

Salvo (Salvatore Mangione)

(Leonforte, Enna, 1947)

The work in the collection, *San Martino e il povero (Saint Martin and the Beggar)*, 1974, belongs to the first series of works that mark Salvo's return to pictorial language. In 1969 he began using photography to create self-portraits where he wears the clothing of various figures, from a dancer to a bandit to the artist par excellence, in his well-known *Autoritratto (come Raffaello) (Self-portrait – as Raphael)*, 1970, and then the Lucerne series, 1970-75, where he portrays himself as a benedictory Christ.

Salvo has constructed a distinctive artistic personality through processes of linguistic overlapping. He reactivates and revisits, around his figure and his identity, the typical celebrative forms of heroism: the 'holy picture,' the portrait, the memorial stone, the patriotic rhetoric of the flag, and a 'genealogical' catalogue of great figures from all periods, where his name appears as last on the list, always positioned at the bottom right, ambiguously as both an element in the sequence and the work's signature. He employed this same process in 1974, when he exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne the painting *San Martino e il povero (Saint Martin and the Beggar)* – which predates the one in this collection by one year – as the final element in a sequence of masterpieces by famous artists. He chose one artist from each century, from Simone Martini to Rembrandt to Salvo.

These early paintings, created as of 1973, continue his series of photographic self-portraits in the guise of others, and continue his appropriation of heroic iconography. Indeed, it is no accident that among the images of saints, Salvo chose Saint George and Saint Martin, knightly saints and literary figures more than devotional ones.

The paintings are freely conceived reappraisals. The work acquired by the CRT stems from the study of a painting by El Greco. However, it is not the extremely personal style of that painter that seems to interest Salvo, who instead gives the composition more classical proportions than the accentuated verticality of the original; he also modifies the livid shades typical of the Spanish painter, in favor of a more expansive palette. He annuls the contrast in the original between the white of the horse's mane and the black of the harness – Salvo makes the animal as pure as the steeds in fairytales. He muffles the depth of the shadow, to the point where the volumes are almost annulled. He transforms the acidic and metallic green of El Greco's cape into a more cheerful, pastel tone that spreads to the entire composition. All this contributes to the construction of a mythology of ingenuity that Salvo, with studied ambiguity, pursues in order to both dissimulate and amplify the mystery of art. (EV)