

My move to Rome essentially meant that I wanted to become a painter. I loved painting and I wanted to to be a painter. Rome was the dreamed-of city, because at that time the most admired artists lived there, from Pirandello to Guttuso to Mafai. That, then, was the natural choice.

PIERO GUCCIONE

THE YEARS IN ROME



IMAGES AND TESTIMONIES

Writings by : Dino Buzzati, Luigi Carluccio, Piero Guccione, Renato Guttuso, Alberto Moravia, Enzo Siciliano

Guccione by Piero Guccione

I do not wish to fall into categorical statements and easy polemics, especially today when doubt and uncertainty are unquestionably present; nor do I feel it necessary to polemise here with those who blatantly 'bluff' (and I am not just referring to the abstract). After all, it is a matter of explaining some of the reasons for my work, and for this there is no need to resort to long, vicious speeches, even if I cannot help but establish a relationship between my ideas and the world around me.

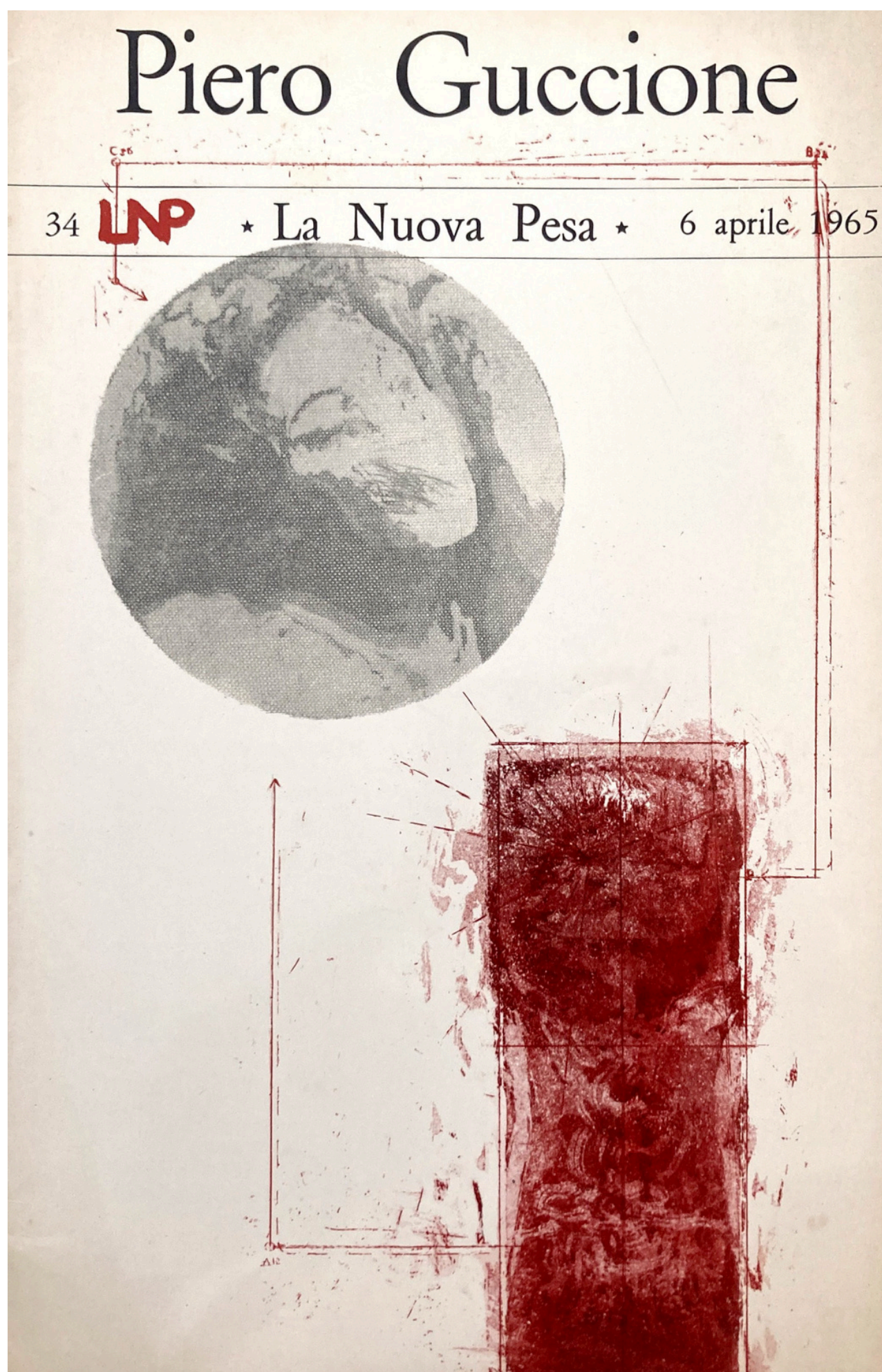
I exclude reference to the conflict between 'objectivity' and 'non-objectivity', which has been and continues to be (as understood in current terminology) one of the fundamental problems in the recent history of modern art. As far as I am concerned, after a brief period in which the fear of falling into the swamp of a programmatic and moralistic painting led me to confront

