stacchini, with his fascinating elaborations; and finally the director, Alberto Bartalini, knowledgeable, refined, ingenious and exuberant. The idea is brilliant: to hold an event in Venice, at the Biennale, to bring to light an artist who, although good, has never left the confines of his region, Tuscany, and to submit his works to a series of acts aimed at highlighting its excellent qualities. To build effective interactions between: one artist's craftsmanship which puts refined handwork at the basis of his creations and the formal inventions of another artist who knows how to act with expertise in the contemporary world as an established painter of international stature and the magical spaces of the city of lagoons. The inspired director guides the experience with sagacity and passion: he chooses the performers, imagines the scenarios, studies the atmospheres, fantasises about the actions. His is a multifaceted project that develops step by step, starting from an intuitive scenario,*

enriching itself in progress, drawing inspiration from sudden illuminations that spring from his fervid imagination and profound knowledge of art history, of which he knows how to grasp even the most hidden corners, the most secret details, suited to his articulate theatrical sensibility, very much in tune with the spectacular baroque machines'.

Stefano Stacchini on the occasion writes a contribution that will also be included in the publication dedicated to the Italian Pavilion curated by Vittorio Sgarbi⁴: *'In Collodi's Pinocchio, the path of growth leads from the Puppet to the real Child. The sacrosanct right to lightheartedness is sacrificed to duty, and frivolousness is destined to clash with the harshness of life. Babb 'fishes' his Pinocchios out of everyday life, and their vices are obvious, but he envies them with a sly smile and his good nature. Renato Meneghetti's Pinocchio, seeing all the other Pinocchios being ridiculed, runs away with the desire to remain a puppet, a rebel against the destiny of becoming a child.*

And if the Lie has a long nose... then what about Elephants?' Therefore, the curtain rises with Act 1 'For Venice': 'The director sees Babb's works vibrate with the rippling of the waters, transfigures them into transparent, reflected images, and fantasizes about them as they merge into the jagged outline of the sumptuous palaces on the banks of the canals. He chooses the pictures that seem to him to be most suitable for this sumptuous setting, and designs the project around them. He creates the conditions for his proposal to be as successful as he aspires, and is convinced it will be. However, he does not stop there;

Dal Padiglione Italia
54. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
Biennale di Venezia

Babb

Giorgio Dal Canto



LA BUGIA

ANCHE GLI ELEFANTI HANNO IL NASO LUNGO

indagine X-RAYS di **Renato Meneghetti**
collaborazione artistica **Stefano Stacchini**

Ilario Luperini - Curatore

Il Sindaco del Comune di Pontedera

Simone Millozzi

ha il piacere di invitare la S.V. all'inaugurazione della mostra

Mercoledì 6 Giugno 2012 ore 18.00

Centro per l'Arte Otello Cirri

Via della Stazione Vecchia, 6 - Pontedera (Pi)

La mostra resterà aperta fino al 14 luglio 2012 - orario lun/sab 9 - 13 / 15 - 19 • Ingresso libero
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regia

Alberto Bartalini





Vecchi e nuovi equilibri (Old and new balances), 2011
oil on canvas 100x70 cm

In a barren landscape where plants no longer bear fruit but skyscrapers oscillate old and new balances at the top of the nose of an old elephant imprisoned with capris reduced to applauding puppets.

The Mites are in the place of honor.

The values are trampled under the paw of the imprisoned elephant, who cries.



54th Venice Biennale, the work of Giorgio Dal Canto



54th Venice Biennale

Padiglione Italia

54. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
della Biennale di Venezia

L'ARTE NON È COSA NOSTRA

a cura di **VITTORIO SGARBI**

Nel *Pinocchio* di Collodi il percorso verso la crescita va dal Burattino al Bambino vero. Il diritto sacrosanto alla spensieratezza viene sacrificato al dovere, e la leggerezza è destinata a scontrarsi con la durezza della vita. Babb pesca i suoi Pinocchi nella realtà quotidiana, e i loro vizi sono evidenti, ma li invidia con il sorriso sornione e la sua indole di persona perbene. Il Pinocchio di Renato Meneghetti, vedendo tutti i Pinocchi messi alla berlina, scappa con il desiderio di rimanere burattino, ribelle al destino di diventare bambino. E se la Bugia ha il naso lungo... cosa dire degli Elefanti? *Stefano Stacchini*

In Collodi's *Pinocchio* the young protagonist must cease being a Marionette and become a real Boy. The inviolable right to carefreeness is sacrificed to duty, and lightness is destined to clash with the heaviness of life. Babb discovers these Pinochios in everyday life and their vices are obvious; but he envies them, with his sly smile and his right-minded nature. Renato Meneghetti's *Pinocchio*, seeing the other Pinochios being mocked, flees with the longing to stay a marionette forever, to rebel against his fate, that of becoming a boy. And if the Lie has a long nose . . . imagine an Elephant! *Stefano Stacchini*

La Bugia

da *Il Pinocchio* di Babb
Anche gli elefanti hanno
il naso lungo

The Lie

after Babb's *Pinocchio*
Elephants have long
noses too

Tese 101 e 102
Arsenale Novissimo
Spazio Thetis
Venezia

indagine x-rays di
Renato Meneghetti
collaborazione artistica di
Stefano Stacchini
regia di
Alberto Bartalini

x-ray study by
Renato Meneghetti
with the artistic collaboration of
Stefano Stacchini
directed by Alberto Bartalini

*La Bugia. Anche gli elefanti
hanno il naso lungo / The Lie.*
Elephants have long noses too
2011

da *Il Pinocchio* di Babb
after Babb's *Pinocchio*
indagine x-rays di / x-ray study
by Renato Meneghetti, regia di /
directed by Alberto Bartalini
Facciate Tese 101-102, Arsenale
Novissimo, Venezia

La Bugia / The Lie, 2011
da *Il Pinocchio* di Babb
after Babb's *Pinocchio*
indagine x-rays di / x-ray study
by Renato Meneghetti, regia di /
directed by Alberto Bartalini

La Fuga / The Escape, 2011
da *Il Pinocchio* di Babb
after Babb's *Pinocchio*
indagine x-rays di / x-ray study
by Renato Meneghetti, regia di /
directed by Alberto Bartalini

Sgombero / The Move, 2011
da *Il Pinocchio* di Babb
after Babb's *Pinocchio*
olio su tela / oil on canvas
70 x 100 cm



Sponsor

*La Bugia. Anche gli elefanti
hanno il naso lungo*
è un progetto artistico
interamente promosso da
*The Lie. Elephants have long
noses too* is an artistic project
promoted entirely by

CDC SpA

AVVENIMENTI SPECIALI A VENEZIA / HAPPENINGS IN VENICE - La Bugia

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Pisa, Galileo Galilei Airport, Babb's installation

even before approval for the idea is given, he perceives the developments, sets them aside for the time being, but is ready for them to re-emerge, even richer and more articulate. At the centre remains Babb. The director is won over by the scenic quality of his work, by the lighthearted and, at the same time, scrupulous and penetrating way of dealing with vital issues. This is the moment Babb develops the Pinocchio cycle. Pinocchio serves him to create immediate, universally known references. Pinocchio is the puppet par excellence; by taking on his guise, the whole of humanity is transformed into a collection of puppets. The 'Bowler hats' and 'Stripes', Babb's traditional performers, also share that same fate. Their wooden bodies and limbs, their long noses, their round, wide-rimmed eyes, their expressions - at times bewildered, at times indifferent, perplexed or amused - are true maniquins. They are puppets at the mercy of a few unseeable puppeteers who, perhaps, do not even exist as physical persons, but can be identified with the ugly fairy tales that all the inhabitants of the small village that has become our miserable and quarrelsome planet are beguiled by Stefano Stacchini, then, with his usual skill and intelligence, composes spaces, transfigures images, creates intense dreamlike atmospheres, and emphasises and expands the poetry of the whole. *The Lie* is born: Pi-

nocchio's long nose finds its alter ego in the elephant's trunk. This gives rise to the fantastical transposition: *The Lie*. Elephants have long noses too'.

