

MILAN

Mathilde Rosier

GALLERIA RAFFAELLA CORTESE

In a site-specific intervention at the Fondazione Guido Lodovico Luzzatto in Milan this past spring, titled “Figures of Climax of the Impersonal Empire,” French artist Mathilde Rosier established a dialogue with the house in which the great Italian intellectual and art critic spent his life, inserting her surreally inflected pictorial depictions among household furnishings and archival materials. In her concurrent gallery show, “Impersonal Empire, the Buds,” she modified the actual space, adding a wall, positioned diagonally to the entry corridor, that functioned as a screen for a video projection while separating the space into two different areas. The video showed a performance that the artist had created in the space behind it, but without an audience: Thus, the viewer could only observe the action after the fact, via the video recording. Moreover, there was a sole, frontal view—an interesting choice, since the action seen on the video unfolds in a circular, or, more precisely, spiral manner. Three performers crouching on the floor write the words of a poetic passage by Rosier, using white sand poured from bottles adapted for the purpose. When the action is concluded, a man and a woman wearing costumes designed by Rosier begin dancing a waltz to music and to the artist’s voice reciting her text. The spiral of writing on the floor gradually disappears beneath the feet of the two dancers, whose headgear hides their faces. Then the first three performers begin rewriting the lost words, but now with black sand, and the dancers efface the words again. The circularity of the action, the dance, and the image of the spiral refers to the mythical time of cyclical repetition.

According to Rosier, the human face is like an alphabet, a combination of elements that designate the singularity of each of us. It is also a mask that we employ to tackle our social relationships, but one from which we need to free ourselves. This is why, in the paintings of her “Blind Swim” series, 2016–, all the figures are faceless. These are vertical compositions with hands and legs and featureless heads, sometimes upside down, and seemingly suspended in a state somewhere between human, animal, and plant. There are no longer any hierarchies between head and feet, top and bottom, the life of the mind and the vitality of the body.

The room was equipped with benches so that viewers could comfortably view and decipher the paintings at length. In them we saw, for instance, against light, mostly blue backgrounds without spatial coordinates, a female dancer floating on tiptoe but upside down, reaching out, her body a sort of orange efflorescence. Another dancer, again upside down, seemed covered by a long, greenish veil that turned into a solid shell. In a third painting, a pinkish figure seemed to possess wings instead of arms, and to be the outgrowth of a spiral form. All of Rosier’s figures convey a sense of “seeming”; nothing is defined, and everything is in mutation. They are also overtly fantastical and oneiric, as well as somehow innocent and mild. But in reality they allude to a potent utopian desire for a transformed relationship with nature, a new way of relating to the world—in short, a new ethic.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Mathilde Rosier, *Blind Swim 14*, 2017, oil on canvas, 78¾ × 43¾”.

