

Arseniy Petrov – Light transparency

Elio Cassarà's viewpoint is the passing glance of a traveller. As he looks at the world, he deliberately distances himself within the sphere of his art from any possible inner disturbances or tensions, and simply admires the atmosphere of colour in these places. It is his impressions, his experience of looking at the cities of Northern and Southern Europe, that form his material. He transfers his impressions into the plane of art, but not through a practically scientific spectral analysis like an impressionist, nor through a poeticisation of unremarkable locations, but by translating them into the language of abstract combinations of colour, marks and lines in a subtle harmony with each other.

The undoubted tranquillity and harmony of Cassarà's work reflect his artistic creed. The artist's voice expresses a consistent evolution of established stylistic tendencies, and might be defined as abstract impressionism.

"Transparency" is the exact definition that the artist chose long ago for his series of paintings. He reduces objects to coloured marks of different shapes, their edges indistinct, sometimes overlapping, or else clearly defined, drawn with a single, long stroke of the brush. We see them like pieces of coloured glass submerged in clear water and obtaining an even greater resonance from it. And we do not look through the glass, but we observe the light shining in our direction through its entire thickness, as in a stained-glass window.

Here the artist's biography makes us think of Venice and of the glassworks of Murano, the transparency of the Venetian air and the celebrated local colour. However, he is able to keep his expression of the beauty in which he delights within bounds. In his way of working with marks, lines and contact with the canvas one can sense the essential self-restraint that prevents him from slipping into tawdriness or descending into prettiness. He keeps the balance of the composition under strict control. At the same time the white colour that surrounds everything serves as a sort of concentrated milieu which is not active, but is not amorphous either.

Among the artists who have influenced Cassarà some are not obvious – the romantics and Böcklin – and some are very evident – certainly Mark Rothko, of whom he has made a long and profound study. Elio Cassarà recognises Rothko's influence as fundamental both for twentieth-century art as a whole and for himself individually. But though it takes his artistic methods as its starting-point, the semantic element of his painting is completely different. In Cassarà's eyes Rothko "is a spiritual painter who obviously grew up in a confined religious milieu. The light in his works bursts out furiously from his soul. Rothko's spirituality has a tragic, if not pessimistic colouring." Cassarà calls himself, not without irony, "a chronic optimist". In fact his art is about happiness, in a Mozartian key.

The Moscow series reveals the city through an unexpected filter of which we had no inkling – through a prism of violet and gold. But not gold in the sense of a banal reference to cupolas. In

the artist's own words, his first impression of the city was of clouds that were violet from the quality of the Moscow light, with a golden glow. Variations on this combination became the main leitmotif of the series exhibited here.