

ENRICO PROMETTI

A contemporary "primitive" artist by Marco Madesani

We often think of art as a whirling unicum, a miscellany which transcends time and space, so much so that we compare the most distant representations from both a symbolic and material point of view. And so it happens that African arts, with their concentration of formal and evocative solutions, are a source of inspiration which animates abstract language and becomes a variegated showcase to draw from and to dialogue with.

Enrico Prometti encountered Africa early, of course long after the various Picassos, Modis, etc., but the heuristic significance of such a cultural revolution, according to which the twentieth century was no longer the same after the encounter with the art of the "other", is still to be understood and evaluated; most importantly, the revolution lingers on to this day with the perpetuation of formal stylistic elements which highlight the debt of all modern avant-gardes to l'art negre.

Enrico's encounter with Africa happened long before he set foot in the "dark continent" when, as a teenager, he witnessed the magic of certain artefacts, and with his first figurative experiments recycling waste material.

This gave rise to his first conceptual reflections on the analogies between cultures: the West, caught in the whirlpool of exasperating and continuous production, can no longer manage to think of recycling as a condition for a balanced ecosystem, but only as a déjà vu revival dictated by fashion. Prometti's productions have silently pursued this ecology of art for decades, and its message is all too topical nowadays.

Enrico loved to define himself ironically as an old man who stays young through creative play, but this playful artistic activity concealed an anthropological dimension, a quest for the origins of form and art-making.

This symbolic investigation lived in unison with, and was fed by, the interaction with "primitive" arts, inexhaustible fonts of inspiration and studio practice.

He made countless trips to Africa, marked by adventure, encounters with landscapes, cultures, colours and sounds. He has witnessed a great deal of this variegated world, an inventory of mankind in transformation, one foot in the painful past and another in the global future around the corner. Amongst the many African peoples, that which Enrico visited most often was the by now well known Dogon, with their complex symbolism and archaic cosmogony that never ceases to amaze.

The manipulation of materials (wood, iron, plastic, bronze, paper) continually forged sculptural or pictorial forms which in time evolved from the delicate surrealism of his early works to his final, more mature, period which photographed energetic tribal-metropolitan snapshots.

The energy which moved Enrico Prometti did not make any distinction, almost as if this process risked discriminating against something, and so it was a case of total artist or no artist at all.

The self-expression house, everyday objects, his car, stools, a box of pipe tobacco ... Nothing was excluded a priori and everything came together in the epiphany of his abstract and symbolic forms. This was evidently another analogy with African art which, by its very nature, spares nothing, indeed it elevates the category of mundane objects to splendid artistic artefacts.

Prometti was a careful collector of African works, but outside the world of the art dealers. The object was alive insofar as it was collected in loco and was fruit of that here-and-now aspect of his travels. In particular, his collection of objects pertaining to the religion and material culture of the Dogon people was without doubt remarkable.

Travelling, then, became a cultural, anthropological and artistic experience and these three dimensions were inextricable.

His artistic sensitivity and ability allowed him to collect dozens of pieces from the Sub-Saharan region, but each one of them closely bound to its place of origin, which gave it gloss and sacredness, a million miles from the well-lit display cases of fashionable lounges.

The countless subjects of his works are the decantings of a genuine, shrewd and happy universe. Thus the theatre of the world takes shape through the symbolic stylisation of the tarot; its totemic forms are vital and energetic, steeped in a Pagan religiosity. Jewels are sculptures for the body, collages and panels a jubilation of restless shapes and colours. Irony

pervades all his works, art is still just liberation and his irreverence reminds us of the frivolity of life.

Enrico's studio represented a unique experience; his chosen place of work is made up of layer upon layer of objects: created, abandoned, taken up again and reassembled. A fruitful handwriting, in a state of eternal coming into being, attests the story of a life of searching which will never come to an end since searching is the very meaning of a life spent for the sake of art.

Enrico's studio was worth dozens of personal and collective exhibitions and, like all valued items, should today be discovered, understood and appreciated.

The sense of a profound artistic message is offered with the humility of one who has always been consistent in wanting to personally take care of his own business. A practical, total artist to continually measure oneself against in order to chase away those dark shadows of nonsense which lie latent in all of us.

Short biographical note

Enrico Prometti, b. Bergamo, 1945. d. Bergamo, 2009.

From 1959 until 1965 studied at "G. Carrara" Academy of Fine Arts in Bergamo.

Personal exhibitions of painting, sculpture and woodcuts in private and public galleries in Bergamo, Milan, Lodi, Ferrara, Olbia.

Collective exhibitions in Italy and abroad, including two personal exhibitions in New York in 1996.

Long journeys in Indonesia, Sumatra, Papua and, especially, West Africa.