

Fulvio Gonella

Whispers in the Twilight

September 14 - October 28, 2023

Chelsea, New York: 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel presents *Whispers in the Twilight*, a show of brand new paintings from Italian-born artist Fulvio Gonella, whose vibrant, primitive brushwork and whimsical effects mark the advent of a bold new presence.

Since Fulvio Gonella's teenage years, he has been enthralled by the realm of art brut, a domain where diverse perspectives craft distinct realities. His current paintings combine the tenets of this radical artistic movement with a highly gestural style reflective of street art, graffiti and graphic design, and folkloric imagery. The results combine ferocious visual energy with a whimsical, mysterious sensibility redolent with evocative imagery drawn from an abundant imagination.

Traditionally, art brut artists, in the words of Ian Chilvers, "create their works for their own use as a kind of private theatre," motivated by an endogenous psychodramatic drive. Gonella takes the dynamic a step further in that his works are created for the use of the viewer, as opposed to the artist; "*Whispers in the Twilight*" comprises a public theatre of sorts. The Italian artist's latest exhibit, and his first in the United States, introduces American art-lovers to a brand new set of visual strategies and aesthetic possibilities. Gonella's paintings have three essential aesthetic dynamics, which interact and overlap in ways that operate in a kind of symphony of unreality.

The first element in this visual carnival is the nearly aggressively crude and gestural signifiers that Gonella constructs. Using a salmagundi of paints and colors, liquids, crayons, oil stick, enamel and found materials — literally "mixed media" — Gonella populates his canvases with sketched-out outlines of stick figures with primitive faces, while objects are depicted in assertively flat renditions. To call the draftsmanship "childlike" is both nearly irresistible but also misnomenclature, for underneath Gonella's primitive brushwork lies a sophisticated understanding of form and visual structure. As the critic Andrés Isaac Santana put it, Gonella's "pieces do not respond to ignorance regarding an established cultural tradition or the absence of artistic training ... on the contrary, he works from the most

complete understanding of the artistic field and from a strict organization of ideas.”

The shimmering “Purple Rain Dances on a Zebra Whisper,” for example, coalesces into a pair of wedge-shaped triangles, one the zebra, the other the sky, perfectly balanced against a ground of swirling, dappled shapes (leaves? snow?). And “Il Duello” presents mirrored dual combatants, menacing and silent under the scorching sun and desert sky. The heritage of surrealism, of the belief that the unconscious is capable of generating images of oneiric power, is omnipresent in Gonella’s work.

The second thread of the schematic tapestry that underpins Gonella’s work is the vibrancy of his facture. Paintings like “Sol Invictus” and “Condo Board” feature grounds executed with scribbled cross-hatchings over which are set thickly impastoed figures executed with brash velocity. “Make Flowers Blue Again” boasts a heavily scumbled surface that gives the imagery a jaunty roughness, as if it had survived prolonged exposure to the elements. “The Future is Now” and “Alter Ego” feature blurry splashes of spray paint, summoning not only the vocabulary of graffiti and street artists but also the graphical fluidity of the medium. The paintings combine these different factures in what could be described as a joyful roundelay of texture, color, and shape.

The final element that clicks into place, cementing the gestural elements and the facture together in a rigorous embrace, is the whimsical verbal elements that surface either in the paintings’s titles or as text embedded in the surface itself. “Il Duello” and “Coffee Slave” feature their titles emblazoned across the canvas in primitive-looking lettering, taking off not just from Jean-Michel Basquiat — an obvious antecedent for Gonella in general — but Cy Twombly and Ed Ruscha as well. The latter painting has its title sloping down over the titular pot, with the humanoid character drawn towards it as though sucked by a magnet: the image is both funny and sinister, calling attention to the disparity in denotation created by this particular metaphor. “Condo Board” presents the viewer with a five-headed dragon of comical fierceness; the title refers to the imperious nature of condominium board members, of course, but could also be construed as a nod to the artist George Condo, another painter with whom Gonella shares an affinity. In these cases and more, the verbal element adds a dimension of whimsical humor that nicely offsets the paintings’ savage visual approach.

Such a multivalent framework requires an agile mind and a quick, painterly eye if it is going to avoid become diffuse or incoherent. In Gonella’s hands, the disparate

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motifs and strategies coalesce into a vision that takes on authentic comic grandeur, allowing us to confront the chimerae of our past selves. Santana: “His work is a gesture of reconciliation, a kind of narrowing of opposites. The adult and the child mix and overlap on a surface that resembles a palimpsest with a lot of condensed emotion.” *A palimpsest of emotion*—an apt and canny description of a unique painter operating at full capacity and in fervent exploration of the new.

For further information or to schedule an interview with the artist, please contact 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel by e-mail at info@532gallery.com