

Sergio Masini

Reggio Emilia, November 1980/89

****The Worker in Guerrazzi's Paintings****

The "Palace" always reserves its seats only for the "bosses"; the worker finds neither an armchair nor a spot in the gallery, so he gets angry. He takes the lathe and brings it onto the stage, in front of an audience that expects "melos" but not drama. He performs as a "soloist" with a drill—should we laugh or cry?

Is there still a working-class literature in the graffiti on bathroom walls, like the cave drawings of old? Surrounding it are all the major politico-social-cultural engines, epitomized by 196 individually painted faces with 10,000 watts overhead—as Guerrazzi paints them—and many more in the background, everyone but the workers. Are the workers excluded from the party, or are the others—the bosses—keeping them out?

Guerrazzi resembles the Sphinx: he doesn't speak. The workers are absent because they have always been excluded, plain and simple. Guerrazzi places before you the new superstructure, "Eurocommunism," and depicts the workers as a distinct "other" structure, united at a deeper level: the superstructure may pass, but the workers remain.

Guerrazzi is not "against" the Communist Party or the Christian Democrats; he is "for and with" the workers. Writing and painting, Guerrazzi operates in the realm of "substantia," not "phenomenon." He does not align with Sechi or the party cell inviting him to join; he does not choose segments but the line. Guerrazzi represents thought-feeling that produces thought-feeling: an emotional epistemology. He stands on the irony of reason, a warm logic, like thermal overalls. Put simply: he has a class-conscious heart, a reliable point of aggregation. He doesn't polemicize but educates by making people think, reflect, and meditate.

A Calabrian, he went north. He spent 17 years at Ansaldo, already "pregnant" with the factory when he encountered Kafka, and that sealed his path. He writes and paints, with

that damned "castle" as his midwife. He spends years devouring huge containers of bourgeois cultural books—the only ones available. Then he produces his "wild" novel with a boisterous, unruly style.

But the 150 hours of evening classes are not enough for the working class; Don Milani's reeducation efforts fall short, and the bosses speak in inaccessible jargon. Marxist themes and problems are frozen; leftist rhetoric creates ghettos. Writing, therefore, is fragmented and impenetrable. Painting is needed to expand the spectrum of working-class languages. Hooks and direct punches are necessary for class psychology; reference boards and more immediate codes are essential.

The canvases are many—not only political. Guerrazzi paints people for people. Agnelli is always there with his coterie of scholars and the products of the Palace. But the worker is also always present, even when invisible. The bipolarity functions as the base system schema: bosses on one side, workers on the other. Clear? And culture in between—ambiguous, because it has been hegemonized for centuries.

Everything is painted as it should be: perspective, color, portraits, light, volumes, and grand scenic designs serve the socio-political alphabet. With Guerrazzi, everything is laid bare and without tricks: the game is played in the open, with words as solid as stones, carefully stacked.

It is like when Camillo Prampolini, here in our province, "preached simply to the crowds," educating them to think and build socialism tailored to humanity, where culture meant growth in the struggle for justice and freedom. It still works; history proves it.

Guerrazzi does not only paint political themes. He creates images of Southern life with the colors and flavors of olive groves and skies of stunning beauty. He depicts women with exceptional respect, even in chaste nudity. He paints landscapes steeped in a new way of being silent, à la Quasimodo, sitting on the world where evening falls swiftly.

Guerrazzi is not merely a worker-painter wearing a labeled shirt; he is a true painter.

There are monochromatic canvases that seem like proposals for deep psychology, where the hues make you feel isolated or lost, widen your smile, and stimulate thought. There are family interiors that reveal the delicate threads intertwining the sensibilities of Southern immigrants with those of Northern farmers. There are human anatomies that are revealed, molded in harmony with the psychologies of the faces, giving the context a narrative meaning without ruptures. It is thoroughly modern painting, with sophisticated techniques.

There's a horse with a cart—Agnelli as the driver—that seems to leap out of the canvas in a three-dimensional effect, though you're not sure it outweighs the background chorus of people, reminiscent of a Greek tragedy.

This exhibition is meant to convey that the discussion about Guerrazzi is not finished and never will be. The conversation widens and deepens here today, continuing on the foundational tablets of "the human condition."

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After Nine Years

I reread, exactly nine years later, this writing of mine about Guerrazzi's painting and the relationship between the Artist, the Working Class, and expressive communication in a chromo-figurative language. I have nothing to modify.

The Working Class remains increasingly "outside"... The paintings from back then, revisited today, are still stunning, and the Artist appears even more significant. Furthermore, I saw new canvases in Modena: with "Genoa," boats, shellfish, fruits—I don't recall well, but still, "things" that art critics confusingly continue to call dead nature. Guerrazzi renders nature "alive"—biophysically, even sexually alive—even in shells or pears, as "individuals," specific pieces of the universe, that is, of life.

This aligns precisely with today's needs: Rubbia and St. Francis, science and celebration, quarks and love. Guerrazzi now engages with this broader perspective. He has philosophically moved "beyond" the compelling discourse on the master-worker dichotomy, expanding to Kantian questions: God, Soul, World.

As Fellini's Gelsomina might say: if there's a stone, it must be indispensable to the Balance of Life. I pick it up, caress it, hold it in my fist, press it to my heart, love it. And I paint it.

The result is stunning because the painter thus advances his dialogue, as I wrote nine years ago, and his painting enriches itself with colors, perspectives, contexts, lights, warmth, sweetness, cuts, and encounters previously unknown.

I confirm: beautiful painting, here, today, with Guerrazzi!

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