

The raw material of dreams

by Cynthia Penna

«*Zipangu is an eastern island, in the middle of the ocean, 1500 miles away*» (Marco Polo, from “*Il Milione*”)

The mythical kingdom of the island of Zipangu described by Marco Polo in his “*Il Milione*” has always fascinated the Western world: it has been a source of inspiration and an enchanted world of mysteries and intrigues, and at the same time a place of evanescence and sacrality. And the works of art from that distant land which have reached the West over the centuries have reinforced that impression. Marco Polo travelled there between 1271 and 1288, and in his description of the land in his diary he combines realistic passages with fantastic stories of an enigmatic, enchanting and impenetrable world, fantastically rich yet completely and intentionally isolated from the rest of the world.

If we observe Japanese paintings from the past we perceive, in the essence of the expressive vocabulary, a certain predominance of landscapes painted with soft brushstrokes and a light touch and what I would define as “elegance”. But this is anything but a sign of weakness or uncertainty in the artist: the purpose of the rendition is to mirror a floating world. The artist aims for harmony as philosophical principle of balance between finite and infinite, and for Nature rendered on a cosmic level. Artists as Hokusai and Hiroshige dwell on the landscape as an indefinite place where everything happens and everything comes to an end, a place of departure and at the same time end point of a cosmic harmony that encompasses the very life of humans as element of a whole which is identified in the great Nature.

The art of Japanese landscape painting, of which Yasumari Nakagomi is a leading representative, has its roots in this tradition.

In this exhibition **Nakagomi** explores the unidentified and unidentifiable environments hidden in the depths of our minds. Fantastic, dreamy and unreal landscapes, or the landscapes of our childhood, linked to recollection and memory. Spaces rather than landscapes: the spatiality of our imagination rather than the real spaces of our everyday life. Nakagomi's vocabulary is based on a *perception* of the landscape scene rather than on an identified reality: his landscape is a post-pastoral one, where all references

to a real nature has been eradicated. And yet nature is present, but in a distant, blurred way, as if in a dream or in a hazy, blurred memory.

What makes his art so singular is that the observer always manages to identify a place, a real space which is to be found in the memory of every one of us, the memory of a place that has really existed, that we have experienced, but which remains, above all, in our unconscious.

The landscape represents the “genius loci”, the sense of place and belongingness and sometimes of identity; it is the mental map which we carry with us regardless of where we are born or choose to live. Along the path of our lives we travel, wander or migrate but in the final analysis we always bring along with us a kind of interior “landscape” made up of all the identifying elements characteristic of someone belonging to the human species inhabiting our planet. It is the essence of our “being” in that world, our inevitable position in the global environment of the planet.

Nagakomi has chosen to spend time in the United States in order to learn and immerse himself in the Western cultural world.

He has been able to familiarize with the Western vocabulary through numerous artists' residencies in the United States and in Italy: this has enabled him to arrive at a style that may be defined as a meeting point between an Eastern poetic and the dynamic contrasts characteristic of the Western world. Eastern landscape art with its nitid images of contexts dominated by a meditative, Zen-inspired atmosphere is thus combined with abstract American landscape painting where the monochrome accent characteristic of American minimalism, and not only: Nakagomi turns traditional Japanese landscape painting into new motifs freed of every figurative accent by introducing sharp blades of light, cutting dramatic rays inspired by the Italian Baroque, alternated by a lines of radiant luminosity that bring to mind the European landscapes of Turner and Constable.

This confluence of apparently contrasting and mixed situations have resulted in an abstract visual universe in which the observer succeeds in identifying and recognizing his or her own past.

His canvases always evoke a familiar spatial character, something well-known yet forgotten, a material that is not concretized in something real or tangible but that represents baggage from the past, a *dejà vu*, a thought that the onlooker recognizes as his or her own. The fog that surrounds the landscapes, the feeling of losing sight of reality, of getting lost in a fleeting and uncertain environment, but at the same time those sharp blades of light that strike the scene, that mysterious event that scares and fascinates us at the same time, or the reassuring sunray, the calm lake that seems to be made of light rather than of water, that one would like to immerse oneself in: everything

leads to a metaphysical landscape that is interiority, intimacy, hidden sphere of our thoughts or our dreams.

A structure, a plot or a grid that becomes part of our imagery, and that we feel comfortable about, captivated but not suffocated by a context in which we can regain the equilibrium between Man and Nature that was lost in the era of the Atropocenne. A metaphysics of the landscape that turns into the raw material of dreams.