



Darkness above me | 2020

CollagenMalerei on canvas

110 x 150 x 5 cm

Nr 20201130

Original, Signature on the front

The image rights are with Luzena ®

The critic

As soon as the darkness has disappeared, the coloured and luminous inscription is visible on a canvas in one's innermost self.

Giampaolo Trotta

“Visual thinking in the field of the contradictory art brings about a motive of development for a deeper research concerning the inner aspect of mankind.”
(Rudolf Arnheim, Entropy and Art)

Luzena has created another important and inspiring work of art: Darkness above me. As always, this work of art goes far beyond pure aesthetics, and it has in itself a strongly semantic and conceptual value, which is above all based on the artist's 'way of proceeding': on analysis and synthesis, on fragmentation and reconstruction. She takes an earlier painting as a basis, which is getting a means to an end, but never a final aim. She takes it apart, decodes the details, fragments them, paints over them like on a palimpsest (a manuscript that has been written over) and 'mixes' the different parts in order to put them together again and to find a new unicum that conveys an 'orderly' message of harmony in life which means living in coherence with oneself and in connection with the whole universe. In other words, according to a method of entropy, we might say that what happens emotionally becomes a direct message to the viewer's mind and heart.

As everyone knows, the concept of entropy (which has been derived from the Greek ἐντροπή, entropè, inner transformation, change, evolution) was introduced at the beginning of the 19th century in the context of thermodynamics to describe a property of all systems known at the time, namely that the transformations spontaneously occurred only in one direction which was the one of the greatest disorder. The concept of entropy was very popular then. In fact, it was no longer only used in a physical context, but it was also adopted by the social sciences, economics and art.



As early as 1971, the German psychologist and art historian Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007) dedicated a fundamental essay *Entropy and Art - An Essay on Disorder and Order* to the concept of entropy and its usefulness for the analysis of works of art. "The harmonious tendency towards order in the whole of nature is somehow inappropriately inconsistent with one of the laws with the greatest influence on the behaviour of physical forces, more precisely, the second principle of thermodynamics." On the one hand, both organic and inorganic nature tend to be in an orderly state (and human actions seem to be determined by a similar tendency). On the other hand, physical systems have the tendency to be in a state of maximum disorder.

The relationship between these two opposing 'cosmic' tendencies, between the one aimed at mechanical disorder or chaos (the principle of entropy) and the other with geometric order, is also the basis of Luzena's artistic work. The configuration of the colours with the structure of the painting is not created part by part by Luzena, but rather initially seen in its entirety in a juxtaposition of structures that form a single indefinite unit.

In accordance with what Arnheim said and which in turn referred to Wolfgang Köhlers (1887-1967) Gestalt theory, "disorder is not the lack of any order, but the clash of orders which are initially unrelated to each other". At the beginning, Luzena does not have in mind the individual components of the entire form, but conversely, the complete structural order (with the whole amount of its colours) before thinking of the individual elements. Then in her vision, she takes everything apart analytically and reduces it to colour fragments or 'figurative' ones, which she puts together again with lyrical and emotional gestures according to a frankly 'disordered' scheme that is still characterized by a high degree of entropy. But it gradually shows a harmonious 'interference' that takes everything back into an 'anti-entropic' order, respectively into an order with low entropy and strong contents in terms of semantics and semiology. This result, however, goes far beyond the individual parts (pigments, sand, collages) and the individual colours used at the beginning and which were at the basis of the composition. That is, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," according to the assumption that occurs in the scriptures of the entire Gestalt psychology school of thought. In this way, what can be seen as extreme simplicity, as a 'bare' geometrical basis with few strokes or lines, as monochrome in the diverse nuances of the different variants, is combined with the triumph of the deliberate and intentionally suggested gestural and lyrical 'disorder'.

The desired effect is that the viewer of the picture is affected in his whole personality and that his or her perception spontaneously tends to restore a certain order (anabolic (1) 'constructivist' tendency towards synthesis), even in all the 'disordered' aspects (catabolic (2) 'deconstructivist' effect by means of analysis). Thus, perception highlights the inner structure of the work of art in a definitive and final equilibrium that is necessary so that, after crossing the threshold of conscious rationality, we can enjoy the work of art aesthetically and ethically to the extent that it will become similar to the absolute 'stability' of a new Golden Age.

