

Mimmo Paladino

(Paduli, Benevento, 1948)

Paladino developed his work within the context of the Transavanguardia group, and his production embodies in particular two fundamental aspects of that movement's poetics, namely the nomadic dimension of his images, and the alchemical role of the artist.

Looking at the works in the collection one after the other, what clearly emerges is the artist's very specific relationship with light and darkness. It is a relationship that has led him, over the years, to elaborate a dual expressive note: the chthonic and the celestial, the Dionysian and the Apollonian. His art unfolds in the boundless territory of a universal, nomadic mythology. For this reason opposites manage to establish a dialogue as complementary aspects of our most ancient cultural matrix, never oblivious to the lost totality of the origins.

The colors, deep blues, reds, and brilliant yellows, are composed to move beyond the flat space of the backgrounds. His works have always aspired to a dual nature as both painting and sculpture. Bronzes, such as *Giardino chiuso (Hortus conclusus)* (*Enclosed Garden*), 1982, are painted sculptures; works such as *Lampeggiante (Flashing)*, 1979, and *La virtù del fornaio in carrozza (The Virtue of the Baker in a Carriage)*, 1963, are sculptural paintings. Thus it is the work itself that embodies metamorphosis, even more than the protean figures of hybrid masks, which Paladino uses and portrays in the process of transformation.

His works change skin before our eyes. They pertain to the 'other' and absolute time of art, of course, but they do not seem fixed as such and possess the suspension of sleepers, drowsy in the certainty of a still distant awakening. Metamorphosis, purification in silence, and reawakening are all phases of an art that breathes the alchemical dimension, and, as in *Untitled*, 1999, is capable of harmonizing the profound blackness of ritual night with the light of gold.

The titles of the works are striking, as if the artist were trying to have them constitute a third element; in addition to sculpture and painting, there is also the word, to benefit the obscure completeness of his liturgy. The titles often seem to allude to mysterious codes or to a heterogeneous well of popular knowledge and the tradition of fables, but Paladino has written: "I have never given titles that suggest a meaning for the work in strictly symbolic and literary terms. [...] For me, the title of a work always represents the disquieting side for its interpretation." (EV)