ambiguously unconventional themes and to resolve them in a sort of compromise between plasticity and abstraction, I realised that the only possible alternative was a position of firmness and rational clarity.

I am convinced, in fact, that for each person, depending on his or her nature and training, there are two options at the present time: complacency in an impotent taste of the idealistic type, or the will to make one's conscience active in relation to society and reality.

As for me, I have chosen the latter. I do not know where this choice will take me and whether I will be able to make paintings that are as such: I only know that this choice helps me to feel more alive and closer to the earth. In critical or artistic terminology this would perhaps be called a 'realist orientation', but I am not interested in that, or at least others will say so after the results.

Piero Guccione in «Mondo Nuovo», 29 maggio 1960



exhibition catalogue cover

Garden on a blue sky, 1965



Guccione by Renato Guttuso

[...] Guccione was recognised, when he first appeared, as having rare qualities as a 'painter'; the most painter, it was said, after Mafai (and after Turcato) who had appeared in Rome. Having started out from painting, and without ever having detached himself from it, even in the periods in which forms were more wrapped up with meanings and warnings, Guccione now resumes an extremely firm discourse in the strict terms of painting. But it would not be much of a case if that were all it was. It would only be a good starting point.

I do not believe that I am a 'priest' of 'painting', but I do believe that this term has a broad and profound meaning that goes beyond the Bonnardian-Morandian-Mafaian interpretation - to be tasted with the palate [...].

With Guccione, we are waiting for man to somehow look out of the windows and watch that rainbow, get soaked in that rain, lean against the wall of that terrace or cut that flower that has blossomed between the iron bars.

This is the open discourse of Piero Guccione; and it is, perhaps, the open discourse of modern painting, which goes straight from Cézanne to the proposals of today's best young artists, among whom Guccione is in the front row, a discourse that was called cubism and that we are not afraid to call realism, and from which the comings and goings of taste have not succeeded, nor are they able to distract us; and to which all that was true in the (true) experimentation of these years, consciously or not, has made a contribution.

from the exhibition catalogue at the gallery La Nuova Pesa, Roma 6.4.1965

1965 with the painter Renato Guttuso



Mystery in a bit of sunshine by Dino Buzzati

There is something suspended, something vaguely disturbing in certain serene or empty days: Piero Guccione has managed to fix it in his painting. A wall with some grass, a deserted balcony are enough to give substance to this feeling

The painting of Piero Guccione, - Sicilian, thirty-one years old, beautiful face, resident in Rome - is at the same time mysterious and serene, two things that do not easily go together. He is exhibiting at Galleria Toninelli, Via Sant'Andrea 8, first floor, right-hand staircase. Mystery, which in my opinion is indispensable, in one form or another, for art to exist, is of various degrees and qualities. There is the most obvious and cheap mystery, which belongs to the night and which has been widely used and abused from the beginning of romanticism to the present day [...].

