

Claudio Parmiggiani

(Luzzara, Reggio Emilia, 1943)

Claudio Parmiggiani creates paintings of the mind, conceived more than executed, as acts of knowledge and, as such, as processes of abstraction. In *Studioso in lettura (Scholar Reading)*, 1969, the attentive glance of the old sage falls on a large terrestrial globe, an image completely unknowable for those within it, but knowable by way of abstraction for those who can project their gaze, from above, over the totality that contains them. Parmiggiani's approach is one that one might call Plotinian, or Neo-Platonic, because of its movement through concatenations, from one image to another, within a scheme that descends from and returns, from and to the realm of ideas. *Ab Olympo (From Olympus)*, 1977, exemplifies how painting can be transformed into cognitive abstraction without losing, and in fact enriching, its poetic value. The large oculus through which we glimpse not the absolute blue of infinity, but a velvety sky of lighter and darker tones, like the effect of distant clouds, can seem, in keeping with Renaissance tradition, to open upward above our heads. But the median position where the artist has placed it — the wall on which it is hung, orthogonally to our glance, like a traditional painting — momentarily blurs the clear indication contained in the title. *Ab Olympo* does not allude to a sky observed by mortals, but to a sky seen by the gods or by those who can elevate their thoughts beyond the perspectival immanence of the line of the earth.

The artist has carried out numerous reversals: *Pane (Bread)*, 1998, is composed of 52 bronze breads. The heaviness of the material, made for the weight of monumental sculpture, is dissimulated in a form that conceals the act of casting in the lightness of leavening; but in that weight it seems to silently recall the profound shadow that the gold of mature wheat hides: the absence of Proserpina who returns to the despairing Demeter, in the passage of these seasons.

Untitled, 1988, is also based on the dialectic between light and shadow. The black frame on black canvas echoes *Icona (Icon)*, 1975, and *Iconostasi (Iconostasis)*, 1988, but here, in the work's brief space, a different dialogue is established between the absence of white and the radiant light of the yellow. In this clashing space, against this background, the wing of an angel, black as pitch, is delineated. It too is as light as a feather, but heavy with the darkness of night that impregnates it. (EV)