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During the 20th century, painters fell under the irresistible charm of cinema, and above all they were attracted to the charm of stardom, especially in its female form.

The Marilyn Monroes and Liz Taylors transposed from the screen to the canvas (often on silk-screened paper) by Andy Warhol have entered the realm of legend and visual eternity, just as the Joan Crawford “mythologized” by James Rosenquist belongs to the collective imagination.

Cinema and painting courted and fought each other like any traditional pair over the last century, and keep on doing it in the Third Millennium, as you can see from the “cultured” versions of directors such as Luchino Visconti in the Bel Paese, or Peter Greenaway in Great Britain, where also Derek Jarman («Caravaggio», «Blue», etc.) worked wonderfully, without forgetting the refined operations of artist-directors such as Alain Resnais («Last Year at Marienbad» is a thesis-film on architecture), Akira Kurosowa («Dreams»...), Tarkovsky (all films) and Bergman (references to Nordic painting), just to name the best known ones.

George Segal’s disturbing mannequins, “set” in the lobbies of cinemas and put in front of movie signs, fit perfectly into this context.

In «After Hours» by Martin Scorsese (1985), two thieves commit a theft in the basement of an art gallery, stealing a papier-mâché mannequin that appeared in George Segal’s installation, and the resulting dialogue is at the same time hilarious and enlightening on the relationship between cinema and painting.

“It’s by that famous guy, Segal.” [...] “[...] he’s on the Carson show, man [...]”, and the other replies: “I never watch Carson”, and the first one replies in turn: “ Yeah? Well, that’s how much you know about art”.

The screenwriter Joseph Minion intelligently plays on the cultured drifts of the relationship between cinema and painting.

We cannot but mention the images of cinematic mythology that you can see in the boxes assembled by Joseph Cornell —a filmmaker, collector, and forerunner of pop art, nor the large photos that show empty

cinemas and large screens, read in a conceptual key by the artist Hiroshi Sugimoto.

The list of those who have ventured to elaborate the dense web of relationships between the two “muses” would be very long.

Pier Toffoletti has chosen a specific and personal dimension, painting and representing the interstitial spaces wedged between the star aura and the perceptive and mythopoetic dimension of the viewers. Working skillfully, Toffoletti takes apart the mechanisms of the mythopoetic process, the gears that allow cinema to generate, since its very origins, a collective imagination that entrusts the characters appearing on the big screen to the myth and the stardom, recomposing them by means of an extremely personal style and technique, in a “naked”, human dimension.

It is a human dimension that represents on canvas the “naked” version of the stardom instance, which the viewers have seen on the big screen (in cinemas).

The sharpness of the characters, the skillful coat of color by means of large and “aggressive” layers, cause a sort of conceptual transfer that transports the magic of the characters from the big screen to the canvas, changing their operational schemes but keeping their charm intact — and indeed enhancing it.

By means of remarkable interpretative and technical skills, Toffoletti also manages to create a synergy between photography and painting.

It is no coincidence that the first exhibition of the Impressionists took place in the studio of the photographer Nadar in Paris, as if to set off another great love story made up of exchanges and conflicts; since Niépce started studying the sensitivity of light and the possibility of reproducing photographic images on paper in 1816, painting has been deprived of its role as a pivotal tool for representing reality in favor of the mechanical instrument that could reproduce the reality itself.

The outrage became even greater in the second half of the 19th century, when photography started drawing fully from the historical “catalog” of the formal and compositional solutions of painting, to rework the classical genres — portraits, landscapes, etc ..., giving life

to the phenomenon known as “pictorialism”.

The expressive potential of photography, in turn, has captivated many artists. Edgar Degas frequently

used instant shots to stop the movements of the figures and then reproduce them on canvas in his atelier, and Medardo Rosso even integrated the photographic technique at the end of the 19th century, in the process of plastic creation.

In the years when, just to remain in the field of visual arts, Body Art, Narrative Art and Conceptual Art were closely interwoven with photography, the great exhibition «Combattimento per un’immagine [“Fighting for an Image” - TN]», curated by Luigi Carluccio and Daniela Palazzoli in 1973 in Turin, mentioned also by Flaminio Gualdoni at the opening of the compendious catalog of the exhibition «Le arti della fotografia [The Arts of Photography - TN]» (Milan, 1998), summed up exhaustively the various features of the complex relationships between painting and photography.

For Toffoletti, the ability of photography to seize the moment, to extract it from the flowing process of cinematic time — and from reality too, stealing it from the constant destructive activity of the chronotyrant, is the ideal prelude, and at the same time the preparatory step, to the transposition in pictorial form of this element linked to the “freezing” of the mechanical gaze.

Photography seizes the moment — a frame of the time path in which the narrative and mythological fascination of the character is created, and painting turns it into an element capable not only of feeding the perceptive process of the viewer, but also of capturing the attention of the viewers and eliciting reflection.

In other words, Toffoletti creates a device that is, at the same time, expressive and thought-provoking.

Besides, this Friulian artist, as he has already shown in the past, is as skilled as many film directors on enhancing the charm conveyed by the images of women on the screen, from Bardot to Sophia Loren to the unforgettable Anna Magnani, just to name a few.

By means of his pictorial skills, Toffoletti is able to restore the fascination, which cinema exerts on the spectators, enriching the dreamlike state that comes

over individuals in the amniotic darkness of the cinema, turning the suspension of disbelief at the base of film perception into an enhanced capacity of the eye and the spirit to create alternative and endless paths of narration and thought.