There is a mystery of a finer quality, which springs from twilight and dawn. Indeed, in certain cases dusk beats deep night in terms of intensity of mystery, because of the progression of shadows. As for the dawn, it seems superfluous to recall, by way of example, what the dark walls of the mountains against the light say at that hour, the deserted and silent streets of the cities, the courtyards of working-class houses immersed in the nightmares of the morning, the railway subways with the rainy rails beginning to glitter.

Finally, there is - of course the gradations

Balconies, 1965



exhibition catalogue cover

from the first to the third type are infinite - a mystery of more difficult to perceive, and therefore more subtle and profound: the mystery of radiant sunshine as it forms in particular places and situations.

Guccione gave me the impression of being able to paint well and of being modern without the wishful intention of being modern and new at any cost (a disease that is epidemic today). Here, for example, is the edge of a terrace from which three complicated television antennas sprout. They are illuminated by a happy sun and behind them, white and tall, nembo cirrus clouds move slowly. Here is a white concrete wall with horizontal indentations where a miserable grass has formed. Nothing else can be seen. No noise can be heard. All is quiet. Probably soon a lizard will come running up and disappear. People pass by and do not stop. What is there to stop and look at? Yet Guccione stops, paints the thing, manages to capture that meridian feeling of the Sunday suburbs within which are the confused bitter resonances of our daily lives. Here is a French window wide open onto a balcony. The balcony is empty and sunlit. The parapet is wrinkled concrete. The shutter you see is painted red and old-fashioned. Then the sky. Nothing else can be seen. But who is there, besides Guccione, in the room, looking out? And on the balcony, to the right, is anyone sitting? [...]. Things like this Guccione says.

Dino Buzzati in «Corriere d'Informazione», 13-14 maggio 1966



1972 with the painter Titina Maselli and art critics, Michel Sager e Luigi Carluccio

The presence of the present by Luigi Carluccio

Towards Guccione's work I have always been attracted, as if in a zone of intense sympathy that is also human, to the feeling that he situates himself and openly shows that he wants to situate himself within the act of painting, even before the painting. But not in the sense of an extroversion or compromise of a gestural nature; in the sense, if anything, of a perspectival and therefore soothing collocation, which in its simplicity encompassed a clear moral character: almost the expectation, in a certain candid sense, that the artist's work would manifest itself beyond the setting offered by the act of knowledge modelled by man.

