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## A Still Image Holds You Outside Itself

By Manfredi Beninati



Manfredi Beninati, *Mondello*, 2004, oil on canvas, 78 ¾ x 78 ¾ inches

Painting (like drawing or sculpture) is one of the most immediate means of expression. This is because it is so easy to use the materials and instruments, and because it implies complete independence. The painter's work does not require the intervention of any third person. Another important quality is its immediate availability to analysis, thus allowing it to be continuously modified. All this makes painting (as well as drawing and modeling) an irreplaceable media, even when the activity of an artist is turned toward vaster and more complex horizons. Moreover, the sense of continuity with art from the past is a fascinating ingredient: the idea of using the same instruments (or almost the same) that have been at the disposal of artists for the past centuries...

In my paintings (as well as my other works), I deal with what I know the best, that is my vision of the world, the things that surround me, my memory. I speak of the distance that separates us from the things we see as well as the things that inhabit this distance and which, by nature, I tend to ignore. In other words, I paint and I draw anything found in my range of vision. Then I work to

immerse it into the world where, it seems to me, this thing belongs. I try to find the natural balance of these things and this practice is sometimes very tiring. Often, I would even say almost always, I paint subjects from photographs or drawings with which I am very familiar (obviously, these are a lot of images from my childhood and adolescence).

The stakes are very high for my painting. After all, it involves my private research, maybe not interior, but which, in any case, has to do with the way I position myself faced with life events. It involves my search for balance.

The line of a pencil or stroke of a brush (with certain exceptions, as for example hyperrealism) are expressions of the nature of the person, as are his or her facial expressions or way of walking. I love purity and spontaneity and I believe in the capacity of the human being to surprise. A painting, as far as it has been thought out and constructed, speaks in a direct manner of the person who made it. In it you can read what the artist thought at each moment of its creation. Although, in most cases, this reading leaves us with a bitter taste in the mouth, sometimes it happens that we are stunned in front of a painting which unveils its world to us in a unique way.

I have cinematographic training behind me that is a lot more than pictorial. Actually, I satisfied my interest in art history by losing myself in images reproduced in books. The cinema, as a source of fleeting images, then accompanied me throughout my adolescence. Today, two things are indispensable because they represent

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the two opposite boundary markers that define a field of action. A still image holds you outside itself while a film makes you a protagonist in its story. You are not allowed to know a painting or a photograph in any other way than "this" precise plane which, however, being motionless, lets you examine its most secret details. On the opposite side, a film is intrinsically descriptive and shows a lot more. In a movie, the mystery is created by opposing the key elements while in a photograph or a figurative painting, the mystery is inherent and frustrating, playing a fundamental role.

Besides, there exist "transient images" of another kind, like those generated by computer. Eventually, these images emit the essence of painting. There are also images obtained from optical effects. Most of the time, the latter reproduces natural phenomena. The role of all these transient images is, in my opinion, to look for new dimensions, new playing fields, they are also fundamental in the evolution of artistic language and therefore in our society.

I only identify myself with a painting tradition in the sense of an "artistic culture". The fourteenth-, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painters have contributed a lot to the formation of my personal imagination, making up the humus of my forest of memories and experiences. But I do not question myself about the meaning of the history of painting. It does not interest me to compare myself to another artist, competition extinguishes my enthusiasm for everything. I do not place my personal work in any particularly way within contemporary research. I continue on my road, which, however, passes through today's towns and villages. I see the same world that all the artists of our time see, but I do not compare myself to anyone.