

**Ivan Marchuk**

**The Weaver of the imagination**

**from the portrait-icon to infinite space**

Ivan Marchuk is a weaver of reality and imagination, a man with an ancient and modern soul, a descendant of the great icon artists belonging to the "Kyiv School", who has borne considerable fruit in the field of Byzantine creativity to the world of art and spirituality. When I met Maestro Marchuk in Vienna, he appeared to me as the guardian of a threshold between the real and the infinite, between the earthly and the celestial; I believe that he provoked in me the magical and ethereal perception that a man from Western Europe would certainly have experienced in the presence of a brilliant painter of icons. The Byzantine deesis was the door wide open to the Divine and the one who depicted it acted as an intermediary between Christ and man. The canvas ""Ruined the Flowers" of 1995 actually projects before our eyes a Byzantine Virgin with her Child, caught in the expression of great tenderness of the Mother who contemplates the mystery of existence: have the eggs hatched or have they been broken? The egg of life, the origin of everything, is there in front of us to bear witness to the message of pain and salvation; the fingers elongated and elegant, so typical in the characters of ancient icons, they seem to caress the eggs aware of their simultaneous destiny of death and life; the face, schematic in its pronounced verticality, reveals an intense but always controlled emotion that leaves no room for empty and useless sentimentality. A metarational monumentality unites and merges with the deep human breath highlighted and cradled in the entirely domestic and everyday dimension.

A pleasant rhythm, based on delicate monochrome, shapes the scene; the decorative need, specifically a sort of mantle of shrubs and fragments of our experiences, of the relics of our life, adorns the woman-mother as similarly happens in the other canvas "Awakening" of 1992 where a Virgin, gravitating in her iconography between Byzantine art and the Italian Renaissance, is covered by an entire garden of Eden in full bloom; the colors of Ukraine softly wrap her head and the poppy stands proudly, with its bright red, in the gold of the wheat. Gold, in Byzantine icons and mosaics, signified and recalled the constant and widespread presence of the Divine in the life of man who gathered in prayer at the light of a candle and the flame, which warms the heart and soul, we find it in the two significant canvases "Thus time passes" (1994) and "I read your thoughts" of 1999: the first is a powerful meditation on the unstoppable flow of life, the man stares fixedly at the candle that is about to run out with a subtle and nostalgic, not to say dreamy, emotion; his robe is essentially a skin made up of splinters and fragments of his life experiences, in some areas dots or spots of intense colors from red to turquoise blue emerge, these are probably precious gems that symbolize happy episodes of life, in the midst of the debris and relics of pain; in the second canvas, a woman, in full concentration, tries to challenge and make the obstacle of falsified or interrupted communication vanish in her desire to see and identify the thoughts of others or of the other with whom to establish an empathic discourse through the illumination-revelation that comes from the light of the candle that she stares at insistently, candle that she

holds in her hand in an attempt to approach and make real contact with her neighbor; An egg is there on the table, a symbol of rebirth and of opening and closing the mind. A large cloak of memories covers her body and head.

The expressionist vein flows in the portrait-icons of Ivan Marchuk; the precariousness of life with its exile torments, with its uncertainties, with internal disagreements, which sometimes open up to revelations and sometimes to despair, narrates the personal and collective story of an entire people; the restlessness and anxiety of living are present and continuously reproduced in his characters. An example in this sense is the work on canvas "Broken Melody" of 1997 in which two men try to compose a harmony with their worn and broken musical instruments, the result will be a vain attempt destined to have no effect, but if we wanted, guided by our imagination, to imagine sounds emanating from the painting, strings and flute moans would come out, which would basically embody a tragic and infernal melody. In any case, the pain one feels for the lost cosmic and earthly harmony is never discomposed. The same experience seems to be repeated in the painting "The Lyrical Sounds" of 1994: a character is embraced by his violin in total identification with the instrument and in his passionate love he tries to bring out tones, voices, which remain trapped in the web of prohibition and sterility. The high spirituality of the Byzantine icon, in the modernity of Ivan Marchuk's expression, is corroded in its noble and pure solemnity by the evils of a world that collapses on itself every day in the grip of wars and injustices, but at the same time the mystical and resurrected power of the sacred image triumphs with faith and hope over the rubble and wounds of a humanity that seems to have lost, apparently, the founding values of civilization.