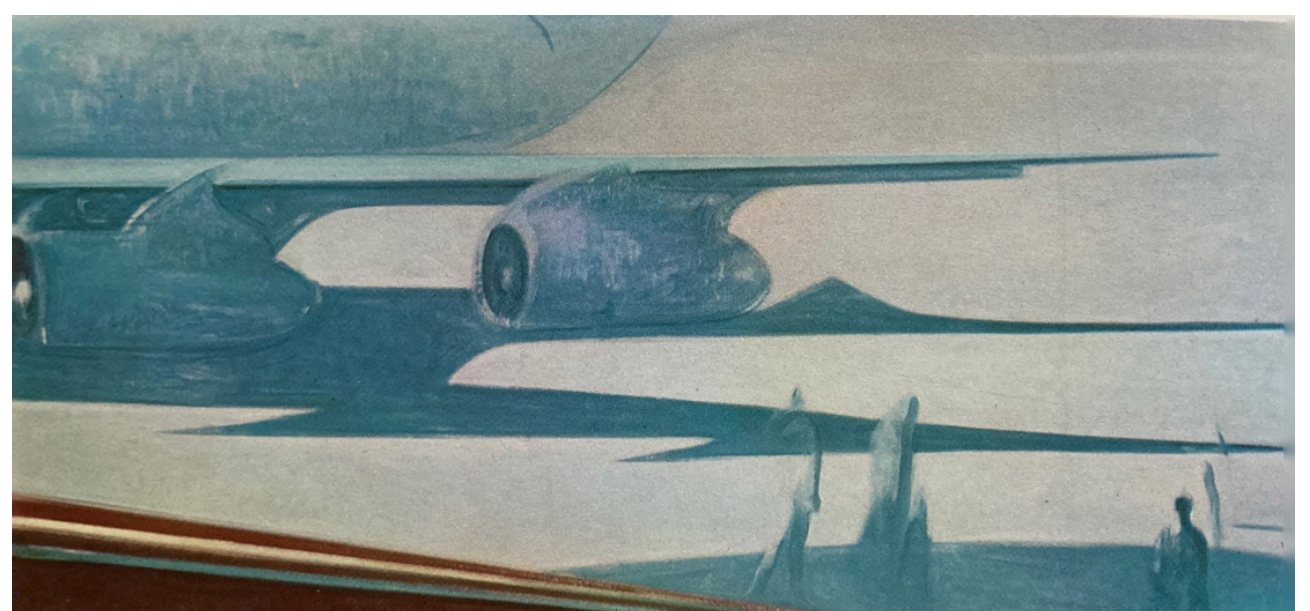
I would like to say that I have always been attracted to Guccione's work by the feeling that his slow turning of his gaze on things, from the slant of a window to the moulding of a cornice, to the cut of a ledge, to the silhouette of a tree seen in its integral concretion of parts in light and parts in shadow, seen, that is, in its, even if it appears filtered through the conjunctions of memory, the actuality of the chronicle in direct reference to a cloud, rain, a rainbow, coincided with a real, at a certain time and in a certain place, contact, or rather awareness of the surroundings as an irrefutable element of transit to the feeling of duration and constancy. And that this did not take place in the manner of the tracing of a hypothetical, albeit subtly poetic in its so realistic evidence, 'voyage autour de ma chambre', but in the urgent, immediately intimately recomposed, gradually suggested, by feeling alive and true through the

contribution of relations with things, the domestic ones first and foremost; with glimpses of the world, the usual ones in the foreground; perhaps even with other unspecified presences, which, from distant wings, advance towards him obeying the same need for discovery. That this happens, I still feel I must point out, not because of the presumption of being or even of being the centre and fulcrum of one's own little world (but how it expands in the fervent trepidation of the lines, of the slight incandescence of the colours!), but because of the awareness of existing in the same ways and under the same conditions as the things that surround us, in a reciprocal continuous matching of reality that is also of realisability: of life as well as of painting.

This is why I would not wait for a man to look out of Guccione's windows, for a hand to discard the door or the gate, for a shadow to pass over the tenderly evoked objects. These objects are in themselves witnesses of a presence. Guccione is with them and his presence is also the presence of the present.

