FASOSA ( From A Series Of Small Accidents )

Whoever views the work of Vittorio Roerade sees an exuberant variety of motifs. Large round faces of teddy bears upon which is superimposed a spiraling text; a cloud of beings – half animal, half human – floating next to and under one another within the image; or a network of branches in which tiny birds and animals are found. The appearance of these forms logically relate to the development that can be found in the diaries that Vittorio has scrupulously maintained since the beginning of his career. On the pages of the diaries, ideas heve benn developed and new motifs expressed in drawings. The human being, human relations, and the relationship of the individual to a greater whole are always central to his work. Out of a strond interest and a deep involvement with these concerns, his work represents a search for insight into those relationships and into himself.

Througout his entire oeuvre the portrait plays an important role. It functions as a mirror to the world: the self-portrait reveals one’s essence to others just as one recognizes characteristics of oneself in the face of another. In the early paintings, Vittorio focuses on portraits of others that are primarily based on photographs. The images are often emotional and penetrating, such as the portrait series of American fighter pilots who were shot down and imprisoned during the first Gulf War. You immediately undergo the fear and desperation that radiates from their unshaven and battered faces. They are painted realistically and impastoed: the brush technique makes the paint surface, at once, lively and unruly. Besides the more traditional portraits, the early paintings and gouaches also reproduce facial parts, such as eyes and noses; as well as body parts, such as feet and hands. Numerous eyes are often placed next to one another on the canvas. Their individual meaning is lost and they are transformed into a pattern of round forms in which the black dot of the iris always forms the nucleus. With the body parts, the focus on pattern is achieved in another manner. The palm if a hand, for example, fills the entire image so that all attention goes to a system of lines that branches out onto the skin.

After this essentially objective and observant manner of working, the need arose to delve more deeply into the subject and, at the same time, approach it more freely. Relying on photos of himself as a young boy, Vittorio looks back at his youth to evoke the image of a child still at the beginning of his development. The little black stripes that he often paints over the mouth symbolize this. The little boy certainly has an alert look, but he is still immature and unable to interpret the world independently.

At a certain moment, Roerade, a born painter, made a remarkable decision and began to clip eyes and mouths from photos and paste them directly onto the painting. In one such work, the result was an extended collage with photos of snakes that combine to form a tree that branches out. A more radical step follows with a series of paintings in which body and portrait meld together. Because each contour of the face is missing, the portrait is strongly alienating: the eyes and mouth seem to work themselves through the skin to the exterior. It is simultaneously fascinating to see how photographic fragments, that we normally would experience immediately as realistic elements within the painting, transform the eyes and mouth into spectral features. Additionally, the more traditional portraits are altered by omitting the eyes and mouth from the face, or by overlapping two faces. In a double portrait, for example, both figures have only three eyes because the left eye of one coincides with the right eye of the other.

These changes mark the beginning of a development in which the portrait is approached as a phenomenon and its psychological identification retreats to the background. In the full body portraits, Roerade begins to work with beeswax and pigment. The wax is applied in thick layers around the eyes and mouth, giving the pictures a strong physicality due to the transparency and plasticity of that material. He subsequently switches to epoxy varnish to achieve a greater transparency and layering in the work. With this substance, the handwriting of the brush work, so strongly present in the earlier paintings, disappears. The forms rendered with oil paint dissolve in the epoxy and acquire fluent contours. In a peculiar way, the paintings have something almost tasty albout them with their shimmering epoxy coat in which the oil paint takes on an unusually saturated intensity. The face becomes increasingly simplistic until there remains only an image of a round contour within which are two dots for eyes and one for the mouth.

With the face completely brought back to un atmost simplicity, space is created for bringing in new elements. Around the faces, with their round eyes and closed mouths, appears a wreath of little song birds who seem to be busy chirping. These elements break through the severity and closed look of the faces. They become more and more like animals or teddy bears with human features.

Besides the portraits in which the individual occupies a central position, Roerade began to develop networks of banches and spider webs in his diaries, drawings, and watercolors.

This fascination with patterns and connections was already present in concrete form in the early work in the close up of lines in the palm of a hand or snake tree, for instance. The network now becomes an independant motif.

It can be conceived of as a system of connections between individuals, but also as an ultimate fundamental structure from which all matter is built up: the fabric of the universe.

For Roerade the universe takes on a playful and poetic form. Teddy bears and birds are here the atoms that move through the network, as if in a free dance. At a certain moment, within that network, texts emerge which are often borrowed from pop songs that relate to love or praise the beauty of existence. Such texts later appear in portraits where they are spiraled over the face. They consist of dots that are drilled into the smooth epoxy varnish. Apart from their function as carriers of the word, they act as an abstract pattern that lies over the image like a starry sky.

In this manner, portrait and network are combined. In the most recent paintings, the intermingling of the network and the individual is continued. The pattern of lines is less dense, so that the animals are given greater freedom. Later, the pattern disappears and is replaced by a human figure that is centrally located as a silhouette within the image.

The animals that originally moved freely through space now emerge from the silhouette giving rise to a wonderful new symbiosis. The systematizing network has become superfluous and is replaced by one carrier: the human being that is directly connected with the animals, like a tree that bears leaves and fruit.

Here the circle seems to be complete: human, animal and stucture have come together. If, however, we look back at the oeuvre of an artist who has always sought renewal, we realize that this development is not yet complete. Vittorio’s love for painting and his intense desire to express his experience of the world is a guarantee of that.

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