

Vincenzo Cohen

Two women of the ancient world: Medusa and Medea



Medusa (2021) oil on canvas, 70x70

The two artworks presented belong to the collection Portraits in red and grey (2014-21). The collection is the last pictorial production of the artist and includes a series of portraits produced between 2014 and 2021. Across the centuries of the history the exposition intends to show historical figures in the light of their cultural context. The source of inspiration borrows from the sculpture in moving from three-dimensional to two-dimensional representation. The represented characters are often isolated figures in a neutral background, rapt in hermetic expressions, to emphasize the need for psychological introspection. The collection represents a return to the painting after ten long years of silence. Between the works the two female myths of Medusa and Medea focusing on the representation of the

female myth in art, from antiquity to today, represent two archetypal figures that have influenced the modern artistic imagination. In fact the history of these two women is rich in symbolic meanings that have immortalized the image through art and literature. The two paintings try to highlight and reveal some characteristic aspects of these myths.

According to the historical tradition, the Gorgon Medusa was once a beautiful princess of Libya. She was the daughter of Forco and Ceto, then joined in love with Poseidon, God of the seas and waters, and destined to be relegated to a rocky ravine on the island of the Hvoerboreans, for

In the ancient Roman tradition her image was widely used as a warning against enemies for his apotropaic character: her figure was placed in the form of an stone idol in defense of the ports, in the form of protomes on ships and as a protective effigy on the shields of soldiers. Archetypically, Medusa represents the alter ego of Athena, her dark side. Athena and Medusa are in fact intended as an image of an ancient goddess-mother linked to the cult of the feminine and her ambivalent, sacred and nefarious at the same time, illuminating and lethal power. Athena represents the rational, the wisdom; Medusa the irrational, the primitive and wild. This ambivalent and bipolar nature of femininity is made even more evident in an episode of the Iliad (Iliad, XVIII), in which Athena, overcome with fury, reveals her vengeful and terrible power, turning the fair maiden into a serpent-haired monster and getting out burning flames from her eyes. Her figure has often been associated with that of Hecate/Selene, goddess of the moon, due to her changing and enigmatic nature. The painting depicts her in all her seductive power, wrapped in the mist of mystery with floating hair in which snakes creep.



Medea (2014) oil on canvas, 60x80

The artist has chosen to represent the myth in its original beauty, without however renouncing to represent the dark and sensual side of the myth using the image of the Italian actress Ornella Muti for the realization of the face.

“...The painting depicts her in all her seductive power...”

The artwork realized in 2014, represents Medea, a mythological character who gives the title to the famous Greek tragedy of Euripides. Medea is one of the most significant figures in Greek mythology. Described as a perfidious woman, Euripides gave her back her human face by capturing in Medea the drama of despair that leads to madness. It represents the revenge of love and at the

same time the victim of betrayal. Medea's drama centers on love for Jason, a love that, once betrayed, will push her to the tragic epilogue of matricide. Endowed with human feeling Medea is nevertheless the heroine of suffering but also a being of mysterious and divine origins: sister of