This is a 'cosmic' tendency towards order, simplicity and luminous silence, which do not necessarily mean regularity and homogeneity. And at the same time, it is the attraction



towards a complexity in which the oxymoron (3) of a 'harmonious disorder' prevails or of a regularity that is not monotonous: This is the basis of Luzena's works, and especially of the work we are currently looking at.

The work underneath today's painting, which was originally titled *Iamos* and which I could write about on the occasion of one of Luzena's exhibitions taking place in Sicily, showed the final joy (represented by the large, clear 'spot' on the right) after we become finally aware that we are evolving towards the ultimate and universal goal.

In the centre, there was the face of legendary *Iamos* that was schematized similarly to Picasso's way of painting. *Iamos* was staring straight ahead to predict the rhythms of nature by means of the flight of birds just as we can read in the Greek legend. He was looking at the street that opened before him and which could be seen in a central perspective with a small door below. He represents the man who is looking straight ahead towards his own future, it is the soul that platonically decides before incarnating what its mission on this earth should be. In this work, Luzena has built an allegorical bridge between the Arcadian place of the 'seers' and the colour of sepia, which she often uses in her paintings, as well as soil that - as is her custom - she has taken home from different European countries. The work took up the question that *Iamos* asked his adoptive father *Aipytos*, namely where his path would lead him. His father replied, "Follow your heart."

This is also Luzena's answer and her point of view is that the connection with the original joy can arise as soon as a person follows the wishes of their heart.

In 2020, the artist 'buried' this original work under new layers of paint. But that does not mean it was annihilated, on the contrary. It remains 'below' just like the first version in a stratigraphy or like the first stage of a palimpsest that grows in the course of time.

It is not 'dead' or 'nonexistent', but lives pulsating inside the work, just like the heart exists under the skin or just like the psyche or the soul exist within us, even if the viewer does not see them with his eyes. The painting lives on a reality and also on an 'immaterial' matter made of the same substance we are made from, too, as Shakespeare would say (in *The Tempest*). The same is true of our dreams because "our short life is contained in the space and the time of a dream". For man is - as Pindar (522 BC - 445 BC) (4) claimed - "the dream of a shadow".

This is Luzena's quiet reflection which, however, does not contain Pindar's extremely sobering and pessimistic, as well as elegiac and plaintive effects, but which is only about the transience of things, including works of art, which are meant not to be immortalized in a status quo but in an everlasting development full of liveliness.

Starting from the clear forms of *Iamos* and in a process of transformation, Luzena ceaselessly put one colour on top of the other and the same was done with the different layers of material. This was a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, of which the photographs taken at the various intermediate stages during the development of this highly conceptual work, which proceeded like a performance, clearly bear witness. Matter, light and colour.

From a technical point of view, Luzena began her artistic and existential 'path' anew by tapping on the back of the canvas in a strongly gestural and emblematic act. By doing



so, the porous material in the lower part interspersed with hairline cracks was removed and some spalling occurred over which the artist painted with sepia ink and a mixture of earthy colours. Then she reinforced the horizontal line on the right side of the canvas creating a surface that became the light area in the lower part of the painting. After that she inserted a fragment of golden colour, which, considered in retrospect, was symbolizing a heart that carries the Light into the darkness of the Earth, exactly to the place where in the painting Iamos underneath, there was the summit of the mountain that stood out against the dark blue-green of the background and alluded to Sepia, namely the Arcadian hills, where there was Aipytos' tomb. This grave, this burial place, this crypt opened and Aipytos and Iamos were freed - that is, the seer and thus symbolically our ability to 'see' into the hereafter.

Around the 'Mycenaean'-like and archaic tower of Iamos, which served as the first guard post of the long, perspective road we mentioned above and which remained visible on the surface to the left of the golden fragment, Luzena painted binder over a large area with the numerous overpainted flakes in order to fix them. As a result, the lower layer emerges like a wreck from the sea, like an archaeological find out of the sand and the earth, 'sedimented' and always present like the roots of our history and our existence.