In the paintings "Yellow Cherries" of 1995 and in "Eva" of 1993 the reference to fruit, with warm and colorful tones emerging from the monochrome, evokes the pulse of life that is renewed with the succession of the seasons, the flow of the sap of nature in these works restores vital enthusiasm in a context of desolation and solitude. The yellow cherries, which can be associated in the imagination with the light of a flame, materialize the reference to the lighthouse in the storm of life and Eve, a woman immortalized in her domestic dimension in front of a table, offers us, in the midst of an undead "silent" nature, the apple that brings salvation and redemption and not temptation and death. Eve, the woman par excellence, wants to lead us to rediscover and reconquer life with passion and ardor. The figures, in Ivan Marchuk's paintings, are attracted by dissolving into the spirit of matter, from exhaustion and flowing into infinity, into the whole, which could also be represented by the embrace of mother earth, of Nature, which becomes the ultimate justification of our existence and which represents the urgent need to return to the earth that has always nourished the man, as a loving mother, when he is cared for and respected. It becomes indispensable, more and more today, a dutiful and reflective return to the peasant civilization that is the basis of a positive social progress in harmony with Creation. Ivan Marchuk invented his own original and specific way of painting which is called "Plontanism" deriving from the act of weaving, of spinning a fabric and thus we reach the effect of chromo-luminarism which refers to the method of combining colors without overlapping them, allowing the synthesis to take place in the retina of the eye of the observer.

The French chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul (Angers, 1786 - Paris, 1889) in 1839, in his capacity as director of the Gobelins Manufacture, theorized the treatment of absolute colors, obtained chemically, as if they were the threads of tapestries: the result was the final result of a warp, of a fabric, which, in producing the flattening, ended up generating the reversal of the optical data in the foreground, giving life to an evocative and bewitching optical illusion. The result, which was achieved with wires, was linked to the result that was obtained in Byzantine art with mosaic tiles; it is no coincidence that Chevreul was a passionate lover of fine arts and applied arts. Ultimately, Marchuk's Landscapes concretize the luminous dimension of the living screen with the illusion of depth of field that comes from the world of fabrics on which light bizarrely and capriciously plays; but it is in the modern television medium that the optical illusion, variable in its luminous shades, reaches its maximum expressive climax thanks to the series of light pulses placed in a row and which create an impressive coming and going of reflections between lights and shadows: in the painting "The sun rose on the Dnieper" of 2004 as in the canvas "Warm evening" of 1984 and in the work "Magic of a moonlit night" of 2005 the thread-colors of Ivan Marchuk's technique give us back a living nature almost as if it were formed and built by electrical impulses, by copper wires that transmit the life-giving energy of light. Ivan Marchuk, with his Cycles "Black and White. Dialogo" of 2020, founds and structures constructions-scaffolding that are a tribute to biomorphism: the stylized creatures, with zoomorphic and human characteristics, intertwine in a phytomorphism that alludes to the branches of a plant, of a possible white tree of life that stands out against the black background of the night.

A skeleton of bones, which take on the appearance of faces, hands, birds, snouts, offers the testimony of a dynamic vitalism revived by an inner fire that makes it incandescent in its rhythmic and lively glow. The artist, with his cycle "Gaze into infinity" which includes works ranging approximately from 2008 to 2010, realizes his spatial journey towards unexplored horizons: past and present, meditation and dream travel together through the galaxies, canceling space and time; the artist's sensitivity marks new paths in the boundless wandering and flow of forms that meet and intersect in a dynamism, conveyed by the speed of appearance and disappearance, which traces the substance of imprints with a phantasmal consistency. A journey "ad infinitum" into one's subconscious, a technological surrealism from interstellar travel. Master Ivan Marchuk with his self-portrait, from the work "Time flows" of 1987, pays devout homage to his land and its roots: with a mysterious and statuesque solemnity, like a Byzantine icon, he proposes to open the way to the future that can and must smile at the whole of humanity, if it has well in mind and guards the tree of life, that arises from our mind, from our deepest and most abysmal identity, and that must be loved and revered. Finally, the history of man is a matter of roots.

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