

This is a stroll in a "Terra Incognita," a wilderness that precipitously overlooks the collective unconscious of the human species.

I had never reflected enough on the sound assonance between the Italian words "incognita" and "inconscio." The "Terra Incognita" (Unknown land) that Christian Achenbach paints on his large, colourful, and chaotic canvases is also the "Terra Inconscia" (Unconscious Land).

That deep space that lies, unknowable, within every human being and that, at times, almost magically, appears as a common, shared space.

As if all our humanity, our celebrated post-modern individuality, floated uncertainty on a dark sea.

A slightly higher wave would be enough to plunge us, individuals and species, into its depths.

Has Christian Achenbach perhaps immersed himself in this unknown and hidden place?

Perhaps, dressed in Landsknecht armour or a diving suit, he ventured beyond armed with his canvas and brushes to return and tell us what lies there, buried but alive, colourful, dynamic, twisted, and tangled? Are his paintings photographs, glimpses into an impossible place common to all of us? Do you recognize it?

Do you remember it?

But what strikes most, beyond the impossible architectures that would have pleased M.C. Escher, the desolate landscapes resonating with T.S. Eliot's verses, and some views that make us think Max Ernst may have visited the same places, well, what strikes is the absence.

In this almost chaotic polyphony of colours and intertwined forms, where everything seems to be in motion and pursuit, behold, in all of this, no living creature populates the painting.

In Achenbach, there is a kind of iconoclasm, a taboo in the representation of human beings and all living creatures. It is not surprising; we are in the place that lies within the human being, contained in it; man is just the empty container, Achenbach's painted work is its content.

However, there is a further step that we cannot overlook.

During the Amsterdam vernissage on February 2, 2024, the painter presented a recent video work that, on one hand, emphasizes and strengthens the dynamic and "animated" element of his works. There are rolling circles, dancing forms, mountains silhouetted by the swaying of impossible flowers moved by a silent wind (the wind of Amsterdam?).

There is, however, a second completely new element that seems to contradict what we said earlier about Achenbach's iconoclasm.

Indeed, in the video, a living creature appears. Anthropomorphic, dressed in an elegant brick-coloured masculine attire, with a face resembling a bird or a small dinosaur. An image that Shakespeare may have dreamed of in his comedy "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

A creature that is a hybrid, surreal, and genetic, perpetually undergoing mitosis, populating, schizophrenic, Achenbach's "Terra Incognita" (and unconscious).

Who is this creature? An intruder? A guide?

The personification of Achenbach's Freudian Id. Or perhaps a kind of Virgil guiding us into the depths of these lands.

We don't know, but do we really need an answer?

No, we only need to emphasize that in Achenbach's paintings, such a figure does not exist; they remain iconoclastic, empty, or perhaps simply waiting for the observer to populate them with their own unconscious nightmares.

The hybrid only lives in the video, in a projection of the "Terra Incognita" manifested through a different artistic medium, precisely, the video.

Who knows if perhaps the difference lies in this. Is it the video that has the power to convey the demons of our unconscious? To make them real, compose them of the material dreams are made of, and see them proliferate, duplicate, and contaminate?

Is this the power of the video?