

"Erotic suffering".

The body in Fausto Pirandello's painting by Manuel Carrera The investigation into the theme of the body in painting has all the characteristics of an obsession for Fausto Pirandello. This clearly emerges from an overview of his entire production: between oil paintings and works on paper there are thousands of nudes, whether they are set in domestic interiors or outdoor, portraits of models in the studio or bathers, the latter as absolute protagonists of the visual universe of the Roman painter. Inevitably, much of Pirandello's bibliography has always focused on this aspect of his art: yet, much remains to be explored regarding the creative ideas offered to Pirandello by the research on the human body, a theme which strongly attracted him from the very beginning (matter of fact he introduced himself for the first time to the Roman public with a composition of nudes: *Bagnanti*, exhibited at the third Roman biennial). At first, the artist's curiosity was devoted to the more strictly anatomical aspects of the representation of the body, following the lesson of his first masters. When, after completing his classical studies, he decided to be an artist, Pirandello did not attend the institutional Academy: instead, he opted for the drawing courses of Sigmund Lipinsky, considered together with the German Otto Greiner one of the most influential second generation "Deutsch-Römer". Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, artists such as Umberto Boccioni and Gino Severini showed a peculiar interest in the calligraphic expertise of the German-Roman engravings, especially so far as nudity, in the symbolic and expressive implications of a sometimes exasperated rendering of anatomical details. Lipinsky, author of the famous manual of artistic anatomy published in Rome by Herder in 1931, was an important cultural reference for the young Pirandello, for whom the study of nudity was from the beginning a preparatory approach to painting. The archive of the Fausto Pirandello Foundation preserves the Hoepli manual of pictorial anatomy by Achille Lombardini, a precious document of this first phase of his apprenticeship, in the 1919 reissue, on which the artist wrote comments and quick (but already surprisingly expressive) studies of feminine nudes. They are, in fact, the first known drawings by Fausto Pirandello (figs. 1-3). Proof of his vocation as an interpreter of the nude is also the 1921 Self-portrait with an engraving (fig. 4), where Pirandello represents himself in the act of portraying a model without veils posing in the background. The Nordic influence infused by the teachings of Lipinsky<sup>2</sup> emerges from the first documented paintings, specifically those made in the period in which Pirandello attended Felice Carena's classes between Rome and Anticoli Corrado, where he had Giuseppe Capogrossi and Emanuele Cavalli as study companions. The female nudes of that period, fixed on the canvas without affectedness, displayed a new monumentality, certainly of Carenian influence. In the exaltation of their raw realism they distinguished themselves from the compositions of his colleagues, oriented towards a more classic harmonic composition. However, it is the acquaintance of Arturo Martini that proves to be decisive for Pirandello and deeply marks his way of understanding the body in painting. Decency and nudity are the themes that characterize the dialogue of their first bizarre meeting, which took place in the alleys of Anticoli Corrado in 1924: «This funny guy, what does he want?». He sees me as soon as we are introduced to each other at the door of the tobacconist's shop, "Here is our Fausto who is a painter and this is Martini who works at Sterne's." and he already tells me that I am just fine, very well, about just right for a Sangiorgio as he sees him, who goes to his studio to pose. "With an armor," I answer, because I am full with modesty and superbness. He gets excited: «No, naked, very naked», in short, a "Sangiorgiorgio a la Sansebastiano". "With the dragon out" I chew. "But who knows him, but what does he want?" I complain with this and that. I even stop talking to him: if I see him I find an escape through the alleys, walking around in squares or town. Certainly someone must have told him of my complaints. He confronts me with the outbursts of his powerful voice: he tells me I'm a fool, a