Act Two '*Behind the Scenes*' describes the artistic 'marriage' between Renato Meneghetti and Giorgio Dal Canto: '*On those images, providently, Renato Meneghetti descends, with his habitual exhilarating mastery. He isolates details, pierces them with his x-rays that enhance their vivid physicality. With this artistic activity, Meneghetti digs into the flesh and history and searches, in both, for that which constitutes the backbone, the indestructible part. He wedges himself under the skin and imagines the pulsing of that which is beneath and beyond, a metaphor for that which is concealed in appearances, in search of the substance, the essence, the nature. The X-ray is something that passes through the surface and crawls into the depths, revealing the complexity of bodies and objects, a structural, physical complexity. The skeleton resists time and so does art, which - as such - resists fashions, market forces, prejudices, stereotypes and the lac- es of power. Pulvis es et in pulverem rever- teris: in the process of the transformation of matter, the skeleton represents the last stage of structural solidity, before the progres- sive disintegration. Thus, Meneghetti en- ters into harmony with Babb's Pinocchios:*



Pisa, Galileo Galilei Airport, Babb's installation

he deprives them of colour; isolates them in a spectral transparency, and reduces them to mechanical robots that reveal their inner workings.

The different skills and personal sensitivities are compared and integrated: ideas interact with each other and so are enriched, and opinions, which are sometimes discordant, tend towards convergence. The initial project moves towards concreteness: the director, the established artist and the visual poet work behind the scenes around Babb: its figures expand, until they take on the consistency of an intervention with a strong environmental value.'

Act Three, 'La Biennale di Venezia' illustrates 'The Set': 'The project begins to take on form. An unusual ritual takes place: a few warehouses overlooking the lagoon come alive with unusual figures that merge with the landscape, under the sloping roofs of the first one a crowd of jubilant figurines, piled up confusingly, all waving little red-white-and-green flags (2011 was the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy), and in the chaotic jumble, a falling Tower of Pisa - a universal symbol, a stereotypical image of the Bel Paese - is inserted. Underneath, with the timing of the action more relaxed, a naked Pinocchio fisherman and another Pinocchio 'bowler hat' in a blue robe appears, dragged in by a rabid dog trying to attack a meek white

sheep. Next to it, the static, impressive pregnant mannequin who seems to be staring in astonishment at the photographed elephant, the latter, with its trunk thrown up in a loud trumpet, chases a Pinocchio in stripes who, overtaken by his shrunken, X-rayed image, hastily prepares to leave the scene. All the while, two other little striped Pinocchios, straddling each other, take photographs. This is an ironic metaphor for a world in which falsehoods triumph, while the massed crowd does not realise this, because they are constantly caught up in events, festivities and activities created to distract them.

They are images created by a free-flowing imagination whose boundaries are difficult to imagine. The apparent simplicity of Babb's figures and scenes conceals a complex interiority, an articulate thought, a man who favours doubt over certainty. He is endowed with a critical spirit that corrodes but does not destroy, that rejects appearances while searching for the contradictions of being.

The Venetian Biennale is enriched with bizarre, unusual, curious figures. Babb's works become engaging posters, in close dialogue with the buildings in which they are placed. The challenge is to attract the attention of passers-by (and seafarers), to accompany them in the transition from the distracted gaze to the questioning of the meaning of those images, from the haste of the impres-



Adaptation of the Pisa Ludoteca

sion to the slowness of thought. Babb's unique images become everyday scenes; art merges with everyday life'.

Pontedera is the star of Act Four: 'Change of scenery. The Venice Biennial has 'anointed' a painter who for over forty years has been doing creative work of considerable stature, deserving of far more critical attention than his secluded activity has so far attracted. Since the Venetian event, Babb has returned to 'his' Pontedera, but he does not stop here. Other people and places in the world await him, and the project of which he is a part, built by a passionate and competent collector, an energetic director, and an effective organisational machine. The venue this time is the Ortello Cirri Art Centre. Convinced that creativity is increasingly understood as the possibility of combining memory and style, experimentation and representation, ornamentation and communication, the Centre aims to promote and disseminate art in all its aspects: literary, visual, theatrical, musical and choreographic.

The director transforms the exposition space: the whiteness of the rooms is crossed by the dynamism of a continuous black band; the windows are dimmed, the spotlights are di-

rected onto the pictures hanging on the walls, in such a way as to create an atmosphere of strong theatrical intensity. The spaces are enriched by the presence of bizarre furniture and furnishing elements. An elephant besieged by amused Pinocchios in striped shirts; an unstable but solid armchair with redundant swirls, isolated in its clarity and covered with Babb's images; furniture by Venio Santoni, another little-known expert that the director silently brings onto the stage.

Why throw away used pallets once freed of the goods they pack? That is the question that Venio Santoni seems to have asked himself when he used them to make his attractive furniture: creations in which the skill of the craftsman is combined with the imagination of a refined inventor, resulting in geometrically harmonious, provocatively and ironically beautiful and useful forms. The already widely explored aesthetic reuse of waste and the everyday object acquires here a dimension of unusual effectiveness and a flavour of absolute novelty. A sort of poem of the absurd, a 'repechage' of fragments of reality with lighthearted mental and emotional associations, revealing the vitality, the semantic charge, the humanity accumulated



La Vespa, 2005
oil on canvas 60x30 cm

The Vespa as a common means of transport and freedom. The allegory of how much one 'stretches one's neck' or 'tightens one's belt' in these times is noteworthy.

in the waste, in the refuse, in the residue of our opulent society.

If, then, that furniture is combined with Alberto Bartalini's fervent imagination, American-style cushions and placemats with images from Babb's paintings, with their desecrating irony, the result is phenomenal. A mixture disorients and amuses, provokes and makes one smile, disconcerts and satisfies. Babb's paintings animate the walls and are enhanced by them; an ambience is created that emotionally involves the visitor and projects him - himself an actor - into the action on stage.'

