

Alberto Sughi on Painting, Ideology and Loneliness

Interviewed by Biagio Maraldi

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Alberto Sughi, is one of the main exponents of the figurative pictorial era, in which "Existential Realism" was widely discussed and debated. Alberto Sughi quickly engaged the attention of art critics: his work attracted a significant convergence of eminent scholars and essayists of diverse orientations and was presented in the most important collections of Contemporary Art, from the Rome Quadriennale to the Venice Biennale. His work has been critical in showing the global art world the latest in Italian art from the 60s until now.

Biagio Maraldi: It is often said that an artist's work is a "mirror," a reflection of the man and his life. Can you tell me whether you feel that the development of your painting has followed the story of your inner life, of your passions and ideals, loneliness and pessimism?



Alberto Sughi: There are, obviously, biographical references. But I prefer to regard my paintings as having lives of their own, which are not always connected with my own personal history. When they are exhibited, other people will be viewing my works. They will translate the images into thoughts, according to their own intuitions and cultural background. Then, perhaps, my paintings will become the "mirror" of those observing them. But "mirror" is an unforgiving word, and I prefer not to use it myself.

BM: One of the characteristics of your paintings seems to be a pessimistic view of the world. The figures in your paintings are almost always enveloped in a tragic atmosphere. Does this portray your relationship with reality and your fellow men.

Alberto Sughi, *No. 60 To Go Where?*, Oil on canvas, 160x160cm, 1991.

AS: The feeling of sadness and loneliness expressed by a work of art does not necessarily reflect the sadness and loneliness of the artist. In my paintings, I suppose I have tried to gain a greater knowledge of the contradictions that man has always burdened himself with, up to the present, to post-modern Man. For instance, I have tried to determine how difficult it is to establish strong communicative relationships within a society that has made communication the most banal aspect of its own identity.

BM: How do you characterize the act of painting?

AS: Painting is a kind of translation: thought, reflection, and conceptual analysis is transferred into image. To tell the truth, we shouldn't even regard it as translation, as if the painter's creations already pre-existed in some other form of expression. Painting is nothing more than an autonomous way of confronting reality. It is true that art, whatever form it takes, always alludes to something else. However, the object on which a painter works, and the way he expresses his art, means that he is under no obligation to bear this in mind.

BM: What processes are involved in your development of a subject matter for a painting?

AS: Each painting is created from all those that you have painted previously, and from what you have already learned about painting; but, above all, it is created from a wish to explore the world, to discover what continues to escape you...

BM: In the past, the relationship between art and ideology was a great subject of debate in Italy. What kind of feelings do you now have about that period?

AS: Years pass, people settle down, and only the quality of a work of art remains as a really useful point of reference. So I give little importance to declarations of ideological commitment, or detachment, which determined much of the negative attitude towards our work in those days. I don't know whether critics today are more reliable. However, I believe that we can probably foresee that tomorrow many critical judgments will count for less, just as much of the painting in favor today will soon be forgotten.

As far as loneliness is concerned, artists are generally resigned to this condition, so it cannot be viewed as unusual, or be seen as a reason for frustration.

BM: Can we trace the history of your artistic education? On other occasions you have mentioned some influences...

AS: The various influences in my work have suffered a process of sedimentation over time, so that I now find it difficult to pin down what has had the greatest influence on my work. As a painter, you are under no obligation to be faithful to, or to religiously respect, the work of other artists. You simply capture something that serves to enhance your own original expression. □

* In 1991, the Italian Cassa di Risparmio Bank acquired Alberto Sughi's large painting, *Theatre of Italy* for its art collection. The same year, to celebrate the acquisition, the Bank produced the volume *Theatre of Italy and On Painting: An Interview with Alberto Sughi*. Recently, Alberto Sughi has completed a new edition of that interview, published for the first time in English and excerpted here. The entire interview can be read on www.albertosughi.com