cranky one, and he disarms me. It ends with a laugh. "No Sangiorgio, therefore!" I confess that this guy intrigues me.<sup>3</sup> Starting from the mid-twenties, the archaic martini an plastic seems to reverberate in Fausto Pirandello's painting, especially in the nudes. The bodies take on sculptural connotations and the skin of the figures, rendered with lumpy brushstrokes, dense with matter, ends up resembling rough surfaces and Ziveri already noted a German influence in Pirandello's painting: G Giuffrè, *Fausto Pirandello : with an appendix of unreleased writings*, Rome 1984, pp. 222-224. throbbing with life of Martini's refractory terracottas. «Fausto Pirandello honestly works on his daily chaos: you can feel in the composition there is a near end of the world between clay women and sand»<sup>4</sup>, wrote Raffaele Carrieri in a review of the Quadrennial of 1943. The earthy tone of the figures recurs in the nudes and in the series of swimmers in the second half of the Thirties and in the first half of the following decade. A time where Pirandello will demonstrate to have reached a first maturity. His stylistic code is already fully personal: with his colleagues from the "Roman School" he shares the tonalist approach to painting, as well as the cultural references, moving from the Fifteenth century to Picasso with a return to the art of Pompeii (a shock in the same period also for Arturo Martini). In any case a lone voice . The expressive and painful value of his nudes did not escapet he contemporary criticism of the time. His visual language, moreover, was intentionally direct and communicative (such as to make it difficult for him to free himself from figuration). To better understand his peculiar interpretation of the theme - and try to identify the reason of his obsessive return on the subject - a reference to his personal sphere is essential here. Beyond the anecdotal, it is evident that the introspective character of Fausto Pirandello's painting is to be directly connected to his personal experience. It is his son Pierluigi, in his recent memoirs, who tells how problematic and fraught with contradictions was the painter's relationship with the other sex, in particular with his wife, Pompilia D'aprile. A model from Anticoli Corrado, of humble origins but since adolescence in contact with artists l from all over the world (he even posed for Auguste Rodin), she achieved a lively notoriety for her sculptural physique. Pirandello, however, never wanted to immortalize her naked. The relationship between the two, marked by passions and outbursts of jealousy, was never notified to Luigi Pirandello, who until 1930 was not even aware of having a nephew. The artist strongly feared the severe judgment of his father, a man both avant-garde in art and conservative in private life. One of the reason why Fausto developed an ever-suffering relationship with sex and love and intimacy. Problems that will inevitably also be reflected in the relationship with his children, constantly immortalized in melancholy attitudes, as in the Pompeian masterpiece Antonio (cat. 4 R. Carrieri, IV Quadrennial, in "Tempo", 8-15 July 1943, n. 215 , p. 25. 5 A. Veneroso, P. Pirandello, *The forgotten Pirandello: through three generations of Pirandellos*, Rome 2017, pp. 56- 58. 6 For further information, see M. Carrera (edited by), *Le muse by Anticoli Corrado: portraits and stories of models from Anticoli, from De Carolis to Pirandello*, Rome 2017. 2). Or again with a psychological introspection with alchemical references, as in Pierluigi (fig. 5), in which the pose of the boy seems to mention Dürer's *Melencolia I*. In nudes, more than in any other subject, Pirandello will always tend to communicate suggestions of his inner torment. Precisely this aspect of his artistic expression can be linked to the fury towards the female figure, towards which, from an aesthetic point of view, he has never shown particular indulgence: "women born from the brush of Fausto Pirandello are very ugly" the writer Maria Linda Sommaruga Natali pointed out in a review of the Quadrennial of 1935 . The desire to deprive all the female portraits of any graceful element therefore becomes programmatic in the nudes, where eroticism gives way to pain. See, for example, the *Woman with the bust* (around 1940), of which an unpublished watercolor study is presented here where the model, compared to the known oil version (fig. 6), shows herself in a more explicit nudity (cat. 1). The gesture of the woman, who tightens the

