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The “bird’s eye” views established themselves in genre painting of the 16th century as a methodology favoured by artists from the Western world to give an overall reading of the landscape – natural and social – documenting its peculiarities and mutations.

The artwork became a realistic tool for embrace in one glance, deep as a hug, a whole vision of the known world, for the viewer it became ideally possible to identify with the graceful bird evoked by that unusual point of view, allowing him to dive into the painting at any time.

With the same ability as her Renaissance colleagues, Karlien de Villiers adopts – more or less consciously – the same rhetoric technique.

Knowing how distance herself from reality in order to observe it and return it in the form of images, the South African artist offers an original and harsh representation of contemporaneity, reviewing stereotyped behaviours and attitudes. Women and men, domestic and wild animals, objects and shapes are used as pieces of a visual puzzle that composes a global and coherent narration; each artwork focuses attention on a theme or an aspect in which everyone – some more, some less – might be able to recognize themselves, but which certainly had never given the time to think.

It’s this sort of “solo navigation”, from which the exhibition takes its title, that makes Karlien de Villiers’ work unique and allows her to overcome the barriers of convention to develop a unique pictorial and drawing language. If on the one hand her style owes a lot to the world of graphic novel and comics, on the other it makes her autonomous and free to tackle the most disparate, and sometimes uncomfortable, topics with intelligent lightness.

Thus, the artist glides from bird’s eye on the couple’s dynamics, on gender issues, on interpersonal behaviours, on playlists of favourite readings, films and artists, on the multiple facets of the female (and feminist) universe, to which she dedicates large part of her production.

In the winking interaction with the public, the invitation to get on board is clearly perceived: the suspended dimension of the “floating” is the hallmark of our fluid time, which would have us transformed into superheroes capable of reconciling occasional jobs with occasional loves with intellectual passions. Sunday Girl arrives at Sunday reduced to a skeleton, Head Girl “is intelligent but does not apply”, Mister Mister stiffly awaits the future, regardless of the present, while Husband and Wife lie every night on a Procrustean bed.

In the series of human types examined by the artist, however, there is no lack of an “underwater” investigation of the unknown dimension of unconsciousness: fears, ambitions, dreams, projections of the self, emerge more clearly when, after the first contact with her ironic and grotesque figures, one plunges into a more complex narrative.

It’s then that, from the general overview outlined by Karlien de Villiers’ work, one can truly enter the single artwork, in the single aspect, minutely broken down and analysed, to fully understand its truth and power.

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