

PANIC FEAR

Mekánema review, Tamara Ferioli's solo show at Studio d'arte Cannaviello, from 10 June to 16 September 2010.

Flimsy lines, like spider threads. Sylvan scenes. Insects and faceless dryads. Tamara Ferioli stages a floating world of winged creatures, adrift feathers, seeds with membranous wings. She uses curvilinear signs, as in a Beardsley's print. The longing to leave behind the earthly gravity, to become light and slippery, is suggested by the title of the exhibition. Indeed, Mekánemas are flying devices, conceived by the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter. The candidness of the Japanese rice paper used as painting surface is a part of the meaning of this new cycle. White symbolizes purity only on a superficial level. It actually means a liminal state, suspended between two moments of being. It's the colour to wear for the rites of passage. This whiteness swarms with little beings: dragonflies, symbols of illusion and change; mayflies, which live only one day; jellyfishes gliding in the air, as beautiful as dangerous; termites which bring destruction. Predation, fragility, transience, beauty, these are the meanings conveyed by insects, which are usually a symbol of dead souls, and, therefore, of another level of reality.

Ferioli produces panic cults.

Nymphs kissing trees, women wandering in a natural setting, that is chiselled like a fifteenth century jewel, full of uncanny details.

Shadow of a Doubt: the creatures of the woods bend themselves over the ground, as to devour something hidden by a cloud of insects.

Pearl Necklace, dryads climbing one over another to reach a honeycomb, their buttocks lined up like the pearls of a necklace. They are arranged in a pyramid, which recalls the flogging scenes in the eighteenth-century edition of De Sade's novels. The sylvan creatures of Ferioli have thin bodies, preadolescent in their appearance, but posed as to constitute a sexual draw. Turned, arched, down on their knees, with the hands slipped on between their legs, pressed on their breasts, in the act of expelling swarms of little eggs from the genitals.

Perfect creatures for sex, because they are devoid of identity, without any facial connotation. Their faces are substituted by tangles of hair, real, glued on the paper mounted on a wooden framework. Red, like witches' hair. This element casts the nymphs in a demoniacal horizon. The hair which hides the physiognomy of their face associates them to the horror icon Samara, the infernal child of the iconoclastic movie saga *The Ring*. According to the Medieval treatises, regurgitated clots of hair were a clear symptom of diabolical possession. And, once the Middle Age was over, the dissociative trance disorder took other names, such as schizophrenia and hysteria. Hysteria defines an exclusively female pathology. In his iconological analysis of Victorian art, Bram Dijkstra claims that among the most recurrent *topoi* there were the one of the hysterical maenad, engaged in wild plays and dances (*Tabula Rasa*), the one of the nymph with broken spine, naked and tempting among flowers (*Shadowless*), the one of the languishing woman, at the extreme limits of death and passivity (*Pity Me*). Symbolist art has been plentiful of ambiguous feminine figures, alone or in couple, animated by unmentionable appetites. On an ideological level, this type of figurative taxonomy has been functional to the stigmatization of woman and her impulses during the nineteenth century. Tamara Ferioli gives back this style and these iconic manners to a liberating dimension, in which sex, bewitchment, danger and death can melt together without guilt, and drown in a white sea.

The discourse on the micro-worlds under glass of *Boule* is more incorporeal and intimate. Here we find the same lactescent hues, for frames of memory given to little fetishes which compose tiny fairy-tale landscapes, sealed in a capsule to safeguard them against the consumption of time. White leaves pinned on a layer of sand, with entomology needles. Lanuginous flowers like cotton wool, wrapping a little house, an empty shell, a fragment of a beehive, as to recall the sweetness and protection of childhood. In *Virgin Bed* white rabbits crowd round a bed with a bunch of red fruits at its foot. And in *Walking to the End*, the shell of a snail transforms for good into a house, and a line of ants heads for it. The symbolism of the snail is the pivot of the installation presented at the Studio Cannaviello: a spiral staircase, like the golden ratio, covered with a myriad of snail shells painted in white, which invites everyone who would come up the stairway of perfection to destroy the carapaces of the little creatures. Because innocence and cruelty are the two antinomies on which Tamara Ferioli's universe is based.

Luiza Samanda Turrini