

Miraggio Inferiore Roberto Alfano

a cura di Piergiorgio Caserini

ArtNoble Gallery
3 Marzo - 29 Aprile 2022
Via Ponte di Legno 9, Milano

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ROBERTO ALFANO

Solo exhibition curated by Piergiorgio Caserini

ArtNoble gallery is pleased to present *Miraggio Inferiore* (Inferior Mirage), the first solo exhibition of artist Roberto Alfano at the gallery, curated by Piergiorgio Caserini.

An inferior mirage is the asphalt bobbing like the sea. It is an effect of the heat, the humidity and the distance, a strange inflection of the above on the below that everyone knows well, but especially those who have always been accustomed to infinitely long landscapes and horizons where the gaze is so wide that it is only possible to follow things as they disappear. Obviously, we are talking about the plains: the Po Valley and the Emilian plains. Expanses dotted with farmhouses, courtyards, bell towers, aqueducts and pylons, framed by the geometric shapes of muddy ditches, embankments and drainage ditches in which families of nutrias wallow, surrounded by small swarms of fireflies; in short, those landscapes in which steaming piles of shit, gravelly mud on the embankments, occasional floods and, recently, tornadoes, recur. Let us say with the certainty of those who live them that these are such vast spaces that it is easy to get lost whilst standing still. They are landscapes that have the peculiarity of urging the observer to continually exercise a glance into the distance, at what disappears and what only appears when walking - and here we live on opposites: the fog is the ultimate fallback, where things rather than disappearing suddenly appear. In short, the long, seemingly infinite spaces facilitate the mirage, whether it is inferior

or superior: whether it is the sky that makes the asphalt and the earth vibrate, or the mountains that disappear below the horizon.

Let's start from a postcard that draws on decidedly biographical aspects. Roberto Alfano, for those who don't know him, grew up between the industrialised moors of the sub-rural area par excellence, the Lower Lodigiana, and the livelier and more flooded expanse of the Emilian plain. The postcard in question is an image or a memory that seems at first glance to rummage around with that neo-realist bucolic of the farmyard courtyard, children running in the fields, dogs and walks. And it will immediately seem as if the subjects of *Miraggio Inferiore* are dogs: dogs of wood, dogs of earth and clay and cement, dogs of cloth and sequins, spotted and striped, motionless and snappy. You will see that there is a shack, just like the abusive ones so often found at the base of motorway overpasses, where you never know whether the mist is actually pollution or vice versa. You will also notice the recurrence of figures and signs with childish features, and this is where we commence.

Roberto's entire production is characterised by at least two distinctive movements. On one hand, there are figures of fantasy: a childlike attitude of disorientation, of stubbornly following a kind of childlike trait that chases after forms, portraits and scenes. On the other, the obsession with the repetition of elements. If we

ask ourselves what a childlike trait is, we must think of a game of forced - but still likeable - sympathies. Which means not allowing things to happen, but rather imposing the reality of fantasy, and opening up adventures where it seems there are none - and here, if you want to imagine it, the figure of the horizon can return again. But the fact is that these dogs mostly have one thing in common. They are disproportionate, some too small and others almost deformed, some grotesque and others tender.