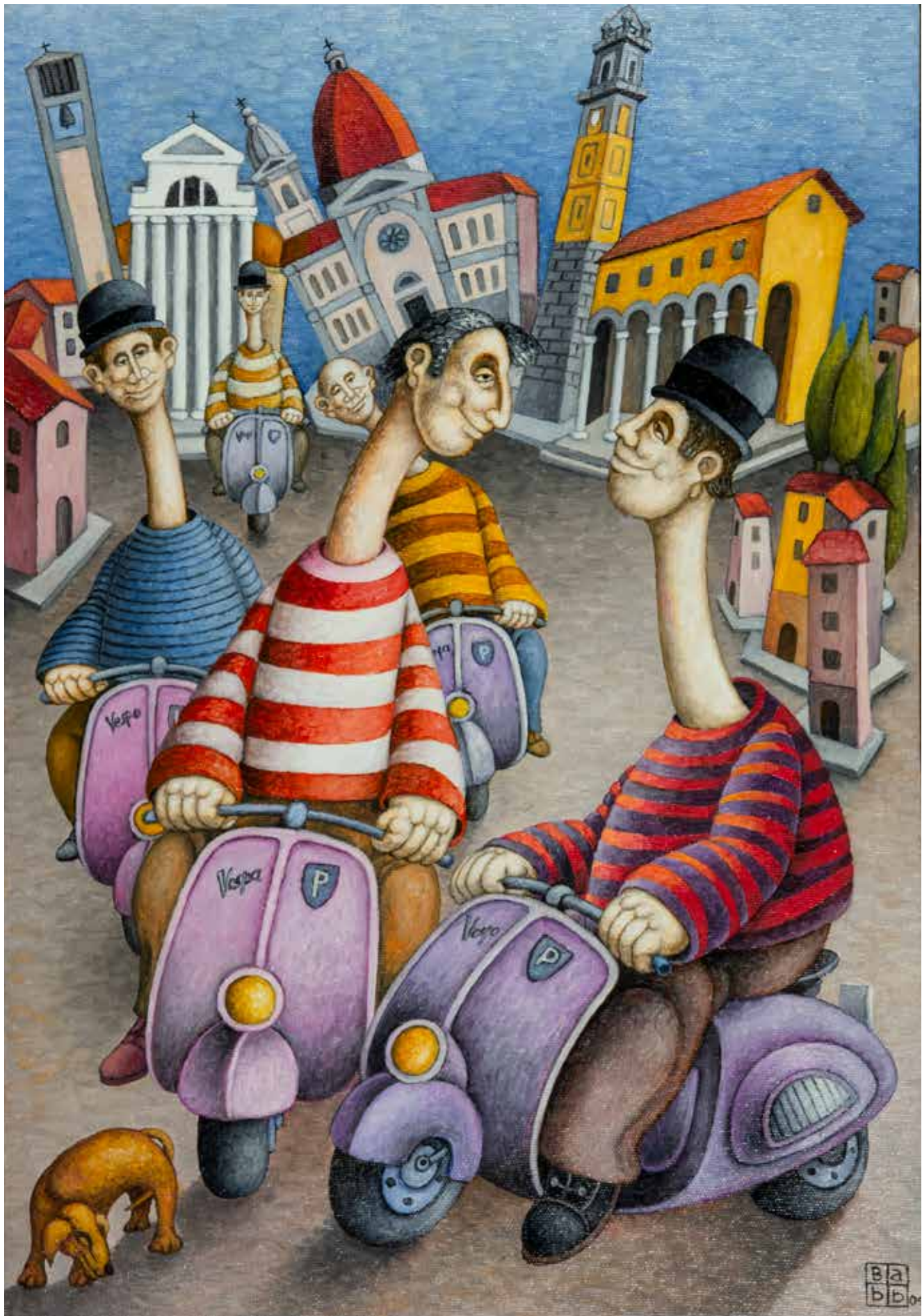
'In the collective imagination, Pontedera is Piaggio, and Piaggio is the Vespa, one of the most significant masterpieces of Italian design. This symbol has, over time, been attributed with the most varied meanings. In reality, it is merely the result of a purely aesthetic intervention: dressing up the engine and the mechanics, giving priority to the bodywork rather than the structural aspect, as was the case in the 1950s be that for typewriters or sewing machines (think of the Olivetti 'Let-

ter 22' on the one hand, and of the Necchi 'Mirella' on the other).

Stefano Stacchini, in the atrium of the Town Hall, sensitively addresses this symbolic icon with respect and affection. Babb's Pinocchios do not overpower it; they support its progress with harmony of colour and tone. Stefano Stacchini's fruitful role is revealed in all its qualitative strength; his flair, inventiveness, imaginative readiness, and mastery of essential communication techniques are in tune with the fervour of the director's design and contribute decisively to the creation of the event.

As the scenic crowning glory of the installation, on either side of the Vespa, placed on a pedestal in the middle of the room, the walls are covered with chalkboards. The visitors, at first reluctantly, then with complete freedom, write and draw on them, once again becoming the protagonists of a spectacular journey in progress'.

In Act Five, we 'fly' to the airport: 'The curtain opens on the Pisan airport, the lagoon scenery returns to view, with its rhythmic



La gente allunga il collo (People stretch their necks)

2005 oil on canvas 35x50 cm

In a tight situation due to the economic problems of Piaggio in Pontedera, people 'stretch their necks'. Stretching the neck has the same meaning as the saying 'Tightening the belt'.

festivity, and BABB's figures expand into the most varied environments: from the multi-storey building to the taxi rank, the passenger lounge, a hangar, and even along one of the main access roads. The climax of the action is approaching, with its heavy load of connotations, emotions and thoughts. Babb's world is once again projected into an international dimension. Pinocchio and the elephant conquer the space, together with the pregnant mannequin, with its belly full of mischievous figurines that, once given birth, will be responsible for the destinies of mankind.

The shaky Tower of Pisa gives way to a 'Bowler hat' who leans peacefully on the mannequin's shoulder and gently holds up a poor 'stripes' abandoned to his fate. Power continues its ascent undisturbed, indifferent to the damage it causes to people and the world.

The Vespa is back, with all its mighty symbolic significance, validated by the being placed in an international airport: one of the most incisive symbols of Made in Italy is once again decorated by this disenchanted and witty provincial artist who has now landed, by decision of the brilliant director, in a broad and rewarding dimension.

Babb's fervid imagination, which generates scenes full of eloquent details and hidden meanings, has happily come together with Meneghetti's creative lucidity and Stacchini's visual poetry, under the strict and perspicacious control of their talented director, who relies on the consummate expertise of refined craftsmen. At this point two more very important players enter the scene: the refuse management company 'Belvedere SpA' and the bank 'Banca Popolare di Laja-

tico'. Their joint action takes on the role of 'deus ex machina', in tune with the director. They benevolently observe from above, reinvigorate the actors, add quality, give impetus to the event, and enable new perspectives. In short, they play a decisive role, as enlightened and sensitive patrons who are able to grasp the intrinsic potential contained in the project. The image becomes the scene. By losing the frame, the delimitations of the picture, it becomes ambience. The image becomes the scene in which the network of exchanges, dialogue, metamorphosis and simulation is woven. In this way, art reveals its original interactive nature, as it involves a relationship that is established between the artist, the work and the viewer. The work is always a relationship and creates relationships, elaborating a complex system of perception and communication, in which sight remains the most lively and receptive sense of the human being (or, as the ancient civilisations used to say, the most deceptive?). And the creative acme is reached in the large poster on the outside wall of the hangar, where Stefano Stacchini expresses himself in all his fine lyricism: colourful, transparent, palpable projections of Pinocchio's profile delicately form the background to a film sequence of the puppet running smiling (and laughing?) towards an undefined space, which fades into enveloping spirals. Seamlessly and with exquisite stylistic coherence, the world of BABB has qualitatively traversed two situations of excellence: the Venice Biennale and one of Italy's most flourishing airports. However, it doesn't end there; it is ready to touch even the playful sounds of children, as we will see'.

