

Poetry in Painting. The exhibition of Enrique Martínez Celaya in Venezia

Charcoal, color, the doubling of reality, and the memories of his Cuba. Enrique Martínez Celaya presents his new works in an exhibition at Patricia Low's Venetian gallery

By Alberto Villa

Personal and collective memory intertwine in the new works of Cuban painter **Enrique Martínez Celaya** (Havana, 1964) presented at Patricia Low Contemporary gallery in Venice. Paintings and drawings that explore themes dear to the artist, but above all the configurations of a self-reflective and poetic painting.

Enrique Martínez Celaya's Exhibition in Venice

In Martínez Celaya's paintings – whose works are in the collections of major museums such as the Met in New York, LACMA in Los Angeles, and Moderna in Stockholm – nature appears in its inanimate, vegetal, and animal expressions. Water, flowers, and birds are thus protagonists of an exhibition that invites a journey whose primary condition is openness to vulnerability, starting from the title: *Here to Kneel, Voyagers*. The paintings, only seemingly easy to read, reveal compositions irreducible to clear exegesis: fusions of memories of places, sensations, references to Venice (like the lion in *The Vocation*), and even artworks from other eras. It is from Filippo Lippi, in fact, that Martínez Celaya evokes the *Annunciation* in the architectural structure of his *The Sweetest Sound of All*, in which the Archangel Gabriel disappears and the Virgin is replaced by a male figure from whose mental profusions poppies, daisies, and dandelion flowers bloom.

The Double Reality of Enrique Martínez Celaya's Works

The work is also a clear example of Martínez Celaya's pictorial complexity, which seems to operate a doubling of reality, defined by the opposition between charcoal and color. The former is used, in most cases (as in the paintings *The Inertia of Embarking* and *The Leading Light*), to build a background dimension, often in reference to natural and especially marine environments. The latter configures an overwriting, a punctum, that completes the work and at the same time highlights its metaphysical ambiguity: is there a dimension of reality? And if there is, is it defined by color, charcoal, both, or neither?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: Poetry on Canvas

What Martínez Celaya weaves with Platonic categories of ideal reality and appearance seems a game whose rules he does not explain to us. It is not necessary: poetry is experienced, not explained. And the works of the Cuban painter are nothing more than visual poems, ineffable meanings that emerge from the encounter of even incoherent elements, suggestions, colors, and their negation. Sometimes poetry becomes explicit, with words that, like charcoal landscapes, define the background structure of the painting; elsewhere it emerges silently, on tiptoe, from the sole pictorial compositions: this is the case of the work on paper *The Never Made*, in which the simplicity of a boy holding a shiny shell in his hands merges with a stroke reminiscent of Picasso, making it the most magnetic piece in the exhibition.