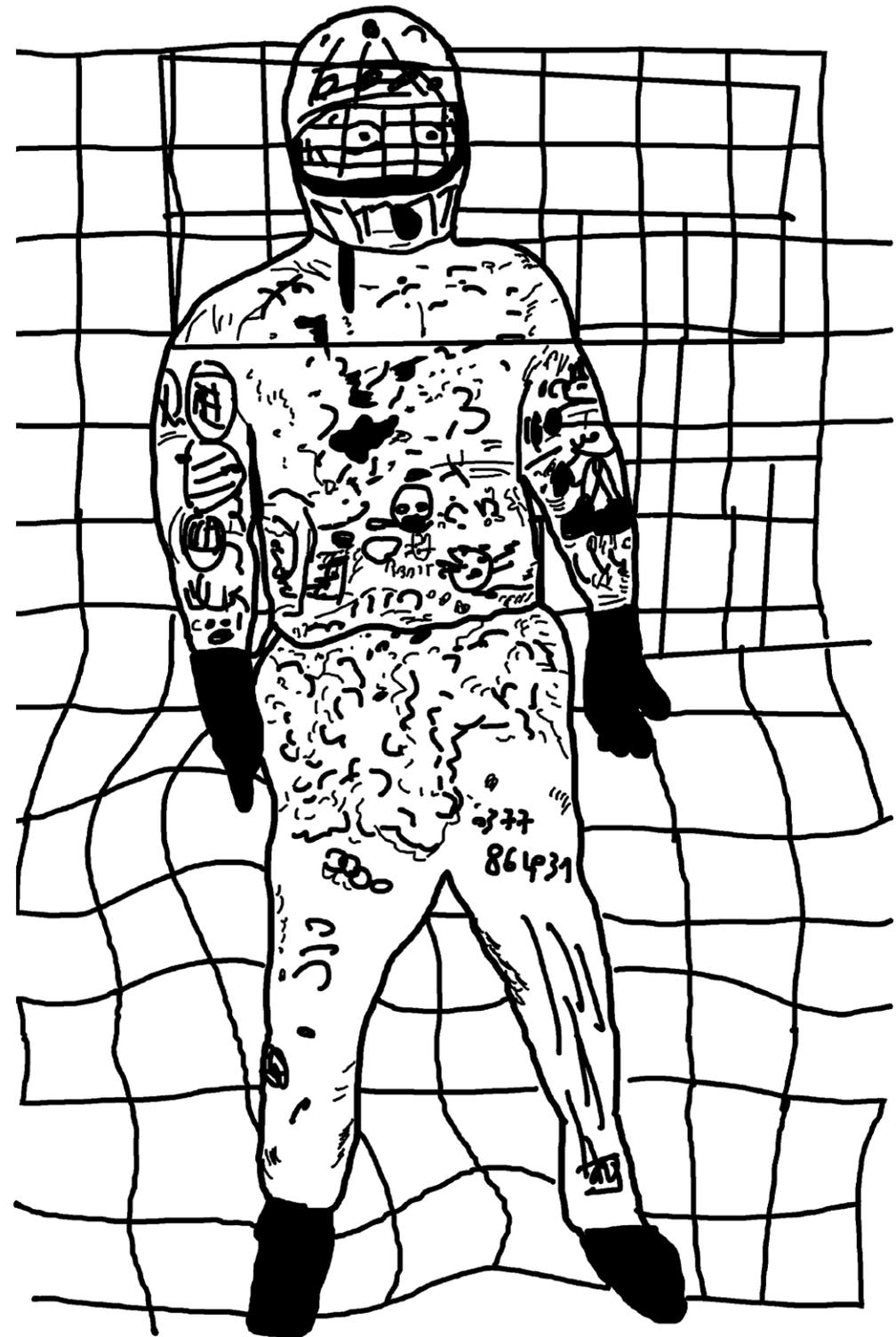
It could be said that some of these are affected by neoteny, which is that evolutionary oddity, the culprit of which falls mostly on the co-evolutionary processes of domestication and selection, whereby friendly canids have not only, for example, long, tender ears and large, soft skulls, but also behavioural characteristics more akin to a puppy. And the perceptual result is that of an aura of tenderness, of cuddles and caresses, almost as if one could think that those affected by neoteny receive a strange reality by reflex. A lysergic reality, as if one were always and only looked at and squared by the eyes of childhood, which are eyes that see things from a different perspective together with what they actually are. It means they are dogs, but almost. Almost-dogs. Exactly like the most grotesque and spectral figures, the masks exacerbate a wild violence as well as exhibit the fascination with ideas of freedom.

In *Miraggio Inferiore* and in the rendering of dogs, a motif of identity is revealed. Of wondering where the limit is between what one sees and what one thinks, and inscribing the problem in a postcard-image, that is to say in a landscape that bends the gaze in a certain way and modulates the sensations accordingly, just like a childlike trait, or a mirage: which throws out figures as they are, turns a dog into a patch, a piece of wood into a body, a lump of clay into a monster, so that a house is also a shack and the onlooker pours out continuously at the foot of the horizon in which he is lost, just to

wobble for a few minutes along with the asphalt.