This was to come in the last Act, the sixth, dedicated to a games room: *“The porticoes of the Pisa Chamber of Commerce building, an anonymous space on the side of the street leading into Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, recently redecorated, open the inviting doors of the toy library, a colourful place for children to play and be creative. On the ceiling and in the cupboards, there is a Babel-like, or rather Babb-like, whirlwind of images by Dal Canto, happily elaborated by Stefano Stacchini, to whom we also owe the clever play on words. They are free images, hovering lightly in the air, in stylistic continuity with the work created on the airport hangar. From the ‘lie’, from a broken world, one arrives at the playful hubbub of the games room where children’s creativity is expressed. Here, in the face of childlike genuineness, in a smoky dreamlike atmosphere, all reference to the conflicts that envelop humanity is lost; all the disasters of living seem to be overshadowed by the desire for a disorganised, playful, amused harmony.*

Stefano Stacchini’s festive elaborations drag one into a world where semblance and reality mix; the dreamlike whirlpool confuses front and back, fantasy and reality. In the world of childhood, reality lies in the dream, in imagination, in the widespread aspiration to creativity, far from the lying world of adults. Dreams are not to be interpreted, reduced to rational patterns, but allowed to wander in their fanciful expansion. Babb’s figures become funny little scenes without a plot, in an evanescent world that seems to move in circles, following the rhythm of an imaginary sound.

Babb’s melancholic and disillusioned world,

with Stacchini’s original interpretations and transfigurations, dissolves in the triumphant fantasy of solid forms and transparent colours, in atmospheres far removed from the ambiguity, duplicity, falsehood and hypocrisy of the adult world.

The theatrical action stops here, in the moment when the brilliance and wisdom of a fruitful director come to the fore in a harmonious twist’.

Babb’s welcome to Galileo Galilei airport, the great Pisan scientist portrayed in a work by Babb in 2011, was triumphant.

‘The Lie, even elephants have long noses’, Babb’s great work, whose protagonist is Pinocchio, invaded the airport: a net more than 100 metres long and about 2.5 metres high was erected along the external road; a cover of particular scenic impact decorated the 700 square metre freight yard, ; while Babb’s Vespa was on show inside the Aeroport.

Gina Giani, Director of Pisa Airport, presenting the artistic intervention, says with emotion, *‘we welcome this new initiative with our usual enthusiasm. Not only arrivals and departures, but also art. Welcoming artists of this calibre is an opportunity for Pisa Airport to take on a new image, promoting the talents of our territory’*⁵.

The Lie, Pontedera, 2012

The Lie landed in his own town and invaded the Centro per l’Arte ‘Otello Cirri’ from 6 June to 14 July 2012.

It was now Ilario Luperini’s turn to retrace the journey: *‘The Venice Biennale brought recognition to a painter who for over forty years has been creating work of considerable relevance, deserving of far more critical atten-*



Pontedera, atrium of the Town Hall (Palazzo Stefanelli), Babb on 'his' Vespa



From left Giuseppe Diomelli, Giorgio Dal Canto, Ilario Luperini and Stefano Stacchini



Pontedera, atrium of the Town Hall (Palazzo Stefanelli), Babb with 'his' Vespa



Otello Cirri Art Centre, Giorgio Dal Canto with his works



Accaparramento (Hoarding), 2011 oil on canvas 60×50 cm

The world is held still by the hand of Power that slices the world at will. The environment is Chaos: the labyrinth envelops the earth and the monument (symbol) falls ruinously.

tion than his secluded activity has so far attracted. Since the Venetian event, Babb has returned to his Pontedera. Nevertheless, he will not stop here. Other people and places in the world await him; the project of which he is a part, built by a passionate and competent collector, an energetic director, and an efficient organisational machine, will take us there.

At the origin of his language is conflict. On the one hand, haughty and pompous figures in black and classic bowler hats are symbols of an opulent bourgeoisie, personifications of a power that conditions existence. On the other hand, tender and pitiful men in horizontal striped shirts, leaning towards a dimension of freedom, without any relationship to a world of myths and myths, and dehumanizing illusions.

His results are achieved with wisdom in the use of colour and refined calligraphic metic-

ulousness, often sustained by a solid plastic framework. These are all aspects that derive from his origins as an expert decorator. Here are the characters with fixed gazes and hollow eyes, hooked noses and flared nostrils, the mechanical poses of the bodies, the suspended atmospheres, the sharp colours, the clear contours, the uniform drafts, the compositions in unstable equilibrium. It is both light and subdued, melancholic and biting, pitiful and desecrating to the point of biting sarcasm; an irony that is sometimes bitter and defiant, but never willing to bend. It is certainly not with it alone that the world is saved, but it is undoubtedly true that without it, the world is doomed to sadness and consumption. Hence, the profound urge to distance himself from the day-to-day in favour of a pictorial world suspended above time and space, crowded with symbols, objects, figures, extravagant animals, immersed in



Spot (Advert), 2011
oil on canvas 60x80 cm

Pinocchio reduced to a mannequin to promote our success mania.

Power and the Mites cuddle and would like to reassure Pinocchio is annoyed and above all he cannot see what Power is making him do.

a fantastically created aura. In addition, here are his improbable spaces, made up of simulacra and deformations of familiar things: stereotypical little trees, buildings that, in their bizarre transformations, recall famous monuments, perilous urban spaces that have all the flavour of our desolate, dense city outskirts.

In more recent cycles, Pinocchio comes to the fore, but Babb does not want to make yet another version of Collodi's puppet: Pinocchio serves him to create immediate, uniquely familiar references. Pinocchio is the puppet par excellence; by taking on his likeness, all mankind is transformed into a mass of puppets. 'Bowler hats' and 'stripes', too, share the same fate. Their wooden bodies and limbs, their long noses, their round, wide-open eyes, their expressions, at times bewildered, at times indifferent, perplexed or amused. They are veritable mannequins, puppets at the mercy of a few unseeable manipulators who, perhaps, do not even exist as physical persons, but identify themselves with the ugly fairy tales that beguile all the inhabitants of this small village that has become our miserable and quarrelsome planet. And so, the 'Mites' burst in, that is to say, the lies and the ugliness that wear down, corrode and engulf humanity. The evils, immoralities, shenanigans and flaws of humanity have always been in Babb's world. They run through it underground like a red thread, but this time they reveal themselves, come out into the open, take on grotesque forms somewhere between human and animal, hold the stage boldly and even relegate Pinocchio to a corner, a simple observer, no longer a protagonist. Under their spell, the

world crumbles, instability increases, chaos steps in, the old equilibrium is upset. The old imprisoned elephant, whose long, withered nose supports the last effigy of power, weeps surrounded by applauding puppets (the defeated humanity) and triumphant mites (dominant vices). All values, eventually overwhelmed by chaos, are confusingly piled onto a chariot and transported elsewhere, waiting to regenerate. A mournful and jubilant wagon: mournful because it carries the remains of a broken-down humanity, jubilant because, once again, men, dazzled by the mirages of a misleading power, unwittingly participate in the deceptive celebration of their own demise'.

The mayor of Pontedera Simone Millozzi and the Culture Councillor Liviana Canovai add the city's embrace and pride in having such a talent among its citizens: 'From the Venice Biennale to Pontedera, on to the Teatro del Silenzio in Lajatico, and finally to Pisa 'Galileo Galilei' Airport: This is how the story of Babb (Giorgio Dal Canto) begins. At the Centro per l'Arte 'Otello Cirri', he makes stop during an art journey that witnesses him as the protagonist of a vast satirical, humorous and at the same time fairy-tale project, thanks to the contribution of Giuseppe Diomelli and under the careful direction of Alberto Bartalini. This is an important appointment that pays homage to an artist from Pontedera who was chosen at the 2011 Venice Biennale, a special initiative for the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy. Through art, understood as an expression of thought and, at the same time, as a path of knowledge and reading of the history and chronicle of our society,

Miti dismessi (Discarded Myths), 1998

oil on canvas 35x50 cm

False American myths, 'third-hand', as Francesco Guccini sang. False myths that are no longer relevant are taken away and new ones are fabricated.

