

## CLIFFHANGER

Curatorial text by Ornella Paglialonga

Runo B's exhibition unfolds on multiple levels; it soars high when his foolish characters float towards the sky, challenge the steepest mountains, collapse to the ground, and do everything they can to escape or tie an alleged culprit to a tree. *Cliffhanger* tells the story of those who "hang on a cliff", within a situation that represents a stereotype of suspense. Contrasts, repetitions, and movements are the keywords that distinguish Runo B's work, with its shades and signature displaced subjects (*spostati*).

Runo B's unsettled characters create an ambivalent dialogue between psychic instability, dislocation from their place of belonging, and the choice not to adhere to certain impositions. Sometimes they offend the realm of form and conventions with their spontaneity. In their everyday facet of life, they do not play a pre-established part and always remain true to themselves, defying others' irony and ridicule. Partly vagabond, partly outcast, wisely stupid, and credibly wise in their idiocy - ultimately more real than many hypocrites - these subjects are handled as one would do with sacred figures.

It is increasingly easy to come across amateur videos on the web that often subsequently become memes: the grandfather who swears at his grandson, the angry person who curses a "thief" politician, people who try to flip an omelet (purposefully) making a mess, Ape Car acrobatics in the busy streets of Naples, skateboarding attempts in clearly unsuitable places, a crab with a cigarette in its claw... and so on. Sometimes it's just a bit of fun, other times it's a simple obsession with capturing highly entertaining moments, whether conscious or unconscious.

Some videos - much more serious than one might think - document news events, such as viral footage of the protester who managed to steal Nancy Pelosi's podium from the US House of Representatives, or for example a video in which the leaders of a small village in China punish a man by tying him to a tree for going to buy cigarettes without a mask during the 2020 lockdown.

Then there are web phenomena, such as American *Christine Weston "Chris" Chandler*, who initially identified as a man but came out as a transgender woman in 2016 and changed her name to Christine. Born as the creator of the *Sonichu* webcomic, she is known for being targeted by trolling from forums such as Encyclopedia Dramatica, 4chan, and Kiwi Farms. *UncleSamPatriot* is probably Finland's most popular YouTuber, a particularly religious one. His most famous video (*Lakupiippu*) mocks the new tobacco law that would have made pipe-shaped liquorice illegal. In Italy, there's the angry *Dario Greggio*, yelling curses at Berlusconi from his channel, or the late *YouTubo Anche Io* (who passed away in August 2021) calmly reflecting on philosophical issues or everyday matters while eating pounds of food at his kitchen table, while fans and haters keep him company from a computer screen.

In this *mise en scène* of disconnected enjoyment - shielded from all forms of social injustice - it doesn't matter if the goal is to achieve an objective or to change the state of things. Wandering, isolating oneself, and indulging in one's madness seems to be the most widespread solution, so much so that it embodies the spirit of today's world: bound by abnormal desires and a miserable fate constrained by injustice and increasingly rooted poverty of spirit.

Runo B's works' main subjects draw inspiration from similar states of marginality. Moreover, his *Fools* series references the difficulty of living within a system: the paintings' protagonists are victims in the

process of trying to escape in all possible ways, overwhelmed by the great challenges of everyday life. Runo B deepens this discussion with the work titled *a day in a heaven, a year on earth*, drawing inspiration from Chinese Taoist myths and legends, stories of ordinary people who usually encounter “a Saint” by chance, entering a mountain’s cavities, spending an afternoon or a few days there, only to leave with completely changed perceptions, as if years had passed. The mountain cavities represent places where time is suspended, and this experience exposes human powerlessness in the face of time’s inexorability and, as a result, how exaggerated the world’s happiness and suffering are. The monotype series is an extension of the painting *The last unvaccinated man I*, whose main subject is portrayed in thirty-six different expressions. In this exhibition, they are presented on a long wooden plank, a sort of springboard, the imaginary reconstruction of an element from Hieronymus Bosch’s famous *Ship of Fools*, which has inspired several of Runo B’s works.

Runo B processes what he sees in a fragmented way, pouring it onto the canvas. Within the works, his Chinese heritage and culture becomes blurred, merging with the reality in which he lives, whether it be Western or Eastern. His paintings are wild and rich in colours, emitting vibrations through cartoonish brushstrokes. The subjects direct a frenetic cry at the viewer, floating on a neutral and variegated background, where consumerist supermarket-style elements often navigate.

The composition originates from a perspective that Runo B discovers in Goya’s work, particularly within the scenes of *The Disasters of War* (circa 1810) portraying the oppression by Napoleonic troops during the Spanish War of Independence; a situation where the association with “crucifixion” is visually expressed as “bound to a tree”. Iconographies of martyrs such as St. Sebastian (the *Beyond Illiterates* series) or Peter of Verona (*Common Saint*), Chinese philosophy and religion (the monotypes from *a day in heaven, a year on earth*), American film (the *Cliffhanger* series), collectively contribute to the array of observations employed by Runo B to develop his works; laying the foundation for an extensive discourse between the history of painting and contemporary society while persistently maintaining a distinctly original, dislocated viewpoint.