

Ambra Mattioli says of her work, “flying creatures with human characteristics really do exist”.

The images here are only part of the story she says smiling. She explains retelling in a soft voice the events narrated in a book which has long fascinated her: **Le Cronache di Etzebur**, by Alessandro Maggiora Vergano, published by “Editrice Selearte Moderna” of Milan in 1976.

An archaic branch of the human species, many centuries before man learned the art of writing, flew in the ancient Armenian skies. The oral tradition of the nomads of Kurdistan still tells of an ancient tribe of winged women which terrorised the shepherds of the high planes sending every kind of evil and misfortune to those who crossed them. In reality those Harpies were a people of gentle and joyous creatures; the stories of their evil deeds put about by them in order to protect their existence. It was impossible to coexist with a species as cruel and superstitious as homo sapiens and the Harpies were forced to take refuge in the inaccessible mountains of ancient Armenia, and here they organised a collective life, disciplined and rigid but at the same time comfortable..

In the space of a few thousand year they developed a spiritual doctrine. This was a way of thinking so pure as to give rise to a totally new vision of creation. The evolution of this sublime though was accompanied in the Harpy people by a physical evolution, Through intervening stages the Harpies developed from stocky and graceless bird women into a race of beings externally similar to the “pedestrians” but with a surprising spiritual force which among other things rendered them capable of flying even without wings.

This was a transformation too rapid for such a relatively short space of time. Nature had taken a way out of keeping with the world as it was.

The end was dramatic, the disappearance abrupt, an inexorable oblivion.

This is the story as told by Vergano, the fascinating tale of the Harpies up to their disappearance into myth as ugly and wicked creatures.

The desire to give new life to a people so fantastic and so forgotten has so possessed the artist as to drive her to make them the dominant theme of her paintings.

Children of the air. Shown here in their daily lives, in their mountain landscapes, in their inaccessible home, at the side of the ancient Caspian sea.

An atmosphere symbolic of movement, witness of the internal search of the artist, of the desire to unravel the threads of animism in her own psyche. Passion and warmth are felt in the antique colours, and a sense of yearning and composure in the calm expression of intelligence in waiting; serene faces, detached and intense, part of the vast and mysterious development of an artist ..”living expression of the sensible world”.

There is a message of life in these paintings which tell the story of an ancient people. It is traced there, minute, decided, a dynamic capable of involving the spirit of the spectator, attentive or distracted. Both can experience the subtle fascination of a past time, full of austere pathos; a message directly conveyed in the particular tones and soft light of the painting, by the vibrant colours, so modern and personal, yet distinct and capable of instilling a sense of waiting for eventsto be lived or only dreamed....