

A SENSE OF JOY

By Richard Cork

Now that the world is so beleaguered by conflicts, anxiety and untrustworthy political leaders, we feel immensely relieved to find in Mauro Perucchetti's new work an exuberant vision. Far from seeing our planet as a place over shadowed with gloom, he offers us an arresting alternative charged with vitality. His new paintings are sensual, humorous and above all celebratory. They seem to be powered by an inexhaustible energy, and their profusion of restless forms and colours have a spontaneity which directly reflects the artist's own spirit of delight.

When he began painting these canvases two years ago, Perucchetti must have experienced an enormous release. Although he gives his paintings the overall title *Nuvole*, as a tribute to his childhood fondness for staring up at clouds in the sky, Perucchetti regards his new work as essentially abstract. So it breaks away from his earlier preoccupation with pigmented resin sculpture, replacing it with painted forms darting all over the canvas surfaces. In this respect, they do evoke the dynamism of a sky where clouds never stop shifting, colliding, parting and changing their shapes very dramatically indeed.

John Constable was enthralled by such movement, declaring that the 'landscape painter who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition, neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids...It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key note, the standard of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment.' But Perucchetti insists that 'everyone sees different clouds, and I think of them as totally abstract.' Nor does he share Constable's involvement with freely handled brush-marks which often make viewers aware of juicy pigment. Perucchetti starts his paintings with a pencil, because 'I want the lines to be precise, and the acrylic should achieve a super-smooth surface. No impasto. I use all the skills I have to make the paintings last, but I would also like them to have a child-like freshness.'

He has no desire to control the meanings conveyed by his art. These paintings emerge from his subconscious, and 'I only see creatures in my work after I have made them. The canvases have no titles, because I want people to make up their own minds when they look.' Hence the fascination we feel when viewing Perucchetti's paintings. Even when a particular form initially reminds us of a cloud, it suddenly resembles the ghost of an unidentifiable animal instead. At the opposite extreme, psychedelic flowers are evoked by another work, while elsewhere two luminous stars seem to be involved in performing an ecstatic dance.

Although our first impressions of a canvas may be chaotic, the longer we gaze the more it yields highly evocative possibilities. In one painting, which has more empty space than most of them, a flying pig with a parachute is discernible. But then we discover, in another painting, a dog wearing a gas-mask, and an even more ominous mood is created by the painting where a serpent wriggles a cross an Eden-like garden inhabited by a pregnant woman and a skull. Mouth can be found all over the place in Perucchetti's images, ranging from enormous and hungry to cheeky and gleeful. But the most frequent emotion conveyed by his work is a sense of joy, and this redemptive quality invites us to return to his paintings for the replenishment they abundantly provide.