

Valdrin Thaqi

You do realize, there is a place where the sidewalk ends

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A century ago, the German critic Franz Roh coined the stylistic notion of Magic Realism to name the research of certain Neue Sachlichkeit artists. The Magic Realism echoes the rhetorical figure of the oxymoron by introducing an element into the realistic representation of reality that transcends it.

A comparable "tendency" in the world of contemporary painting has apparently made a comeback, or perhaps what has returned is the fascination about a particular kind of suggestions and images drawn from reality, that seem to oscillate between the unreality and immateriality of dreams, or between the heaviness and the materiality of matters and corpses.

Over the centuries, these "returns" cyclically pass through figurative arts and its formal characteristics, however this alternation never happens in the same way over time.

It is as if there were silent rules linked to human nature, or non-written laws, that lead to modify our artistic expressions with similar cyclicity. The work of the Kosovar artist Valdrin Thaqi seems to be no exception to this tendency, indeed it is easy to find in his research some of the characteristics of Western painting from the first half of the 20th century. His poetics is particularly current, and in my opinion, it takes up from the lesson taught by the experiences associated with the Magic Realism.

His work is a narrative manner of painting that transcends the perception of reality, breaking the logical/temporal order and showing the human experience in its existential characteristics.

Valdrin Thaqi paints bodies, symbols, scenes and animals within an atmosphere of expectation, in a gloomy fixity, in an unreal everyday life.

His subjects are often portrayed near water, a fundamental element in his narrative, which recalls the very essence of this element, that is, what gave life the possibility to generate itself.

In the work *Fight me* (2022), two young fencers seem as if they are performing the dance of a fight. The foils seem to continue the lines of their bodies. They are their natural extension. The subject of the painting is violence, shown as a game: an almost intellectual and sporting exercise, controlled and tamed. In the background, a lake landscape with soft colour fluctuations. At the bottom centre of the canvas, two white narcissus testify the boundless ego of the human being.

The reptiles are creatures that are both terrestrial and aquatic, and in the painting *Fight me* a Komodo dragon emerges from the waters of the lake. This animal, considered one of the most territorial and aggressive male species, is here to remind our bestial origins, our animal instincts, our natural and atavistic violence.

These are symbologies that converse, that generate a subterranean and silent narrative, that invite us to see beyond what is represented and that introduce into the painting meanings that transcend the image itself.

The artist seems to undermine an unambiguous direct reading of his paintings, deploying conflicting meanings in them. By embracing this strategy, it is as if he is trying to make these images universal, leaving them open to multiple interpretations.

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Thaqi sometimes reminds me the painter Michael Borremans and his way of painting; as for Borremans, his characters are absent actors who have no conscious grip on their circumstances.

In Thaqi's work, images are painted as a coded language and the visual syntax indicates a deeper meaning, an existential philosophical dimension. The life of the subjects that animate his paintings can be interpreted in a similar way to that given by Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: an absurd, thrown life, driven by impulses, almost alien to the characters themselves.

The main thrust of his poetics seems to be a quest oriented towards the uncertain nature of the human psyche, characterized by extreme contradictions, fears and fragility. An expression by means of images, of the depths and darkness of the human soul, made up of emotions and impulses.

Everything appears seemingly calm and peaceful in the artist's vision. The landscapes are limpid, taken at dusk or dawn, waiting for a change.

It is this subtle dimension of suspension that makes these paintings fascinating, arousing in the viewer deep questions and reminding us of the words of the critic Franz Roh, who used the term "magic" to indicate the "mystery that does not fit into the represented world, but hides behind it".

Simona Squadrito

Valdrin Thaqi (b. 1994, Skënderaj; Kosovo) lives and works in Berlin and Prishtina.

Valdrin Thaqi is a visual artist graduated in Painting at the Academy of the Arts in Prishtina, Kosovo.

Realistic and dreamy, poetic and intuitive in its content, Thaqi's painting practice points out personal as well as collective memory and experience. His figurative paintings are inspired by philosophical inquiries, morals and absurdities that stem from processes, states and events observed in daily life. Often infused with passion and conflict, many of his works find their cause in the analysis of social reality, posing questions about existence and human experience. Sometimes deeply connected with the artist's life or the history of his home country Kosovo, the meaning of Thaqi's works, however, is never fixed. His paintings incite thought and prompt contemplation.

Often large in scale, his soft-edged works present scenes in rich planes of violet, lavender, mauve and purple colors carefully mixed with the shades of brown, blue and green. Made up of smokey brush strokes appearing intentionally out of focus, Thaqi's paintings somehow evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing. The depicted scenes seem to blur and fade away like a memory or old photograph, while the protagonists of his works are often distinguished by unreadable facial expressions. Operating through simple, but meaningful juxtapositions of figures and objects, Thaqi creates powerful narratives about the complex image of human psychology and existence.

Thaqi has recently exhibited at Manifesta Biennale, Prishtina (2022), Bazament, Tirana (2022) and LambdaLambdaLambda Gallery, Prishtina (2021).