

VERA GIRIVI: INTERVIEW

James Barron: Tell us about your painting routine. Do you complete a painting in a day?

Vera Girivi: I paint in the afternoon, and usually I try to finish a painting by evening. Sometimes, I correct a painting that doesn't convince me. It is a glance and feeling of satisfaction, even in the imperfection, that I recognize as the moment of completeness of a painting.

JB: How much of your paintings come from your imagination?

VG: Usually it is imagination, but sometimes I like to stop and look at the great painters for inspiration. I use my skills and my vision, twisting the forms, especially in corpulent women.

JB: Your paintings of men feel quite different from those of your women. Can you describe your process when painting men?

VG: Although women are complicated in their physical imperfections, I prefer to paint them rather than men. My women, who are almost always naked, show strong character despite their imperfections. Sometimes, when I walk on the street, I look at women in old age wearing youthful clothes, and I imagine them without clothes, with their frailties. I think that kind of woman does not want to get old and so she vulgarly covers flaws that would increase her beauty. Like my imperfect women, it would be trivial to me to paint a muscular and perfect man. Yesterday, for the first time, I explored painting a man's body. It was a great discovery for me. I felt a modesty in creating and understanding an almost-shy character. This man does not exhibit virility, but the feminine part that is in him, symbolized by the fan. I love that these characters are not weak, and display an openness and joy for life.

JB: You often use fans in your paintings. Can you discuss what the fans represent?

VG: For women, the fans symbolize a habit of beauty. For men, they represent modesty.

JB: Female characters recur in your paintings. Are any of them self-portraits?

VG: My women are certainly not feminists, but they have a strong and dominant character. They are not ashamed of their nudity, which is never vulgar. It is their imperfections that attract. Perfection fades. Flaws express truth and purity. They are never young women. Rather, they are middle-aged women who embrace the change in their bodies. They become more heavyset, but always elegant. The paintings are never self-portraits, even if I am not afraid to exhibit my imperfections.

JB: For years your audience was entirely on Instagram. Please describe the difference for you in showing the actual paintings in my gallery or at art fairs.

VG: My story began in an unusual way. I began to show my works on Instagram for enjoyment. I immediately found a lot of warmth and interest from my followers, and this kept me going. I am attentive to the number of followers, but I don't let myself be influenced if a work I like very much is not as successful on Instagram. For me, Instagram fans are like spectators of a theatrical work. My paintings exhibited in the gallery feel more protected. In a fair there is always the possibility of negative judgment, perhaps given by visitors who do not understand that mistakes sometimes create beauties.

JB: Your paintings have been consistently getting larger in the past year. Tell me about your interest in painting on a larger scale.

VG: Working on the big canvases makes me feel great in my smallness. I want to put everything in it, cover the whole canvas. It feels satisfying.

JB: Many of these new paintings were created during the lockdown due to the global pandemic, when you were at home. Can you tell us how the lockdown has influenced your art during this period?

VG: My work slowed down a lot during my confinement. In order to paint you need oxygen, social life, visual concentration of the outside and the noise of people talking, walking, laughing. It's all part of that essence that I call instant photographic glance.

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