

Valerio Carrubba

In the psychoanalytic reading of melancholy, the relationship between subject and object of desire manifests itself as a form of ambiguity, of contradiction whereby the self suppresses the object only to be, in its turn, defeated by it. It is precisely in this gesture of annihilation that melancholic subjects show their devotion to the object, which eventually triumphs over the ego.

Carrubba's artistic practice stages a perpetual struggle with the work, an exhausting effort to abolish the painterly image, which nevertheless continues to surface, a looming, ghostly presence. The strategy is to paint the canvas two times, turning the artistic gesture into something completely mechanical, automatic and impersonal. The first version, already complete, perfect, is covered by a second, identical draft, which hides the first one, transforming it into a shadow.

The choice of images, too, is derivative: the original image being already a copy, there is no invention, only perpetual repetition. The themes for the paintings come from a classic repertory—although they are not citations from art history, but ancient anonymous images, as in the case of anatomic models, which typically bore the name of the physician who commissioned them rather than the name of the artist who realized them. These provide Carrubba with the material he needs for his virtuoso gesture, since they contain rich details and complex figurations, and at the same time recast the intrinsic contradiction that lies at the root of his research—fascinating images, and the result of undisputed mastery of painting, the anatomy plates were primarily a scientific tool, they supported a research aimed at an objective knowledge of the human body. Carrubba emphasizes this ambiguity, underlining the pathos that hides in these images, adding a feeling of drama, in the form of narrative elements—natural sceneries, allegorical references and, above all, the surgical act—multiple hands sadistically opening the body, exposing to our gaze what hides under the epidermic surface, multiplying the painterly process in a play of conceptual hints.

The uncertain boundary between science and conscience is dealt with again in the series of drawings where Carrubba gives us a painstaking hand reproduction of clinical handbook texts, explaining ancient surgical techniques in detail—as if in a psychotherapeutic session, here the artist carries to extremes the antinomy inherent in a surreal gesture which, in its mechanicity, lays the unconscious bare. (IC)