corset on her abdomen, tells something of self-punishment: in short, it seems to express all that "erotic suffering" of which Virgilio Guzzi wrote in the same period, on the subject of bathers, in the first of the critical texts dedicated to his friend Pirandello. Then he added: "these terrestrial nymphs are certainly not from Diana's court; they won't smooth the mustaches to Mr. Boucher's friends. The land they inhabit is often like a land, turned into gray, and burned by the sun. More than a light, a mugginess, a vapor envelops it all, where the colors fade, those colors that are now typical of the artist, colors which look like pastel and with the spatula treating them like a plaster: those whites of chalk, those grays of dry clay and of ash, those delicate pinks and those browns of earth ». Anyway, Pirandello never seemed to have expressed himself in writing on the issue of nude painting. In all the autographed writings, between thoughts and notes that he wrote down on any type of paper support, there are in fact very rare traces of speculations on the representation of the human body. The expression of the inner conflict between decency and desire to free himself from the bestiality of his impulses was possible, for the artist, only through lines and color, however without ever finding a sure way out. Anyway,, a writing is known - which is worth remembering here - in which Fausto Pirandello describes the vision of a bather, in which the theme of eroticism meets, just like in his paintings, with that of pain: ML Natali, *Female Figures in painting (At the Roman Quadrennial)*, in "The rights of the school", 5 August 1935, n. 37, p. 407. 8 V. Guzzi, *Art exhibition at the Terme: exhibition by Fausto Pirandello, Rome 1941*, p. 4. "The young woman sitting on the sand hugs her knees and struggles with an uncovered sensuality and, freed from any conventional framework, animalistically, she feels the state of nature in the congestion of the sun that has reddened and swollen her face, her shoulders. She is astonished and much more naked than decency allows her; and it's a lot. She looks in a grim way, full of appetites and disruptions that have no place, reason or apparent purpose here. She would like to be satisfied with herself if she found the hermaphrodite way. Now she reclines her head and closes her eyes so as not to lose them against the sun and has an act of sufficiency in her mouth, an ability to enjoy everything that worries me ". The expressive transposition in Pirandello's figuration was accentuated in the immediate post-war period. Bathers assume increasingly sharp-cornered forms: all attention turns to the tangling of bodies, making the setting increasingly secondary. No longer natural or architectural backgrounds, but colors spread over large backgrounds, most of the time alluding to the sky and the sea. The reinterpretation of certain Picassian patterns then led him to a gradual sublimation of the shape, until, in the mid-1950s, he reached an abstract parenthesis. But the decomposed and fragmented figures, "concave and convex" or refracting in the light (fig. 7), do not seem to abandon the sphere of pain. «Your distorted nudes, marked by lines like the cabal, are always poor tortured meat», Guzzi writes in 1950: «faceted or flattened and summarized inside black or red lines that should reduce them to numbers, to rich and strange arabesques, keep the heartbeat, the color of mortal substance, they live an essentially earthly life in which the viscera beat and blood runs ». The subsequent return to the figure from the late Fifties - a sort of inverse sublimation - is expressed almost entirely in the themes of the nude and the swimmers, taken up with serial obsessiveness. In parallel, and with the usual seriality, Pirandello creates still lifes, in whose compositional patterns rhythmic scans similar to those of groups of nudes can be seen. Bathers, therefore, end up becoming objects themselves - those objects with which, to use Guttuso's words, as early as 1940 he seemed "to be [...] in morbid intimacy" 11. Then when his health forced him to gradually abandon the use of oil, Pirandello concentrated all his energies on paper, in particular on the pastel technique, creating mainly works of 9 ML Aguirre D'Amico (edited by), *Fausto Pirandello: Small impertinence: fragments of autobiography and other writings*, Palermo 1987, p. 56. 10 V. Guzzi, *Fausto Pirandello, Rome 1950*, p. 21. 11 R. Guttuso, *Painters at the IX Sindacale del Lazio*, in "Primato",

15 May 1940, n. 6, pp. 26-28. small size. In deformed bodies, represented with bright and unnatural colors, the artist now represents his own physical suffering, in a reflection on the body that has now reached maturity. The culmination of this phase is perhaps identifiable in the Crucifixions series, in which the Pirandellian expressionist language has an unexpected encounter with the traditional subject of Western sacred art (already faced in the 1930s with similar intent, but very different implications, v. fig. 8). The mangled bodies of Christ and the robbers become a universal symbol of the pain of the human condition, a theme that can ultimately be associated with the entire production of Fausto Pirandello, over half a century of consistent research.