

## Gaetano Pompa

by Vittorio Sgarbi

What purpose can history and nature serve for an artist like Gaetano Pompa? Archeological remains, documentary records of the past, places, plants, animals are for him an insatiable desire for creativity.

Pompa, seemingly a citizen of the globe (he was born in Lucania, lived in Germany, then in Rome) always proclaimed to be part of the vast Latin soul. He reconstructed the late Roman epoch, but, of course, without a wish to do "real archeology". In fact, how could an artist, a veritable poet of history so full of blanks be satisfied by anything other than interpretation?

Pompeii survived due to a monstrous calamity which today, and it seems a paradox, proves to be unrepeatable luck! How many other Pompeii is, maybe more prominent, but less "fortunate", disappeared leaving no trace of their grandeur? Can we live without this data without changing forever the very truth that "archeological" history defends above all?

Pompa chose to give his own answer. It is evident that at least dealing with the past an absolute historical reconstruction is impossible.

But Pompa was successful instead in integrating death with suggestive hypotheses, most of all in their physical forms and through what he called "Mutmassungen".

The artist explained thus how this foreign term became part of his everyday lexicon: "Almost all my works are called "Mutmassungen on something." "Mutmassungen" is a German word that means "conjecture". My friend Uwe Johnson from Pomerania, who died tragically in Sheerness in North Kent, used this word for the first time in his book *Mutmassungen über Jacob* (Conjectures on Jacob). Ever since I used it too, as homage to Uwe and for the beauty of the word".

This anecdote gives us an understanding of the laetitia, fatalistic enlightenment with which Pompa confronts the "things" of this world.

It is useless to tire ourselves searching. We make great discoveries in life by chance; they dawn on us themselves. Pompa is an artist whose intellectual roots spring from the big "metaphysical-dadaist-surrealist" family, but their route in the epochal they grow through the imaginary world that he pretended to discover in his paintings, Pompa reinvents history as if in a dream, as if he were interrogating his unconscious to reveal himself, to understand himself all the way.

That is why Pompa creates almost involuntarily, developing pretexts, one by one, which may seem unimportant but which unveil little by little new discoveries, new adventures, sacrilegious intrusions, modern images in ancient times, brusque passages from epoch to epoch, from Continent to continent, from race to race, His is a dimension where the ancient and the modern wind up side by side, It is a permanent state of contamination, an archaic satire that invents new history, new time, new nature.

A game, if you wish, but the most serious one. But is it really so? Or is Pompa's imaginary history an intentional fantastic appendix to the real one, undoubtedly improbable but not impossible? As we cannot negate the possible existence of four or five other Pompei, why should we exclude the possibility that Pompa's history could be real?

Pompa wanted to make history his own, confront its blanks, filling them with our pleasure, with our intuition, Pompa invites us to relive the past with the same energy with which we live the present, History is no longer an obscure domain, but a "serene" companion of our existences. It lives in our present, It is the source of our imagination. That is why Pompa's works demand due respect for their mystery, as real documents of a history and a civilization that today seem to us unlikely, but which did not exist due only to destiny's whim.

His creations are precious documents -- small relics, exquisitely refined, made ever so fine by meticulousness of a masterful artisan, by noble materials -- faultless, elegant and enigmatic in their reference to fragmented scriptures.

Gaetano Pompa is no longer with us, but he continues to offer us these documents, with countenance of self-assurance, without hiding a shadow of a smile, because nothing in this world is as truly serious as what seems useless and nothing is as useless as what seems serious.

If we were to let the passion of his work possess us, if we allowed it to intrigue us as it can, we would be willing to imagine that Gaetano Pompa is living his third life.