Babb offers ideas, critical insights and keys to interpreting reality and politics with great immediacy and effectiveness. Once again, our city deals with contemporary visual languages through multiple articulations ranging from permanent to ephemeral events, involving visitors and citizens alike. Art is a strong instrument of cohesion and an engine of synergies on a local and national level. Increasingly, cooperation between the public and private sectors is essential and necessary, each with their own characteristics and activities, but with the same goal of creating a system to enhance the continuity between tradition and innovation with a view to social responsibility'. On 18 July 2012, Babb also received a plaque in recognition of his artistic merits from the municipality of Pontedera.

*Mayor Simone Millozzi, in handing over the award, said 'Giorgio has made a cultural journey possible, which has also seen the growth of the city. Babb is an important character for our cultural life: he has highlighted places to the full and given us the opportunity to reflect on our society. (...) Dal Canto has taken the name of our city beyond our borders. These paths require passion, expertise and drive from the public, but also from the private sector: the productive part of our city can make a contribution'*⁶

Moreover, it did not end there because, in the same months, the artist also made his own Vespa model. In the land of the two-wheeler, Babb had already been a great success at the Piaggio Museum three years earlier and now enriched this prestigious space with the Babb Vespa.

It was a tribute to a myth and it brought everything full-circle: the Pontedera artist, or

rather 'pontaderese' par excellence, merging with the defining symbol of the town. The fruit of Corradino D'Ascanio's ingenuity blended with the signature of Giorgio Dal Canto, who wrote, "I'm a liar!" on the vehicle.

A designer Vespa branded with the usual irony and sarcasm that harked back to the 'world of lies' so often studied and illustrated by Babb.

His two-wheeled tribute was first on display in the entrance hall of Pontedera's Town Hall and then taken to enrich the Piaggio Museum's collection of artistic Vespas. This is what Riccardo Costagliola, President of the Piaggio Foundation, says: *"Three years after the exhibition held at the Piaggio Museum, Babb's artistic journey returns once more to the Vespa. If at that time, his works were exhibited with great success next to the classic models, today the Vespa itself has become Babb's medium onto which he transfers his ironic and biting images. At the end of its exhibition at the Municipality of Pontedera and Pisa Airport, "Babb's Vespa", graphically reworked by the visual poet Stefano Stacchini and directed by Alberto Bartalini, will become part of the Piaggio Museum collection, alongside the works of other famous artists who have celebrated the world's most famous and best-loved scooter with their interpretations, paintings and sculptures. The Piaggio Foundation is happy and proud to welcome the work of an artist from Pontedera among the masterpieces of technology and industrial design in its museum. This vehicle will represent, in the eyes of visitors from all over the world, further evidence of the strong ties that exist between the Vespa, the city of Pontedera, culture and art in all its forms"*.



**Armonici Conflitti (Harmonious conflict),
Pontedera, 2013**

Gli *Harmonious Conflict* went 'on air' in 2013, directed by Alberto Bartalini and curated by Ilario Luperini. For the occasion, a 'Babb dictionary' was also made:

"THE POETIC NUCLEUS - Thus, at the origin there is a conflict: on the one hand, arrogant and pompous figures in black with the classic bowler hat, symbols of an opulent bourgeoisie, personifications of a power that conditions existence. On the other hand, tender and pitiful men with horizontal striped shirts, leaning towards a dimension of freedom, without relations with a world of myths and dehumanising illusions.

HIS PAINTING - His work are created with colours chosen wisely and refined meticulousness, often supported by plastic solidity. All these aspects derive from his origins as an expert decorator. The delicate analytical refinement and skilful insistence on details never lapse into decorativism, but sublimate into formal syntheses of rare expressive intensity. These are the characters with fixed gazes and hollow eyes, hooked noses and flared nostrils. There are the mechanical poses of the bodies, the suspended atmospheres, crisp colours, the clear contours, even application of the paint, and the compositions in unstable equilibrium.

IRONY - Above all, there is irony: light and soft, melancholic and pungent, pitiful and desecrating to the point of biting sarcasm, an irony that is sometimes bitter and defiant, but never willing to bend. It is certainly not with it alone that the world will be saved, but it is undoubtedly without it that the world is doomed to sadness and decay.

Hence, the profound urge to abstain from the day-to-day in favour of a pictorial world suspended above time and space, crowded with symbols, objects, figures, extravagant animals, immersed in a fantastically constructed aura. In addition, here are his improbable spaces, made up of simulacra and deformations of familiar things: stereotypical little trees, buildings that, in their grotesque transformations, recall famous monuments, perilous urban spaces that have all the flavour of our desolate, dense town outskirts.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO BABB - He observes his and other people's world with wisdom and concludes that the situation is hopeless: humanity is permanently distracted by new and tempting mirages with few merits and many faults. Technological innovation seems to bring enormous benefits to the quality of life. That is how it would be, Babb thinks, if new and increasingly distressing forms of slavery were not created, that lead to the dulling of critical faculties and are detrimental to the autonomy of thought. The same is true of all religions, and even the worn-out ecological postulates and idealistic utopias of redemption. Nevertheless, his inspiration and his entire artistic oeuvre cannot be traced back to such simplistic parameters: his is a very complex and articulate vision, full of things both said and unsaid, of deep thoughts and simple intuitions, of lyricism and epicism. That is why Babb's paintings are so full of symbolism and require a meticulous and attentive observation that delves beyond the first amused impression. Beneath the light-hearted attitude of the hardened individu-

alist anarchist lies a rare depth of thought and a sincere concern for the fate of his fellow human beings. These emotions can only find their way to the surface thanks to the artist's ability to condense them into figures of great communicative effectiveness; they are thoughts, emotions and deep feelings articulated not through organic reasoning, but entrusted to the power of images. Babb evokes atmospheres that transcend the reality depicted; it constructs a kind of extra-neousness from reality; there is a kind of magical slowness of the world; a spent, metaphysical silence envelops the figures and scenes depicted. The gazes of the individual and of the multitude takes on an unusual fixity, as if lost in an indefinite distance. The fixity of the representation, the stylisation of all the compositional elements and naturalistic references, and the obvious symbolism give a sense of the artist's conceptual operation: from the apparent simplicity of the content emerges a pressing invitation to reflect and discuss the complex human situation. However, Babb does not propose any solutions, he only takes note of risky situations, depicting himself in the re-proposal of ambiguity, of the enigma; it is as if the suggestion of the mixed, of the enigma was at the basis of his every creative act, was at the very origin of creativity. The analytical meticulousness, combined with the pictorial complexity, forces us to reflect, to go to the origin of the message, to try to grasp its constituent elements and discover the reasons for its being. The fact that we do not find answers, but more doubts, should not cause too much anxiety: doubt is a value in itself, it generates knowledge; the search for

the meanings of existence is an individual path and we should be glad that someone has helped us to ask the right questions. Art as a process of self-awareness, therefore, in which intelligence, detached irony and restless ambiguity complement, enrich and substantiate each other'.

