



in collaborazione con

GALLERIA RAFFAELLA CORTESE

Mathilde Rosier

Figures of Climax of the Impersonal Empire

Fondazione Guido Lodovico Luzzatto

To quote its curator, Germano Celant, the exhibition *Post Zang Tumb Tuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943* at Fondazione Prada is “an immersive experience” which “reinserts works in their original communication space” and is dedicated to intellectuals’ active during that period, during which populism eventually took over.

The exhibition here, taking place in the home of G. L. Luzzatto, is a tribute to the writer, who was actively engaged in the defense of modern art and fought against the rise of fascism and antisemitism in this period of radical changes.

The way of writing about art has changed a lot since then. What used to characterize the art writings of the first half of the 20th century was often a form of analytical autopsy of the subjective emotions of the writer in front of an artwork.

If we analyze the writings of some art critics from the 1930s, we realize that what they were doing was not exactly celebrating the mere explosions of sensations and feelings experienced in the presence of an artwork but describing them, almost scientifically. The writer was not so much glorifying this emotion as he was pointing to the mechanism generating it.

It could be interesting to read Luzzatto and his peers again, to see how in the most critical moment of recent European history, between the two World Wars, the art writer engaged himself as an eye opener on these “emotional mechanics.”

Being able to analyze one’s feelings and to articulate them with words is a way to “taste” them in a different manner, maybe in a more delicate and at the same time a more conscious way, so one can enjoy the emotions without being completely overwhelmed by them.

This clear awareness of how emotions function in the complex realm of our mind is certainly a way to understand also how, on a transpersonal level, collective emotions easily create a fertile soil for the development of populism, racism and fascism, if they go unacknowledged.

Luzzatto wrote about emotions in paintings as a lesson in detachment; a similar form of teaching is found in Buddhism. The book cover of Luzzatto’s biography, showing him walking on a path to a mountain summit, reminisces that of another book, about the adventurous writer Alexandra David Neel, as she was exploring Tibet in the very beginning of the 20th century and discovering a Tibetan form of Buddhism that she would later contribute to reveal to a Western audience.

In Luzzatto’s house, left untouched after his death in 1990, we find the discreet but repetitive presence of pictures of the mountains where he loved to go hiking. The apartment reveals an intimate Luzzatto, passionate about mountain sight-seeing. We imagine him, as an eagle eye, trying to be on top of things with his feelings, exhilarated but also in control. Was he not trying to teach this attitude to his readers?

What happens if one walks a bit too high up and for a bit too long is a mix of exhaustion and exhilaration. The exhilaration of ‘going out of oneself’ or of being a bit ‘high’, like on drugs.

This slight trance is the one of the modern painter, for instance Van Gogh or Chagall, who were Luzzatto’s heroes. It is the trance of the painter as a seer, the one who possesses the inner vision described by Luzzatto in his texts. This gentle hallucination proposed by those painters is a way out of our usual mental constructions, the gate to a new world which is not a delusion but on the contrary, an extraordinary form of clarity and understanding: a vision; that is to say, a visionary view on the world.

The exhibition shows a series of *Portraits*.
They are transpersonal, or trans individual beings.
They are support for contemplation and meditation.

They are a definition of what painting is; an auratic presence beyond representation.

The same intention is palpable in the video presented on the television set in the living room, titled *Le vierge Aujourd’hui*, which shows how the self reflection of the artist dissolves and melts into a landscape with the raising sun of a new day.



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The *Portraits* and the video describe a face absorbed into something bigger than itself; the human face becomes a bud, an anonymous force of life.

In a bedroom, facing one of those *Bud Portraits*, we find a sculpture which is a homage to Luzzatto's sister, a botanist that was excluded from university in the 1930's because of her Jewish origin.

Trees that function as a theatre stage open to a backdrop representing a landscape with mountains at dawn seems to emerge from the bed. Boxes for naturalist collections are found behind this scene.

The bed is a stage for dreams and a gate to another realm where we gladly lose our identity.

This show is about what we see when we close our eyes.

It is an invitation to extra lucidity.

It is an invitation to be careful with ourselves and with the world that surrounds us.

Hopefully, it is an invitation to be aware and awake.

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