Then, as I said before, she added some fragments and collages, like vague fragments of life. The 'surviving' buildings, the ruins of the ancestors, have been highlighted by means of hatching, and the contrast between light and dark has been enhanced and emphasized by using a mixture of sepia ink, as well as black, blue and earth tones. After turning the canvas, the artist intensified the circular movement clockwise from top left to bottom right with gloss reflections. This inner light unravels the night of the spirit, as well as fear, evil, lies and all the human misery, because it is stronger than darkness (as the artist says, "Remain calm within yourself and be in connection with yourself and your centre, no matter whether the darkness is above or below you.")

But the inner light does not destroy the darkness that remains a fundamental and 'necessary' part of the final painting, which is divided between the darkness above the golden core and the white part below. You have to 'breathe' the darkness of the earth, you have to bring your spiritual being into matter, you have to literally 'bury' it there because that allows matter to rise again. There can neither be day without night, nor light without shadow or good without evil. Every reality exists inasmuch as there is also its opposite that defines it as such. This is where Darkness above me arises and where it does not matter which is 'above' and which is 'below', because it is about the eternal, hermetic circular movement which in antiquity was symbolized by means of a snake or the οὐροβόρος (ouroboros). And according to an archetype dating from ancient times, it devours its own tail and indicates a cyclical and ever recurring eternity. "Eternity in the sense of an infinite time was represented by the Egyptians as a snake devouring its own tail," wrote Claudius Claudian (5) in *De consulatu Stilichonis* (6). Ouroboros also occurs in the world-famous frieze from the 15th century about the fate of the soul at the Florentine Villa Medici (dating from the 15th century) in the town of Poggio a Caiano, where it was attached between the Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) (7), the theology of the Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and the Jewish Kabbalah.



What counts therefore, is not 'above' or 'below', which is relative, but the shining centre of our being, the beating heart of life. All of this also reminds me of a great exegesis of the Gospel I heard in Lent and which is connected with Christ's temptations in the wilderness and with his transfiguration. The Gospel was interpreted by Paolo Arzani (born in 1959), a Florentine priest and theologian. According to Arzani, the Lenten season is essentially not a time of repentance, but rather a time of self-awareness before being born again in the Light of the Risen Christ. The temptations represent the dark sides of our existence which we blame ourselves for, which we cannot eradicate, though, and even may not have to do so. God, however, loves us with infinite love, that is, even with our dark sides, with which we have to learn to live in serenity without being dominated by them. And the transfiguration on Mount Tabor (8) is also our transfiguration taking place by means of our inner Light that emerges: the Light of love that we must recognize and obey, i.e. the Light of resurrection. In fact, it is not enough to know that God loves us even with our dark sides, but it is necessary for us to be guided by our inner Light that comes from within ourselves and that allows us to live in the same divine Light by giving meaning to life itself.

Thus, in Luzena's paintings, the darkness and the shadows remain preserved. They do not disappear as if by the action of a *deus ex machina* or of a magic wand, but they are 'transformed' and coexist peacefully within us like the lamb with the lion does in the myth of the Golden Age. This golden fragment in the symbolic shape of a heart made of gold and love is now creating an equilibrium between 'white' (the Light) and 'black' (the darkness), between the upper realm of the Gnostic Pneuma and the gloomy waters of the underworld. And next to it, there appears like a 'wreck' after an existential shipwreck one of these 'sacred' Mycenaean towers framing Lamos' 'old' way to knowledge. Hence, the darkness is necessary so that in contrast to it, the Light can explode and spread within the darkness

Endnotes (translator's notes):

1. Term from human biology meaning 'constructive'.
2. degrading
3. Stylistic device that consists of two contradicting terms.
4. Source. Pindar, Odes. Pythian Odes VIII
5. Roman poet of late antiquity who was born in Egypt approx. in 370 and died in Italy later than 404 AD.
6. Stilicho was the poet's patron.
7. In 1462, Marsilio Ficino founded the 'Accademia neoplatonica' (Neoplatonic Academy) in Florence, which was a cultural institution.
8. See: New Testament, Matthew 17:2, Mark 9: 2-10, Luke 9: 28-36.

translated by Brigitte Janoschka, Ainring, Germany (31 May 2021)