Giuseppe Diomelli, on the occasion of the Harmonious Conflict exhibition, writes of his encounter with Babb, 'When one meets a madman, two things can happen: the madman remains mad, while the sane remain sane or... one can go mad oneself. In either case, the madman thinks that everyone else, except himself are mad. Which side are the madmen really on?' As another great artist Mino Trafeli used to say, 'When you close the gate of the asylum, it's wise to wonder whether you're inside or out'. A life spent generating critical thinking to unveil the reality of things while always keeping a 'distance'.

Revolutionary, progressive or maximalist are all 'old-fashioned' terms that are ill suited to a complex personality expressing himself through an art that needs further effort to be fully understood. Everything seems clear, but then has to be translated. Babb's target, primarily 'power' cannot 'read' or can only partly, and therein lies the key.

Ennio Flaiano used to say that 'the worst that can happen to a genius is to be understood', and so many people stop at that pleasant style of recognisable forms and characters that very often raise a smile.

"Babb's 'Assault on Heaven', armed only with his paintbrushes, is a different story for 'special people', for those who really stop to reflect on society, customs, politics and all 'passages of time'.



Alberto Maria Lucifero

Alberto Bartalini

Regista

Alberto Bartalini as immortalised by Giorgio Dal Canto in 'Alberto Maria Lucifero' (2012): where 'An imaginative and funambulous director; in his baroque style, occupies the stage with educational inventions'. Babb, Giorgio Dal Canto, Harmonious Conflict edited by Ilario Luperini, directed by Alberto Bartalini, Bandecchi&Vivaldi, Pontedera 2013, Index of Lies

Alberto Bartalini, renamed in a work by Babb 'Alberto Maria Lucifero', decides to send out a clear message: 'And, therefore, a renewed awareness: The barbarian invasions cannot end until man converts to beauty. The new barbarians do not come from anywhere far away. They are already here, masters of cities that are increasingly uglier because they are faithless. Against Evil and the Ugly: Art. In hoc signo vinces and he who is in sin, let him think! Town Planners, Architects, Humanists, Government, whether incapable or indifferent: CONVERT!'



Manichino gestante (Pregnant Mannequin), 2010 oil on canvas 40×50 cm

Power calmly and indifferently (because he thinks of other things and plays with the doll) leans on the mannequin that is gestating our future. The Mites that represent our vices (the darkest and most evil part of us) will be born and will generate Chaos.

The mannequin appears from nowhere.

Only the common man, small and caged observes and could perceive from afar what will happen.

The image of this work is present in the installations at the 54th exhibition of the Venice Biennale

One thing is certain, everyone even those mocked, accused, harassed by his brush eventually had to take off their hats to such art and pay homage to him.

Dal Canto wonderfully depicted Pontedera, the place where he had the good fortune to be born and, by choice, to live.

It is a complex town, very complex, whose his-

tory is barely visible, and in which art struggled to emerge until the 1990s.

Babb also had this great merit, that of giving his hometown 'a face' and of being available a thousand times over to illustrate its most diverse aspects.

When his creatures came to take him beyond the canvas of life, the world lost some of its colour.



Il reuccio (The little king), 2014

oil on canvas cm 60x80

Just a question of headgear: everyone has hats, even the worms who represent the popular mass. The King instead has the crown!

On the day of his death on 23 May 2016, the mayor of Pontedera Simone Millozzi wrote: *'In presenting the 2009 exhibition, Carlesi wrote that his picturesque work could basically be read as a poetic attack on power, and he was not wrong. Because those who knew Babb I think perceived his being against power very well. However, at the same time, I think that Ilario Luperini was also right when, in the same exhibition, he described Babb's artistic journey as marked by irony and bitterness, disenchantment and concern. In short, a man against, but with measure, with taste, with love. (...) Babb gave us colour, irony, nostalgia and many other feelings that cannot be summed up in a few words. He gave quality. He has given art. He has helped to enrich us and make us discover things we did not know, all with his pictorial work. It is workers, artisans, and artists like Giorgio Dal Canto who help us to grow and become more aware, to broaden our horizons. To broaden our horizons by making 'our own' the messages that can be perceived in Dal Canto's paintings. These, combined with the importance of painting, culture and art as tools to awaken consciences, are opportunities to raise the cultural quality of our discussion, thereby indicating a different way to build a better world, to foster the dialogue and social relations that are increasingly lacking in everyday life today'.*

Among the condolences expressed was that of Riccardo Ferrucci who wrote an article concluding with these words:

"Dal Canto was able to magically find, thanks to his consistency and ethical commitment, that fragile balance between harmony and

colour, between narration and song, which enabled him to build an admirable universe of stories and illusions, of lights and colours, which simply becomes poetry'.

Some people may have been reminded of Babb's 2009 work '*Collage*', a collage composed of cigarette filters with a handwritten inscription by the artist: 'I will die, but I have smoked a lot'. It was a kind of manifesto phrase of his character and his extraordinary journey in a 'stubborn and contrary direction', which was dominated by the vice of tobacco but also by that of always telling the truth.

In 2018 came two more acts of this amazing story: 'Lodobabb' and 'A lume di naso'.

The first, a great homage by the artist Marco Lodola⁷ to the genius of Dal Canto.

A sculpture entitled *LodoBabb*, 5 metres high, in Piazza Caduti Divisione Acqui Cefalonia e Corfù (Piazza Duomo), in front of the Hotel Armonia, a reinterpretation of the famous - pregnant mannequin - that the Pontedera artist created for the 2011 Venice Biennale.

The second was the realisation of '*A lume di naso - underground art collection*', which is housed in the hotel underground parking lot and consisted of ten large reproductions of Dal Canto's works. The two tributes were inaugurated on 24 February 2018 as part of the **LODO LAND - City of Lights** event, directed by Alberto Bartalini. This exhibition united Palazzo Stefanelli, seat of the Town Hall, Corso Matteotti, Piazza Duomo - Armonia Park, through Lodola's light sculptures that lit up the city in a fantastic atmosphere.

In the publication illustrating the event, Giuseppe Diomelli wrote: '*Giorgio Dal Canto - Babb in art - an artist who will not be forgotten.*

For his stature, for his admirable fantasy and, certainly not least, thanks to the installation of the 'Pregnant Mannequin' in Piazza del Duomo in Pontedera, an integral part of the 'Art Collection' route, which is developed in garage of the Armonia Hotel. The 'Pregnant Mannequin' is one of the most moving works of his entire production, already present in another form, at the Venice Biennale.

On an initial suggestion, Alberto Bartalini worked skilfully, in direct contact with the creative craftsmanship of Marco Lodola. The Municipality of Pontedera fully accepted and shared the project. Thus, the work was reborn to a new life. Lodola's phantasmagoric lighting has offered a new, enthusiastic version of it, with absolute respect for its original formal structure: an ironic and biting figure profile of a woman who carries in her womb a tangle vile of 'mites', a disturbing symbol of those mysterious beings intent on upsetting the balance of existence, in a process in which all mankind is

involved; in the present and in the future. Personally, I believe that Babb's warning has an alarming kernel of truth; and that is also why I am particularly pleased to have been one of the protagonists of this prestigious event'.

