

ART. BEAUTY WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

“Music of the spheres”

*The new geometry of LeoNilde Carabba*

by SARA VERDERI

I meet the artist in the atmospheric store room of the “Bocca” bookshop in Milan. Here, piles of books, antiques and a slightly old-world smell provide the setting for her incredible paintings, which consist of views of the Universe and “luminous discs”, in the words of Rossana Bossaglia, the art critic who wrote her catalogue. She writes of the paintings, “...the gradual transformation of the chromatic fabric from one colour to another means that these discs can be read as astral objects in perpetual movement; at times the titles given by the artist suggest a mystical interpretation of their meaning; and the artist’s synaesthetic intention is also clear, each time underlining the musicality of this stellar landscape”.

She smiles, in her comfortable jeans and jumper and trainers. She wears a large, mysterious looking ring, her hair is wild and her eyes twinkle with rays of light.

**Will you tell me a bit about your personal story? I get the feeling you’ve got a lot to tell...**

“Of course. As far as my artistic development and my first artistic experiences are concerned, I can tell you that I come from a very intellectual family in which the art that was considered important was ancient and traditional art. I went to the International High School, where one day I had a lesson on the Impressionists, which lasted about eight hours. It was love at first sight. Like someone in love, I started visiting exhibitions, museums, reading and finding out more. But nonetheless around the same time I failed my art class four times, so I resigned myself to the fact that perhaps I wasn’t good enough to paint. So I thought I could become an art critic, and in the meantime I cultivated another passion: poetry. I wrote a lot, and then when I was 21 I had a very high fever which had the miraculous effect of “freeing” my painting – and that’s when everything began to flow. During my first solo exhibition, in 1961 at the Numero gallery in Florence, a famous critic was impressed by my work and asked me if he could see more. Already at that time I felt I was a painter, so I told him that they were at the photographer’s studio but that if he came back I would be happy to show them to him. Kaiserlian returned two weeks later and I showed him fifteen more of my paintings. I then worked with many different artists, and enjoyed the support and influence of Hsiao Chin, Baj, Crippa, Fontana, Manzoni, Christo and others. I have very fond memories of the art scene in Milan in the Sixties and Seventies; it was a real hive of activity and all the great artists were really accessible, ready to help you if they thought you had talent. I often used to go to bar “Jamaica” or to the “Caffè Brera”, and they were all there. And of course it all depended on your *savoir faire* and your own talent. At that time I travelled a lot, to Paris and around Europe, for exhibitions and expos. It was wonderful, there was life on the street, and I met a lot of extremely interesting people, such as Turcato, Fautrier and many others. Then I settled in California for love, and for work, and there too I had interesting reactions from the critics, like Pierre Restany for example (*n.b. – he wrote of her: “...it takes just a moment of looking at the lyrical morphology of L.C.’s language to realise this evident truth: this*

*type of painting is done with the skin, with the blood, with the heart. Adopting this type of language means being ready to learn new lessons from life, being capable of showing total generosity in meeting one's own destiny").* I also lived in Rome for a few years, before coming back to Milan for good in 1988 after all those experiences, from which I had gained so much. I've always had a love-hate relationship with Milan; in fact I now live in Sesto which is a quiet place where I can get everywhere on foot, something which is only possible in a small town".

**What is your artistic feeling? How did you negotiate your way around painting? I know that you are self-taught. Is that right?**

"Yes, I am self-taught. I began with geometry, then I moved on to softer forms, to seas, skies, trees, descriptions of the earth's crust. Then I moved back to a more sacred geometry, alchemic I'd say. The softest period took place during a curious process for me: during the years of the feminist movement, women rebelled against the clichés imposed on them by society, to regain possession of their masculine side. The exact opposite happened to me. Although I was active in the *Movement*, and helped set up the "Libreria delle Donne" (the "Women's Bookshop") - which used to be in Via Dogana and is now in Via Pietro Calvi - I had made a name for myself in art with a stern masculine expression. So my path meant rediscovering my feminine side. I remember the very first poster for the bookshop, which I made from an old photo of the women in my family sitting all together - I had carefully cut out all the men standing behind them".

