

Rufoism

## *The guardian of strawberries*

Chiara Gatti

I haven't got a brain... only straw.

How can you talk if you haven't got a brain?

I don't know. But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking.

You say "scarecrow" and you immediately think of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; in that field of ripe corn from where the straw man kindly explained to Dorothy what was the best way to take on the moor.

Collective imagination always reconnects this figure between fable and folklore to literature that has made it often protagonist. The word also reminds to Turnip Head, the judicious scarecrow in Miyazaki's masterpiece *Howl's Moving Castle*. From an anthropological point of view, there would be dozens of ideas to be explored on its role as mediator in the relationship between peasants and land, rural traditions, crafts and seasons. An archaic yet universal story.

No wonder if Rufoism (real name Marco Perroni) - for years focused on figurative translation of eternal themes such as loneliness, search for identity, escape - has chosen it as new hero of his rural elegy, bending its message in an existential direction and unraveling a story of ordinary abandon and at the same time of grotesque glee among the golden wheat spots. Halfway between the country fair and the dance of death, between the countryside festival and a medieval Sabbath, they rise from the ground, emerge as animated twigs, creatures made of rope, rags and stubble. They are worn out hominids, rag fetishes, bizarre humanoids, boneless embryos, masses of clayish matter, anthropomorphic golem, like *Cthulhu* "The Horror in clay" by Lovecraft, heirs of a primitive cult tinged with a quiet desperation.

They make you smile and, at the same time, deeply touch you, squeezed as they are in the tangle of black sharp signs, china barbed wire, tempera and marker, which Rufoism curls up as nooses around their necks. A walk in the sun, sweating earthy moods and breathing mosquitoes. The smell of brewing straw is mixed with that of a pond, a river, a strip of sea that stagnates nearby. The crows caw and make fun of their forced immobility.

Poor scarecrow! Celebrated in the aesthetics of nature as the guardian of strawberries and pumpkins, fairytale idol in rural traditions and in the popular world, now he weeps tears of malt and becomes for Rufoism the metaphor of every coercion.

Yet it is because of his painting, his gesture and his lysergic colors, if this panorama of (in)human drought does not verge on tragedy, but it exorcises anxieties and fears with caustic irony, diluting in black humor a fierce critique of the evils of modern society.

The choice of the wheat field as an allegorical scene of an existence on the margins is not far from the views that Rufoism has gone through in the past: his black pools, the beaches, the squares of Bologna. There is the same atmosphere of ambiguous suspension, of waiting that suffocates conscience. The multitude of the marginalized is then poured into an ocean of wheat. "The bastards" as he calls them: derelicts with button-stitched eyes, hung upside down (erudite quote of Baselitz, another master of unstable equilibriums), drunk with a life that is corked, they hint at a dance move on the only pole holding them up as a wooden leg. Moth-eaten. They dance to the rhythm of the small chains that dangle from their belts, while the wind is whistling, making the cans or empty bottles hanging on their open arms jingling.

Trinkets, lullabies in the sunset, they spread the sound of a peace that is not there, before sinking into the silence of the evening, the damp of the night, when in dreams freedom peeps out from the horizon, from the bank of ditches, over the rows of mulberry trees, in the plain which welcomes but does not console.