

ANGELS AND DEMONS

*"That man has been made capable of discovering and reproducing the divine nature surpasses the wonder of everything worthy of admiration."
Asclepius - 36*

With his cycles of artworks, Nicola Previati places himself ideally and programmatically outside the stagnant and self-referential dynamics of so-called "Contemporary" art. The refined painting technique, the compositional inventions that retrieve and update ancient skills and knowledge, and the colors, even volcanic in their contrasting harmony, would be sufficient on their own to legitimize these works and place them at the center of the contemporary painting scene. However, behind these works lies much more; their sparkling physicality is, in reality, the result of a much deeper journey, constituting their true content and value. They testify to the recovery of the vital root of painting as Art and thus pose an ontological question that must be fully understood.

In the face of the current swamp represented by a culture that, by defining itself as "contemporary," admits to having no roots with the past or prospects for the future, it is indeed appropriate to start again from these works to try to understand what the true role of art is and, consequently, what the ethical responsibilities of the artist are.

Words designate things, but images represent worlds; hence, the latter is recognized as having a "polysemy," the ability to simultaneously express multiple meanings distributed across several levels and degrees of knowledge. However, the things designated by words can have a catalytic effect within certain "worlds," coagulating dynamics or energies that would otherwise remain floating and indeterminate. Under favorable circumstances, words become the spark that ignites a fierce fire. This is the case with the few words mentioned above, which inflamed Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, from whom the fire of the "Renaissance" spread, whose historical and, above all, artistic events are universally known, and which form the premise for the most enigmatic passage of the entire writing:

"Our ancestors... invented the art of shaping deities. To this invention, they added a supernatural power drawn from material nature and mixed with the substance of the statues. However, since they could not create souls, after having evoked souls of demons or angels, they introduced them into their statues through holy and divine rituals, so that these idols had the power to do good and evil."

To create a "statue" first and then animate it with "holy and divine rituals" belongs to the religious sphere and thus to the priestly function: we all have experience with a "blessing" by a Catholic priest on objects or icons intended for the aforementioned purpose. In artistic creation, understood here in the general sense of poetic creation, the opposite occurs: first, there is the evocation *"of demons or angels,"* and then the *"holy and divine rituals"* are, in fact, the act through which the work is created. When an artist, be it a poet, musician, painter, or other, completes the work, the game is over: either they have succeeded in making it alive, or it remains irreparably dead, incapable of producing the described effects, that is, having the *"power to do good and evil."* "Magic" is thus the true energy that must move artistic creation, but even here, some distinctions must be made to avoid the commonplaces of sensationalistic spiritualism. Regarding the *"holy and divine rituals,"* it is easy to agree: there is no doubt that the creative act, whatever it may be, requires personal "liturgies" that prepare the intellect to receive the "vital energies" and transmit them to the matter (words, music, color, etc.) being dealt with. This state is often called "poetic fury," but the nature of these energies must be clarified. It is evident that Demons or Angels, whatever one understands by these terms, do not ontologically belong to the sphere of art. Instead, art is a manifestation of the vital energies emanating from the *Anima Mundi*, to use an archaic term. The artist places themselves at the center of the great creative force of nature and brings it to fruition through their work, which is alive and has the power to do "good" if it is within this great energetic flow, or dead and has the power to do "evil," propagating spiritual necrosis if it is outside of it. The artist's magic is always a *natural one*, which, through *sympathy* generated by the appropriate choice of matter, attracts, coagulates, and fixes the energetic flows that pervade the world. The

"living" work of art is the one that manages to rise from passions (sensations, psychic dynamics, emotions) to energies because these energies are the force that will allow the work to interact with the context in which it will live. In conclusion, the work of art is not a body added to other bodies; rather, it is a spirit that vivifies the parts of the world inhabited by humans.

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