Alberto Bartalini, renamed in a work by Babb Alberto Maria Lucifero, decides to send a very clear message: 'And, therefore, a renewed awareness: The barbarian invasions cannot end until man converts to beauty. The new barbarians do not come from anywhere far away. They are already here, masters of cities that are increasingly uglier because they are faithless. Against Evil and the Ugly: Art. In hoc signo vinces and he who is in sin, let him think! Town Planners, Architects, Humanists, Government, whether incapable or indifferent: CONVERT!'

Ilario Luperini, on the other hand, outlines the fantastic meeting between Marco Lodola and Giorgio Dal Canto: 'the LODOBABB project, an event made possible by the refined far-sightedness of Giuseppe Diomelli and the inexhaustible creative vein of Alberto Bartalini.

In the space in front of the Hotel Armonia stands, amusing and majestic, a light sculpture by Marco Lodola, who likes to call himself an electrician. He is, however, an artist of considerable depth and acclaimed fame.

The sculpture in Piazza Duomo, in the spaces of Armonia Park, takes its cue from and plastically re-elaborates the pictorial work created by BABB for the 2011 Venice Biennale, curated by Vittorio Sgarbi, and directed by Alberto Bartalini: the Pregnant Mannequin. It admirably interprets one

Bassa cultura (Low Culture), 201

oil on canvas 80x60 cm

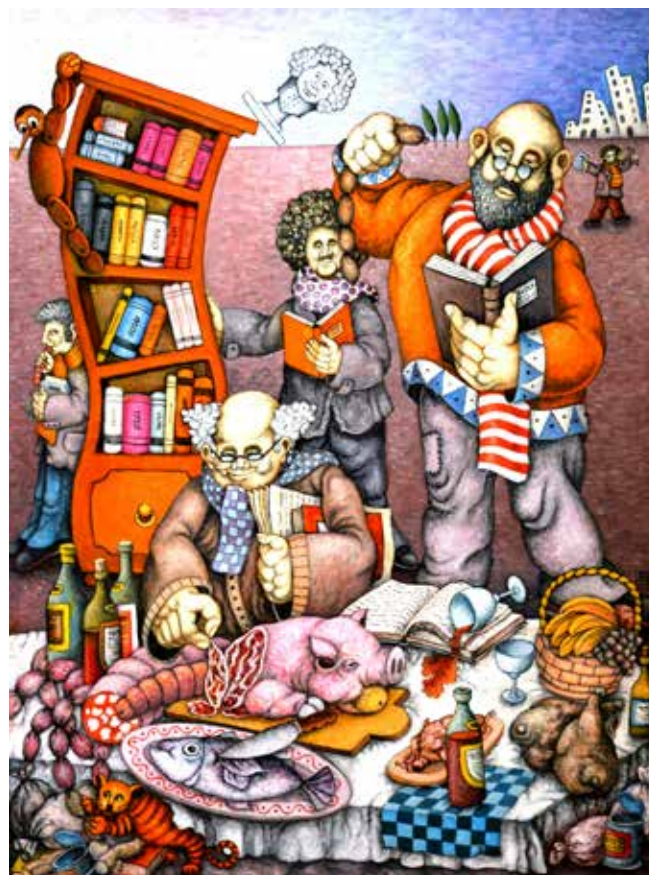
Everyone chooses what they like best in the name of culture, as long as it is edible.

of the essential characteristics of the artist from Pontedera: the light and soft, melancholic and pungent irony, pitiful and desecrating to the point of biting sarcasm. It is sometimes a bitter and defiant irony, but never one that bends. It is certainly not this that will save the world, but it is undoubtedly the case that without it, the world is doomed to sadness and decay. Therein lies the main point of contact between the two artists. Art is a serious thing, but it is also a beautiful game. It is the game of discovering unexplored areas within oneself, and of bringing to the surface memories, emotions, forgotten suggestions. The game of imagining the future as we did as children, when we gave vent to our creativity by inventing stories, vicissitudes, and plots often took the place of reality. This is the sense, not too hidden, of this enveloping sculpture of light, which is also to be seen as Lodola's heartfelt homage to Babb. From the sculpture, following a trail of light - *A Lume di Naso* (By Noselight) and an amusing series of little *Pinocchios* - one arrives in the basement garage where the Underground Art Collection is housed, a permanent exhibition of images reproducing some significant works by Giorgio Dal Canto. Thus, two themes that Babb was deeply fond of emerge in the figure of the puppet and in the tragicomic, age-old antagonism between the 'stripes' and the 'bowler hats', two imaginative, steadfast symbols of a society that is in perpetual transformation. Hence, the uniqueness of this permanent gallery, which is organised in such a way that the visitor is distracted from his usual haste, and induced to stop and look. The works

on display offer the possibility of catching Babb's work in all its complexity: beneath the light-hearted attitude of a hardened individualist anarchist there is always a rare depth of thought and a sincere concern for his fellow human beings; thoughts, emotions and feelings that can only find their way to the surface thanks to the artist's ability to condense them into highly communicative figures.'

These actions are important because they leave a still visible mark on the skin of the city and their fruits are still very noticeable.

The light is still shining on Babb's art, a light that warms hearts and consciences.





Pontedera, Piazza Caduti Divisione Acqui Cephalonia and Corfu, the pregnant mannequin and the entrance to the permanent exhibition 'A lume di naso'



Pontedera, Piazza Caduti Divisione Acqui Cefalonia e Corfù, the Hotel Armonia and the entrance to the permanent exhibition A lume di naso