from the exhibition catalogue at the gallery Il Gabbiano, Rome 7.5.1968

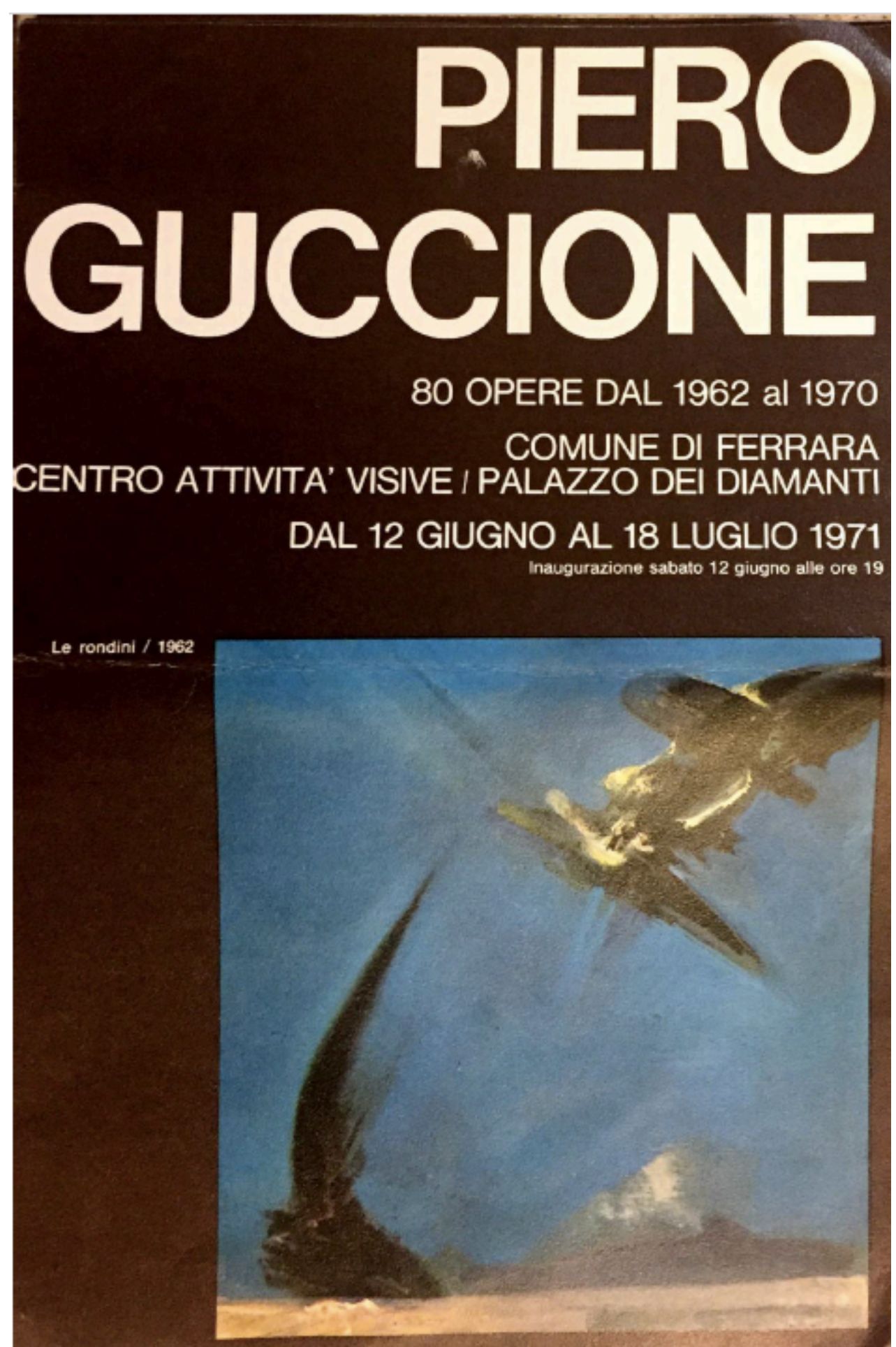
Those who go, 1970



Piero Guccione by Enzo Siciliano

Piero Guccione is now thirty-six years old. Having arrived in Rome from the southernmost tip of Sicily, he brought with him from there the feeling of light and the palpitating, bleached air. A feeling that has not remained exhausted and inert on canvas, but over the last ten years has clashed and dialysed with very different and even dissolving pictorial experiences. Piero Guccione, during this time, has matured a consistently personal complex viewpoint, not denying himself what the world offered him. Towards these offers his attitude was never one of passivity, but rather one of emotional acquisition, of subtle and meditated stylistic elaboration. These were the years of the success and then the decline of Italian pop-art. Guccione undoubtedly looked at it, but he did not suffer its theoretical and market blackmail. He wanted to understand, within what his pictorial imagination suggested to him, its iconographic necessity. He studied its movements, its even tragic spasms, and his universe took advantage of this. He painted gates and peeling walls, trying, through painting and drawing, to surprise the magic dust of existence. He painted the rapture that the reflections of things in each other - the leaves inside the shiny surfaces of cars - produced. He rediscovered the poetic silence that stretches across a canvas at the moment when colour has coagulated the image. He found, after the conflicts of the avant-garde, that painting is a kind of multiplied mirror within what the mind dreams is the real.