**... Fascinating. But I notice that today your paintings seem to be about other universes. What is behind them?**

"Behind them is my interpretation of life, the eyes through which I see the world. Through Jungian and Reich therapy I reached a spiritual dimension of myself. I had a passion for studying the Tarots of Crowley, which are related to astrology, and the symbols of Hebrew letters, which naturally led me to the Sephirots of the Kabbalah, each of which is linked to a planet and an Archangel. These keys led me to deep meditation. I generally work in my studio, where I make five or six paintings at a time, given the time it takes for the paint to dry, which is different for each colour. At that time, however, I found myself in solitude and with a deep connection with the Universe. I took five months away from the press, I walked in the woods, meditated, treated myself with Aurasoma oils, and I worked on one painting at a time, for hours. That is how I made the large paintings that you see here, each of which is dedicated to an Archangel. They are healing paintings, and when I was painting them something trapped inside me was released and I healed my heart. These paintings are very important to me. Just think, I even mixed Aurasoma oils in with the paints, so as to impregnate the canvases with them".

**So you have found a connection between art and spirituality?**

"Yes, and it's a very deep one. Jungian evolutive astrology was a way of understanding myself. This astrology doesn't predict the future, but it helps you to understand the roots of pain; it helps to show a person the way in the light and in love for oneself. At times art has been a means for personal healing, because it has allowed me catharsis, and at other times it has been a means for spiritual elevation. Following this personal journey, which also led me for many years to be

a disciple of Osho, the Master who I love and who I was lucky enough to meet in person at Puna in India, I now hold creative expression groups. My group is called "The dance of the Rainbow Spirit" and aims to help people grow by exploring emotions and learning to translate them into visible signs. We belong to a society which favours writing as the medium for cultural and mental expression. Very often adults find that they have a creative potential equal to that of a seven-year-old child, since they have never been allowed to express it. My work involves rediscovering that child, taking his hand and making him aware. This process works on the emotional and energetic blocks that have impeded the development of creativity and of the person in various areas of his or her current personality. It takes into account the dimension of the physical being which lives in the here and now and has to deal with the world of today. In other words: spirituality does not mean flying off with the Gods, but being present in life itself, with an intimate feeling of belonging to Earth and to Heaven.

I also want to stress that my awareness groups are very clear and also very "playful". We always have a lot of fun. Humour is a crucial factor of life. Life isn't life without a smile,".

### **Has your experience in searching for the feminine ever driven you to help other women who appear to have forgotten it?**

"Yes, definitely. Even now I hold groups for women only, in which we explore and take control of our own creativity – something which is very important and tangible in women. We work together on what exactly it means to be "women" because, as Simone de Beauvoir said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".

### **From her Poetic Declaration:**

And for myself I can say that recently, after years in which fires and flames, distant horizons and rough seas and enchanted mountains filled my paintings with a clear predominance of the Dionysian aspect, I have returned to a new form of geometry. Even the title of my latest works illustrates the journey I have made. "Dedicato a Michele" ("Dedicated to Michele"), "Materia Mystica" (Mystic Matter), "Dialoghi con l'Assoluto" ("Dialogues with the Absolute"), "Quinta Dimensione" ("Fifth Dimension"), "Comunione Cosmica" ("Cosmic Communion"). I feel I can define these works as maps and as proof of a harmonic meeting between Apollonian and Dionysian, between Yin and Yang, between Female and Male values. Therefore, a new balance between Passion and Reason and a new aesthetic and interior path to follow, to sing of the joy of being alive and conscious that the best way to help protect the planet is to enter into the flow of constructive entropy, and stimulate the planet's inhabitants to realize that, as Hillman says, "...the world will be saved by beauty".

