

In Conversation with Tullio

Pericoli

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When some years ago I went to see Tullio Pericoli in his studio in Milan, to interview him on his pictorial work around *Robinson Crusoe*, on which I was then working (the outcome of this research can be read now in S. Corso (2013), Pericoli told me that for some time he had been obsessed with an idea. He wished to arrange a meeting with a writer and ask him what it meant for him to describe a face. ‘I know – he told me – what goes on in my mind when I work on a portrait, what I look for, what I seek to understand, what I have to remember. But what does a writer look for? How does his mind work when he describes a face?’. Paolo Fabbri had told him an anecdote that had struck him, and that, he recalled, was narrated in Diderot and d’Alembert’s Introduction to the *Encyclopédie*. A wealthy man is madly in love with a woman. He drafts a description of her face, makes a hundred copies and commissions one hundred painters to create her portrait. When the painters deliver the portraits, the man discovers that there is not one that resembles another; and above all it turns out that none of the portraits bear any resemblance to the woman he loves. The anecdote of the enamored Frenchman addresses some of the most intricate problems in aesthetic theory across the ages: what do we represent when we represent? Is narrating with words an experience comparable to that of narrating with images? Can one exist without the other? Can there be a visual imagination without the words that mold us or a verbal experience that is free from the images that we carry inside? In his long and successful career Tullio Pericoli has never ceased to contemplate these questions, and has answered them with his art, his curiosity, his extraordinary ability to watch and listen to faces, behaviors, but also trees, clouds, soil. As a political and cultural cartoonist, as illustrator of literary works, as a world-famous author of writers’ portraits, as landscape painter, set designer, and finally as a theorist of his own artwork, Pericoli teaches us that behind every stroke of the pen or the brush, there are a

thousand stories. With lucidity and generosity, Pericoli opens the gates of his art and invites the curious viewer to stroll between the lines of his paintings – lines which, as he likes to say, have a history, a physiognomy, a grammar and even an interiority.

Simona Corso (2013), 'Immaginare Robinson Crusoe. Tullio Pericoli e gli altri', in *Oltre la pagina. Il testo letterario e le sue metamorfosi nell'era dell'immagine*, edited by M. d'Amico (Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, pp. 35-61).