

Writing and painting share a common archetypal gesture: each is executed with a flowing movement of the hand as it passes over an oblique plane on which it leaves a fluid sign that dries and remains imprinted. That first instinctive gesture is followed by others that pursue the same path, to return to trains of thought whose significance must be clarified; to bring to light forms and meanings; or simply to leap beyond the limits of the intelligible and to develop the primary sign as a continuous individual thread that follows a single, uninterrupted creative impulse. The ultimate aim of the gesture is to leave a lasting impression in the enclosed space in which it has been made. The ancient origin of a gesture of the hand lies in the close relationship of two terms expressed in a dual concept to be found in the most common cosmogonic interpretations of the origin; terms that pertain to the mythology and literature of different cultures: I am talking about the dual concept of the image and the word. The watershed that divides writing and painting lies in the work involved, which in the case of the latter has a more striking physical aspect, since painting entails total involvement both in the space it produces and in the time required for the colour to settle on the canvas. Painting is work because it necessitates pauses and is executed by physically constructing the space through a process of subtraction, eliminating empty space from space. While writing is executed in a manner that cannot be defined in Euclidean terms, painting creates reality from three-dimensional reality, and it does this by giving relief to things, by delineating their shadow around them. Since the beginning of art history, shade has described a broad arc along which the challenge between true and false, between true and fake works, has been played out: shade is an artifice when it delineates the dead area of the pictorial surface, whereas it is a truth when it becomes a shadow of the work itself, an aura of doubt that is born from within it and is projected onto the ontological space that the work creates around itself, like a physical or mental link that gives meaning to meaning. Our perception of our own presence is strongly conditioned by the shadow we project onto the surrounding space, or rather by that fine substratum that lifts us above what is behind us, to a two-dimensional level. Our shadow is a subtle aura, a thin film that lifts us up from the depths and removes a specific weight from our existence that would otherwise remain undefined.

In Elvio Chiricozzi's works, the shadow is not a black prosthesis that is attached to the figures. It does not derive from a pact that painting was obliged to enter into with the world in order to resemble it. In his canvases there are extensive areas of shade that, in some cases, are completely identified with the figure, denoting the impossibility its being clearly defined in the light because it is the projection of a past that has lost its characteristics in the present. Chiricozzi's world, with its figures clearly-defined in the light and its figures in shadow, is a human world pervaded by the same fallibility and hopes as everyday life which is depicted here in a sublimated form that identifies humanity with being a body, a body in painting and therefore, potentially, a body in shadow, or rather an expression that is always on the point of disappearing, a word that is never spoken, but which is concrete and well-defined in the verses of a poet. If it were possible to classify the figures in Chiricozzi's works, I would see opaque figures in the transparent ones, because of their added capacity to act as a screen that blocks out the light. They are all able to express themselves through shade, even when they emerge from brilliantly-coloured light (yellow, for example) that would appear to leave no doubt as to the luminous source of their being. Chiricozzi always defines the profiles of the faces or bodies as areas incised in shade, sometimes leaving only the outlines visible, or rather the dark lines that delineate the face and then permit the black to drain from the path they have traced. Like a latter-day Etienne de Silhouette (1709-1767), finance minister to Louis XV, whose bankruptcy obliged him to spend the last years of his life cutting out silhouettes in Brie sur Marne, Elvio is well aware of the work involved in painting and its results; therefore he begins by delineating the space within the space, defining the area (of shade) where he will leave his mark so that the combination of signs will be more incisive. The rest of the canvas is the space, which is sometimes white and at other times a subtle reflection of the figure, but which is always the most direct link with the world. That's the way it has always been: from the graffiti in the caves in Lascaux, to the Greek, Mesopotamian and Etruscan vases, until the present, the figures have always been outlines that can acquire a surface by being filled in with colour. But if in the art of painting shadow is understood as rendering figures in dark outlines, the work of painting, the type Elvio has chosen of his own free will, consists in incising shadow as if it were a level of depth in which to reconstruct the entire world of the image that goes beyond appearance, in a new space and time dimension. Unlike an illusionist, the artist does not lead us along the path of deception based on the premise "trattar le ombre come cosa solida" (treating shadows like something solid) (Dante), but searches in the darkness for the most fragile figures and signs that are only able to exist as shadows, in painting's shadow. The black figures drawn and elaborated in pencil by Chiricozzi are hand-crafted versions of the shadows that we (now)