Waiting to leave n.7, 1969



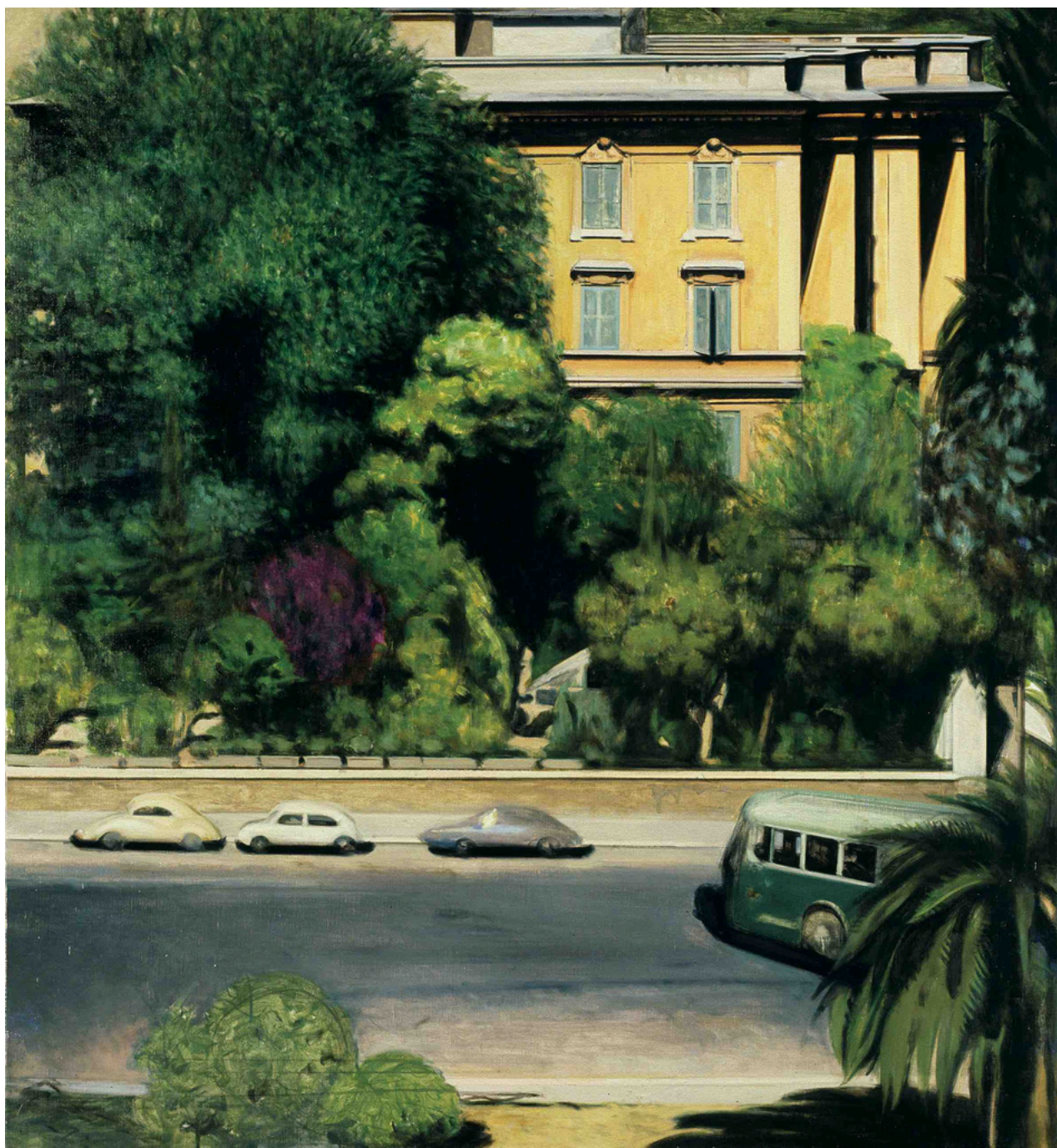
exhibition catalogue cover

He found in that feeling of Mediterranean air and light the flicker of the Morgana fairy of poetry.

