

**The Convergences of Letizia Fornasieri**

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Letizia Fornasieri has been on the panorama of contemporary figurative painting for forty years, ever since she gained her diploma in painting at the Brera Academy in Milan and, in 1981, was awarded the Premio San Fedele for the visual arts. She has talent in abundance and she works like a specialised labourer (she has explained, “In the morning I paint, and in the afternoon I am busy with all the rest”); she mixes paint, prepares canvases, and takes part in solo and group shows.

Right from the start the artist made an impression on the heart of many collectors with Cézanne-style oil paintings that always have as their subject everyday reality (her room, the Milanese trams, a sunflower, her mother reading, roads, houses). Fornasieri from the very beginning has matured as an artist while being totally ignored by activist critics.

At that time the art scene in Milan was dominated by the eclectic figure of Giovanni Testori (1923 – 1993), a writer, painter, art critic, and theatre director: around him had grown up a kind of Milanese workshop, a band of young artists, all in their twenties, all men, and all painters (Giovanni Frangi, Alessandro Papetti, Marco Petrus, Luca Pignatelli, and Velasco Vitali). Letizia shared in their art, obstinately tied to painting and figuration as a process of knowledge – a path followed by few at the time of Conceptual Art – but she was a woman (one of the few female painters in Milan of her generation); she was older than them by a few years and, even though much loved by Testori, she remained outside the milieu. The heir to an approach to reality that is reminiscent of Ennio Morlotti, the expressionist painter from Lecco, and of the tactile art of the Swiss Willy Varlin – two painters she has always loved – Fornasieri paints far from the spotlight.

It isn’t that in those years there did not exist up-to-date critics of feminist art able to be interested in her, but to them Fornasieri’s work seemed transparent: a step backwards instead of forwards, without provocation, without demands, a thousand miles from the hot themes of politics, sex, and the subconscious. Too aesthetic and too little ethics.

The painter, however, had already chosen her reference points: the American William Congdon (1912 - 1998) who, at the end of the 1970s lived in the lower Milanese area, and Giudo Gambaredo in his studio-home annexed to the Benedictine monastery in Cascinazza. A painter who made every work into a prayer. She frequented him for all the 1990s and, in the meantime, was awarded the Premio Carlo Dalla Zorza (1995), she mixed paint, prepared canvases, and took part in group and solo shows. Her works also went into famous public collections such as that of the lower house of the Italian parliament.

These were difficult years for those who, like her, remained faithful to painting. In fact, with regard to canvases and paintbrushes there predominated a general hypocritical climate, as though to paint in oils on canvas were a simple old-timers’ inheritance. Fornasieri knows the capacity of painting to transform itself without ever succumbing, and that metabolising new languages does not mean turning one’s back on painting. She searched for the sense of making art, not a consensus. She has fought the iconoclasm that dominated much of the modern art of the 20th century and leaves, in each of her paintings, the traces of a patient work for the salvation of the everyday: a forsythia, a rose bush, a white buttercup with a yellow heart are slivers of beauty. Those who are touched by beauty can have hope once more because they discover that their life, in fact, still has an aim. Beauty does not explain that aim but insists that one does exist. As Fornasieri says, “The things of life have a reason. Artists search for this reason as best they can, and when they know it they say and offer it”. This sense can appear in forms before words, and even the smallest clues are useful for finding a path and a direction again.

Her apparent delay with regard to contemporary art was in fact to become avant-garde. This was understood by the gallery dealer James Rubin who in 2000 began to work with her, asking from her more discipline in her way of dealing with the subjects, more rigour in her composition, and more conciseness in her forms. This was a fecund dialogue that in twenty years of collaboration has impelled Fornasieri’s gaze into the heart of reality. Her painting of nature, divided between waterways and flowering gardens, Sienese vineyards and Po valley millraces, experiment with new light effects and vibrates with a deep joy for everything that exists because it was created.

At a time of great critical relaunching of both contemporary painting and female art, Letizia Fornasieri has been invited to show the most recent phase of her work in the exhibition “Confluenze” at the Acquario Civico in Milan. The artist concentrates on Nature, in the sense of the kingdom of living beings, both animal and vegetable. The choice of green themes is neither sycophantic nor does it give a wink at a certain environmental sensitivity. For some ten years – not from yesterday – Fornasieri has painted landscape above all and has changed register: the network of canals in the province of Cremona, the tiny flowers that grow in the fields at the doors of Milan, the trajectory of goldfish in their bowl, all become almost expressionist . The artist observes from life, knows, and paints. Because it is not enough to know how to draw in order to make good work nor does technique suffice: it is necessary to transmit an experience.

The character of Fornasieri’s painting seems to be the same as that of water, something that flows to somewhere with ever-different surfaces and dimensions, but that adheres to the form with an amazing and mysterious simplicity. The results are works abundant in their variety of tones and modulations that testify to the full maturity reached by the painter in her representation of everything that lives. The beauty that emanates from her paintings, the *Mentha aquatica* with its violet flower or the *Lotus pedunculatus* with its full yellow pigment, is not simply an ornament. The harmony given by the rhythm to the *Lythrum salicaria* with its fuchsia cobs or to the *Mallards* seen from above, is not something decorative. The beauty and harmony that inhabit every work on show are the sign of something else, from which the works themselves originated. With her painting, Fornasieri tells us what is the real essence of the work of art: to be the point of convergence between humanity and God.