

FABRIZIO D'AMICO

Vasco Bendini, one of the greatest Italian painters of the 20th century, passed away yesterday in Rome, after a short illness.

Born in Bologna in 1922, he had been a pupil of Guidi and Morandi. Despite such excellent teaching, he was inclined to solitude, not just with regards to his painting profession. He confronted this spiritual abyss with lucid awareness: "I paid a high price for my isolation: for being outside every group and solidarity".

In 1953, following his debut exhibition in Milan in 1949, he exhibited large works on paper at a gallery in Florence. The origin of these was difficult to guess, most likely being datable to the immediately preceding years. The introduction of the catalogue of the exhibition included a text by Francesco Arcangeli, who will subsequently pay homage to the unusual early works of Bendini, executed "singularly, solitarily, and candidly", and characterised by long stripes of black paint, as well as by surfaces wetted by little, rhapsodic colour. Arcangeli saw in these paintings "an unusual spiritual enhancement", which differentiated them from the interpretation of reality expressed by the so-called 'Informale Padano' of Northern Italy, as well as from the "latest naturalist" trend supported by Arcangeli himself.

Bendini had put a huge part of himself in these works. Alone, unrelated to the abstract form that was elaborating neo-cubism and neoconcretism, yet structured by clear, neat borders –whose association to his work Bendini always saw unhappily- the young Vasco felt and depicted instead a psychic, nocturnal throbbing of things happening in the inner human eye: a phantom of houses, stormy waves, an embryonic facial trait.

Then, for a moment, it happened that such a solitude, such a detachment from the world around him, such being elsewhere, which he had always deliberately searched, somehow scared him. Hence, for a short period of time Bendini sought to express himself in the material dimension, and its magmatic growth.

This led to the blazing, somewhat furious biennium of '57 and '58, during which thorny mixtures of colour were thrown on canvas almost breathlessly, with quick, excited strokes. This too was a great period for the Bendini, who had, in a sense, established the other side of his artistic research. On the one hand, was the bold use of matter; on the other, was silence and the awaiting for its appearance.

Finally, at the antipode of this achieved turgidity, came probably the most unforgettable works of Bendini: the thin tempera works -as this series of works was named- produced between the fifties and the sixties. These paintings are like silent, bare shrouds, wetted by little colour almost removed rather than placed on the canvas. In these works, only a faint and distant spot of light shines through to the surface. In the crackling, saturating phase of Italian Informale, these works express a genuine, Franciscan paucity. Made of whispers, breaths, and fragile, subtle marks, they are wrapped in silence. After a period in which he experimented with object and environmental art, Bendini returned to the style of the thin temperas in his latest works, allowing colour to fall and spread upon surfaces –initially aluminium, then paper again- almost autonomously. This is the way Vasco's recent painting is: once again characterised by newborn light that emerges from the immense depth of the space and of the spirit, slowly reaching towards the surface.

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Translation by Gian Luca Tura