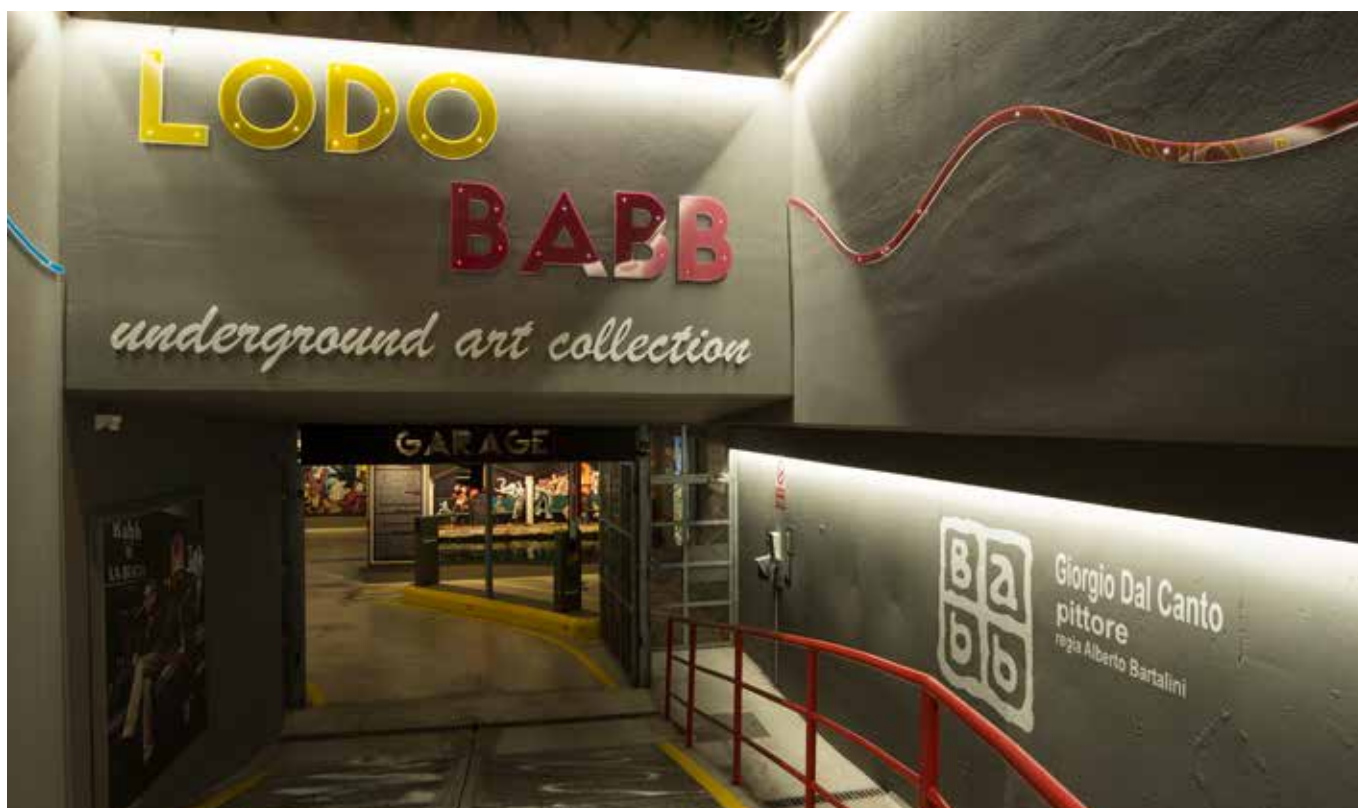
Giorgio Dal Canto



Appoggi (Supports) 2009
oil on canvas 50×60 cm

All similar entities support each other by leaning on each

other: puppets, mites, trees, animals and things because in this world everyone thinks of themselves.



Armonia Park

¹ Newspaper clipping, *The exhibition of Pontedera artist Giorgio Dal Canto at the Verdi, That 'sick' Tower at the hands of man*, 14 March 1993

² Giorgio Dal Canto made '*La Maitresse*' in 1981

³ "stretching the neck", equivalent to the saying 'tightening the belt'", Giorgio Dal Canto, *a story (against)* op. cit. p. 43

⁴ Padiglione Italia, 54 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Biennale di Venezia, *L'arte non è cosa nostra*, curated by Vittorio Sgarbi, Skira, Milan 2011, p. 693

⁵ Babb's maxi-installation at Galilei Airport, *Il Tirreno* 7 May 2013

⁶ *The city rewards its international artist*, *Il Tirreno* 18 July 2012

⁷ "Marco Lodola (Dorno, 4 April 1955) is an Italian artist. He attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and Milan. Later, in the early 1980s, he sided with Neo-Futurism. Lodola combined visual art with other disciplines: literature, music, cinema, design. He soon approached the use of plastic materials, which he shaped and coloured with a personal technique using acrylic paints. Later, his research led him to include light in his works: light sculptures were born, which characterised his entire artistic production. Subsequently, Lodola returned to oil painting, reproducing his sculptures on canvas, often life-size: the most popular theme is dance and ballerinas, Vespas and pin-ups, in retro style. He exhibited a light installation at the Italian Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale and participated in the 54th Venice Bien-

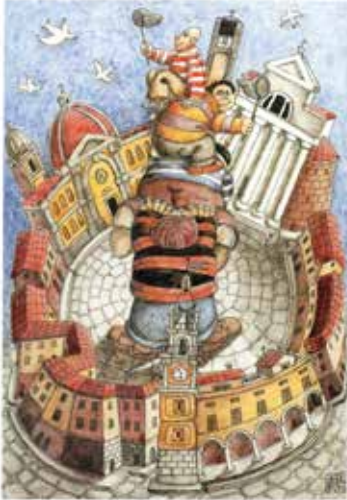
nale with the project curated by Vittorio Sgarbi 'Cà Lodola', and later in the Milan Triennale in 2009. His works can be found in various museums, and he has created sets for films, broadcasts, concerts and events. In particular, he has been active in fashion and theatre. He created a poster for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin and for the facade of the Ariston Hotel for the 2008 Sanremo Festival. He has created works for commercial purposes, collaborated in the musical field with the group 883 and Max Pezzali (creating the album cover for 'Gli Anni'), and artists such as Timoria and Omar Pedrini, Ron and Gianluca Grignani. In 2009, he set up the Rock'n'Music Planet in Piazza del Duomo in Milan, in collaboration with the City Council, with twenty-five sculptures representing contemporary music personalities. He also worked on the set design for the seventh edition of X Factor, and for the film 'Ti presento un amico' by Carlo Vanzina, and created a sculpture for the Hilton hotel group. His light-art journey in the Province of Pisa, conceived and directed by Alberto Bartalini, began in 2005 with OLUX in Castelnuovo Val di Cecina, and continued in 2016 with LODOLALUCE in Pisa during the LODOLUX luminara in San Ranieri, and then at the Teatro del Silenzio with the large 9-metre elephant, specially created as a set design for Andrea Bocelli's show "Le Cirque". Armonia Park presents 'Lodobabb' by Marco Lodola, 'A Lume di Naso' underground art collection by Giorgio Dal Canto, directed by Alberto Bartalini p. 5

G.S. RONDINELLA
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nella
valdera**

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Basta un solo - Sostegno entro
48 ore dopo l'arrivo alla 16
chiusura
Anno 1999/2000

di Km. 26 - tempo massimo ore 5
di Km. 15 - tempo massimo ore 3
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**30^a marcia
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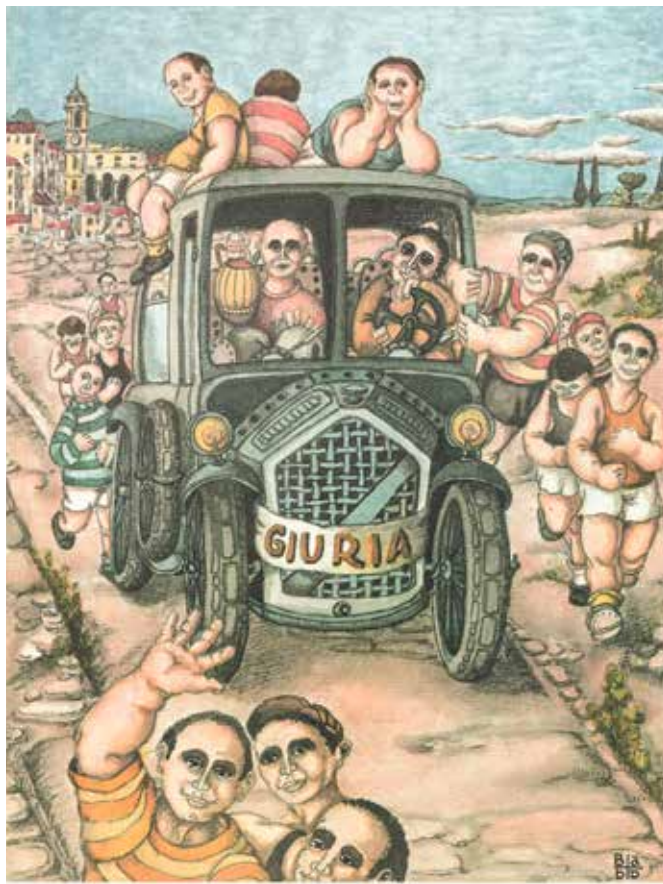
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chiusura
Anno 2002/2003

di Km. 26 - tempo massimo ore 5
di Km. 15 - tempo massimo ore 3
di Km. 7 - tempo massimo ore 2

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