Strangely enough, however, so much luminous enchantment, when observed resolved in painting, makes one think of the masters of a lucid and intact north. I think of the Dutch, of Vermeer's perfection of vision, of that crystalline intensity of colour that overturns the everyday into a horizon of more arcane and dramatic meanings. Just as I think of a Morandian perseverance in dictation, of an expressive detachment imbued with troubled and restrained participation. This light of Guccione's, its harmonious balance seems to emerge from a mysterious, chaotic universe: a chaos that has remained distant, like an impalpable, elusive echo. Tragedy is there, but there is also an irrepressible need for stoic, secular peace. Guccione knows how to give you the sense of a song that rises above the pain. And, in this, he is a painter, today, like very few.

from the exhibition catalogue at Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, 1971

Testimony for Guccione by Luigi Carluccio



On the curve of Viale Tiziano, 1971

Plane trees on the Volkswagen, 1967



If there were no Guccione paintings, one might think that Guccione did not exist. Nobody talks about him (it is a miracle that Enzo Siciliano's beautiful essay comes out on the occasion of this exhibition). What I mean to say is that Guccione does not fill the chronicles with himself, nor does he provoke them; as do so many others who need to establish their presence on the scene through continuous friction with their surroundings.

In the silence with which he surrounds himself, and which in its limitlessness cancels any sensation of duration, it seems like yesterday but it has been three years since Guccione and I last found ourselves looking at his paintings together. Suddenly, from the so vivid memory of the paintings of 1968, *Plane trees on the Volkswagen* or *Flaminio landscape* in front of these present ones, *On the curve of Viale Tiziano*, for example, *The flowers, the car and the wall*, the whole of the time that has passed has been reconstituted the quantity of time that has passed, just like quantity of painting; but perhaps it is better to say intensity, density of painting, because Guccione's works can be counted on the fingers of one's hands, and of these few, some still slowly emerge from the dubious and pathetic blanket of their sinopias, barely counterpointed by small notes in progress.

In contrast to the great, restless, indeed unstable backdrop of the too many gestures and projects of work of which the plot of our artistic life is woven, each day by surprise, Guccione's work condenses in us, as soon as we see it, the joy of an encounter with the awaited thing. In a form, which may even appear reductive, with respect to the ambitions it denounces and with respect to the tumultuous pressing of the proposals that besiege us, Guccione's work places as a fixed point that which is able to signify here, now, lucidly, what I tried to define last time as 'realisability' of his own figure in a certain space and at a certain time; and to suggest, therefore, moving from such a space that has become pictorial, from such a moment that has become poetic, all the incidences and concessions of a structure that encompasses all sensitivity and all knowledge.

In fact, Guccione obstinately tends to point out through rigorous visual experiences the mysterious element that is always the poet's breath: the path, the alternating pauses, the remote motivations of such breath.

from the exhibition catalogue at the gallery Il Gabbiano, Rome, 1971-72

Afternoon with Guccione in the Moravia House by Enzo Siciliano

[...] Moravia says: «What interests me in your paintings - and has always interested me, from the first exhibitions I saw at the Gabbiano, up to what I saw at the Biennale this year - is the work of internalisation of visual reality that you do. It is a non-expressionist kind of internalisation. In expressionism there is a kind of externalisation of the subject, rather than an internalisation of the object. Expressionist technique does violence to the object, it overwhelms it. When I speak of internalisation, however, I mean a way of rendering reality dialectical. The artist assimilates the objective datum to his own experience: or he existentialises it. This is very evident in your painting. You are figurative, in a way. But the places of your figuration are extremely elusive places: they are places - please do not misunderstand me - improbable because of the singular angle they take. This singularity is the sign, or the counterpart, of what I used to call internalisation» [...].

