

CATERINA TOGNON

Aldo Grazzi
Giardino d'inverno

Caterina Tognon arte contemporanea
Ca' Nova di Palazzo Treves
Corte Barozzi | San Marco 2158
30124 Venezia Italia

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NEW LIFE INCIPIIT or REANIMATED NATURE

text by Annarosa Buttarelli



We find ourselves wandering through the touching “Winter Garden” that Aldo Grazzi has set up for us visitors, on our quest for that vital breath that only art can provide in this forsaken world. The small fragile sculptures of the garden are kept in glass display cases to protect them, but also to remind us of the traditional sumptuous “winter garden” made of greenhouses designed to shelter the most delicate plants that could never survive the harsh winter climate. The cases are to be read as essential components of the works, as concrete symbols of a space-time in which new forms germinate and need protection from the aggressions, negligence and bitter cold of our current civilization.

Aldo Grazzi's “winter garden” is composed of flowers modelled in plaster, gauze, cloth and held together with animal glues, sustained by fragile stems made of various plant fragments. They spurt out of the plaster and glue of their vases, broken, exploded, distorted by time, dilapidated, trying to maintain a recognizable form. In their extremely elegant way, they allude to many imprints that art history has laid upon them, including that of Japanese ceramics.

An overall view of these 25 sculptures inevitably generates a reference to the controversial representation of “still life”. The artist must come to terms with this since he has declared that his sculptures are “reanimated lives”. That is what they are, but in order to understand the inventiveness of Aldo Grazzi's research, one must recapitulate what has been done in the “still life” painting genre. To start with, it is important to know that still-life comes from the Dutch word *stilleven* that, as of the 17th century, designated paintings depicting still or silent natural scenes. Originally, this genre embraced subjects with a solemn presence, silent, peaceful and above all sacred. In fact, Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* is painted in such a way that we imagine it to be positioned on an altar rather than on a pedestal. And Giovanna Garzoni, a 17th century master of still lifes, painted her vibrantly coloured vases of flowers and baskets of fruit to celebrate the “great theatre of nature”. However, something “still” or dead, inanimate, is present in many still life paintings, as in Mondrian's brilliant reconsideration of this artistic genre. Or in Morandi's dimly lit aligned objects. Still lifes, maybe because of their perfectly detailed rendition, are typical of extraordinary techniques such as the miniature. Even here, we must go back to the origin of the genre: the word “miniature” stems from the colour *minius* (cinnabar), a bright red colour used by amanuensis to trace the initials of illuminated codes. It is thus important to emphasize the fact that the quintessence of the miniature is fire, or red vibration, and not something still.

There is a still life by Zurbaran that, unexpectedly, is closely related to Aldo Grazzi's works: “Cup of Water and a Rose on a Silver Plate” (1630), one of the most powerful achievements of humble spirituality ever painted. This approach is analogous to Aldo Grazzi's alert and humble perception of the world: he is fascinated by the animal and plant life on this planet and his research reveals an incessant spiritual dialogue with the mysteries of the universe and its manifold vitality.

Aldo Grazzi, one of the most important Italian artists, has toppled the still-life genre through the miniaturisation of a garden (having found the fire within the matter): the cosmological mystery of life proceeds in a microcosm where life itself was never still but has revealed itself under a new form, recovered from hibernation, after a long latency, hidden from the distracted and destructive eye of humans who assumed it had vanished.

The new life has the fragile power of resurrection, of the many re-awakenings offered to those who are capable of perceiving them. The vases or ruins that had shielded the hidden seedlings could have eventually maimed the efflorescence of the vital force: but brilliantly, the cosmological light (Zurbaran's silver plate) holds the vases (the cup full of water-spirit, feminine nourishment) who let themselves to be opened, broken, rebuilt, together with the flower-life they contain. Zurbaran's eternally perfumed rose, a mystic flower in every culture, has been put in a new light and deposited in its sacred ground.