usually associate with black & white photography. While yellow illuminates the present, black & white is strongly associated with the process of assimilating images that pertains to memory, to a world in which vision is confused with what is seen. The artist's very young adolescents that rise from the canvas, seem to be detached from the background, like water lilies floating on the dark magma of memory. Like black & white photography, the black pencil is the most suitable tool for exploring the indefinable. The black of the pencil is a natural black: it is obtained through the calcination of ivory or bone, or the combustion of minerals and plants. The black that the pencil explores is the point of the prism where colours disappear; it has always been the symbol of mourning and death, of the chaos of the darkness before the beginning of time, of the obscure. In everyday language we associate black with melancholy (black mood, black thoughts, black bile), drunkenness, magic, and the pencil has interpreted these as forms. Since the time of Plotinus, and also in the works of Durer and Rembrandt, black has been the refuge for spiritual light, the dark veil that turns the eye within, towards inner life and the dream, in contemplative rituals that begin with immersion in black, the first exorcism of darkness. It is a means of exploring a mystery that is central to art: black within colour; shade within light.

All the little sprites, with their modern features, who smile, leap, play and seem to materialize instantly on Elvio's canvases, embody a mystery of the unknown that destines them to remain attached to the canvas, like shadows drowning in light, and whose age-old faces, unknown signs of individual characteristics, can only be completely brought alive again by shade. When the image becomes representation it is always two-dimensional (this is why, as Baudelaire wrote in 1846, sculpture is a boring art when it reproduces its own three-dimensional quality). In order to be wrenched from the seething mass, saved from potential non-existence and prevented from remaining a blank page, the image requires precise draughtsmanship, a clear design and a perfect knowledge of the tools necessary for such a delicate operation: a perfect knowledge of shadows. The most common meaning of the verb "to draw" is an activity designed to produce likenesses in outline traced with different tools (pencils, charcoal, pointed instruments, burins). To this basic meaning we must add a more profound one: drawing is essentially a design instrument. It is no coincidence that the two terms "to draw" and "to design" are often used as synonyms. The verb "to draw" fully expresses the process of extracting, almost by force, the image from the blank surface, in the same way that one would pull out a "drawer". It is the design that lays the foundations for the painting and conditions the end result. In drawing, the black pencil prepares the space for the colour; it marks the first transition from the imaginary to the real. A translation of terms. Elvio Chiricozzi painstakingly seeks to avoid any betrayal of shadow; he seeks to bridge and to interpret the gap that necessarily exists in every duality, in the transition from word to meaning, in the translation from one language into another. The poetry that Chiricozzi favours (singular and anomalous poet of colour that he is) can always be interpreted in more and more ways, precisely because the loftiest expression of the word contains a host of different meanings, as a direct result of the stratification of the different periods and cultures that have formed it. The translation of poetry shows that two-dimensionality is none other than a channel providing access to other dimensions, which can be interpreted by adopting a dialectical and comparative system. But not a binary system, at least not one that can be totally identified with a single simplified process (like the one on which the computer system is based). Not two in the absolute sense but in the plural sense. In this regard, the relevance of Chiricozzi's painting lies in its expressing a condition that persists in art, also in the face of the new media: the existence of time and of a space in art, which in painting is defined by the necessities imposed by colour. Painting does not mean colouring (as digital painting would have us believe), but redefining the times of art according to the internal processes of art itself, which Chiricozzi explores in great depth.

The art of painting, for Elvio, is not confined to making art, but to designing the work in relation to its particular space and time. This is why he is such a remarkable exception: his entire work is contained in a visionary space composed of two gallery walls on which a pair of polyptiches have been carefully arranged so that they balance and face each other, like two multi-vision screens that stand out from the walls on which their shadows and various essential elements are projected: profiles, outlines, bodies, writing. A cosmogonic whole that obliges us to make a new start, as everything does when the evening shadows fall.

Angelo Capasso