

Massimo Bartolini

(Cecina, Livorno, 1962)

Bartolini, in an interview, quoted the following line by Emily Dickinson: “This is the room of my freedom,” and these words fully convey the poetics that seem to have inspired the artist’s works in the collection. The room is the unit of measure for his creative thought, as intimate as a bedroom, as dense with perceptible geographies and constellations as an artist’s studio can be.

His rooms are mental spaces, *heads* within which the imagination moves, pauses, and passes restlessly, as in the inclined plane of *Tamburo (Drum)*, tilting, creating a sense of vertigo, without finding resolution in a stable equilibrium. It is agitated by the inner wave of thought, where instead of an undertow there are walnuts that roll about, like atoms of ideas that we prompt to sound and resound to test the truth of their contents.

The rooms that Bartolini installs in the halls of museums are white spaces that function as a backdrop for voyages around them, to our art history, as in *Testa n.8 (museo) (Head no. 8 – museum)* — to our archive of memory, as in the various libraries and reading rooms he has created. The room can also be a space where the artist and viewer can sink into a yellow-gold light, where they can float, weightless, in the perceptible luminosity, as in *Head no. 2 (The Studio)*. In that room one can linger as one does in a garden, next to a small wooden table, where one might read outdoors on a summer day. But it is also a space imbued with a southern light of a color that recalls the work of Antonello da Messina and evokes the soft, suffused atmosphere of his *Saint Jerome in His Study*.

In Bartolini’s room the exterior landscape – its perfumes, sounds, light, and temperature — penetrate the interior space. The two dimensions are continuous, without interruption. The world enters there without respecting the cardinal axes. Thought steals them from the memory of the world and drags them inside, without regard for physical laws, orientation, or conformity with the images and space that contains them. Objects freely project their shadow into the mind. Thus windows open onto the floor, as in *Pavimento ad occhi chiusi (Floor with Eyes Closed)*, furniture sinks beneath the floor, as in *Lo studio alle 3 (The Studio at 3 a.m.)*, the precision of corners is lost in the curved space of thought, the ceiling moves like a curtain blown by stormy gusts of wind, air penetrates through the windows, water spurts from the walls or moves with the constant rhythm of oceans in miniature that the mind forms like circular basins within the space. The diaphragm between thought and perception no longer exists. (EV)