«Guccione does not paint what he sees, but only what he wants to see. In him there is a search for the essential, which is only discovered, however, in the moment of living. It is a moment carved out of every story. Piero [Guccione] spies an apparition, an epiphany, or the event. This event is light, sunlight. His real obsession is light [...] and its variations. The reflection of light, and their mirroring. I think of landscapes mirrored in car bodies: that too is a search for light or luminescence. In short, the obsession of his painting is why things appear: and things appear because there is light travelling at three hundred thousand kilometres per second» [...].



1972 with the writer Alberto Moravia



Bolaffi Arte feb.-mar. 1979

«Duration in a painting is certainly not what duration is in a novel. In a painting, duration is depth: painting gives you the sensation that time flows over the objects represented like a wave. In Guccione's painting, this wave-like flow of time is there» [...].

«In [Giorgio] Morandi, time was something dusty and funereal: it flowed to end, to finish, to seal itself in objects. Piero seems to me to paint things, landscapes to discover their vitality. He paints the emergence of the earth, of the sea, in the luminosity of the air. On the contrary, it sometimes introduces into this emergence some elements of rupture, or an element of rupture - I was saying this earlier. The bodywork of a car, a wing, a side panel....leaves, trees, profiles of things emerge in there... These cars, I must say, are impressive: they are the recovery of something that in the temperament of his painting would seem irretrievable. In *Gli Indifferenti (The Indifferent)*, I wrote something in tune with Piero's use of the shiny surfaces of car bodies. I wrote that Carla saw herself mirrored in the car windshield as if in a mirage of impossible comprehension - I wrote like this, or something similar. There is a strange poetry in the images mirrored by the windshields and the car bodywork: the turning of colours into negatives, the reversal of perspective».

Bolaffi Arte feb.-mar. 1979

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Piero Guccione was born on May 5th 1935 in Scicli, a small town in the southeast of Sicily, in the province of Ragusa. After graduating from the Art Institute in Catania, he moved to Rome in 1954, where he frequented the neo-realist painters of the Galleria Il Pincio in Piazza del Popolo.

On April 23rd 1960, he held his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Elmo in Rome, presented by the art critic Duilio Morosini. From 1961 to 1964, he joined the group 'Il Pro e il Contro', along with artists Attardi, Gianquinto and Vespignani. In 1966 he exhibited for the first time at the Biennale International Art Exhibition in Venice and became Guttuso's assistant at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, later holding the professorship until 1969.

In the late 1960s, he built a summer house between Punta Corvo and the Bay of Sampieri, in the southeast of Sicily, where his stays became increasingly frequent and extended. In 1971 the city of Ferrara dedicated the first anthological exhibition at Palazzo dei Diamanti and the following year he exhibited again at the Biennale in Venice, returning in 1978, 1982, 1988 and in 2011. In 1979, he returned definitively to Sicily, to the Modican plateau, where he would spend the rest of his life.

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In 1985, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presented an anthological exhibition of graphics. In 1988, the Biennale of Venice dedicated a personal room to him in the Italian Pavilion. Elected to the Academy of San Luca in 1995, he received the Special Award for Culture from the Prime Minister's Office in 1999 and the Gold Medal of the Presidency of the Italian Republic as a distinguished figure in art and culture in 2004. His art works are part of the collections of the Italian Senate and the Metropolitan Museum of New York.

On May 5th 2018, his 83rd birthday, the Piero Guccione Archive was established, chaired by his daughter Paola. A few months later, on October 6th 2018, Piero Guccione passed away in his beloved home-studio in Quartarella in the Modican countryside.

 ARCHIVIO
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