In short, to close this long text, which is more of a dialogue than anything else, let us say that looking at Roberto's work we find ourselves faced with one of the most difficult aspects of that thing called "art", which has as many forms and figures as it is put into practice, and which is perhaps, at heart, an aspect of expression: its necessity. That of being able to constantly cope with the things that appear and vanish, that afflict the soul and break it up in every portion of the gaze, in every visible one, those affections that - if intense - make it difficult to distinguish between who is looking and what is seen, between looking and being looked at, between the paranoia of a shack in a space so large as to seem infinite and the strange freedom of disappearing into the same space.

Piergiorgio Caserini



A tale in the exhibition

Written by Piergiorgio Caserini in conversation with Roberto Alfano

THE HELMET

There is a rumour that narrates how Stefano, a corpulent young teenager from the Bassa Lodigiana, suddenly chose not to take off his helmet any more. It happened one day in May, when after years of requests and awkward persuasions, his mum and dad gave him the coveted scooter. The kind that seems to have been made especially for wheelies, for skidding and making noise, the sort whose growl unravels in the horizontal air of the plain, where all the noises, hisses and barks can be heard even at great distances, at least during those days when the humidity does not make the air lazy, heavy and vicious. Apparently, no one has ever been able to explain, let alone recount, the reason for this bizarre choice. Nevertheless, no one ever wondered how it is that Stefano found that tenacity, bovine to say the least, to maintain that sparkling white helmet even during mid-August, when the mugginess is such as to make the asphalt rumble and the landscape vibrate like a mirage, capable of making old uncles die, tired of their lungs intoxicated by greyish dust and of impregnating the spongy air with shit even when the periwinkles bloom within. Some say he was as stubborn and childish as flies on manure, but we dare say no more. Just the facts. So, whether he slept, walked or even ate, sucking on a disgusting, wrinkled straw, Stefano just couldn't separate himself from the spongy warmth that encircled his skull, to the

point that in fact, for all we know, he might not even remember his own ears, even though he knew they were there. The same lack of reality could just as easily be attributed to the chin. Stefano could have his father's chin, his mother's chin, but also his uncle's, who died prematurely from that dusty greyness of asbestos that snowed on his head for a few decades, blossoming into a tumour that resolved itself, almost fortunately, in an accident due to the encounter with a barbaric truck wheel in an alcoholic and foggy February. In the same terms, Stefano could have long hair like his aunt, or like the lady in the farmhouse, who smells of cat piss: few but good hairs, silvery like the moon on foehn days, when the sky brushes off every cloud.

Why are you covering your handsome face, they asked him, why have you locked yourself up in there, and Stefano mouthed metallicly, revving his scooter quickly through those flat fields that certainly lend themselves well to the excesses of speed, so much so that it could be said that the idea of the motorway is due precisely to these places, as well as many other ideas that have tormented the centuries. Damned are the plains, damned is the asphalt, damned are the straight and narrow lands, psalmodised Stefano. In short, his parents' pleas were useless, and even after selling his scooter behind his back, they ended up

solving nothing. The day came when it was decided to give him some puppies. The small, cuddly ones, that bark and lick so much, that you almost wonder if that excess of affection, of domesticity, is not at bottom a ridiculous compensation for the tiny size, as if to say help me, as does neoteny, the puppy effect, that you feel like protecting even the worst of things, and if you think so, in essence, you are a slave to tenderness. This is what Stefano thought, and to get around the problem of tenderness, he haughtily named them Zip, Booster and NRG, partly in honour of his companion seized by the parental guards, and partly because he hoped they would growl as loud and metallic as his little scooter's engine did.

THE WALK

Six months had passed by now, and the case had gone nowhere. Zip was a wild young thing, a curious sniffer, a prophet of smells; Booster growled at bicycles and barked at all passers-by, untamable; NRG, worthy of his name, preferred to express his excitement by pissing wherever he could. During that October day, he pissed on the car of the landlord of the Somaglia docking, who had been wriggling around cursing and moaning all day long, imprecations that he surely breaded together with the bleaks, giving them that characteristic nauseating taste. So, Stefano chuckled, knowing from his helmet that at most he would hear a metallic screech, and discreetly went off to continue his walk.

It was a beautiful October day, one of those days that shine on the horizon, when the sun plays with the thick air and draws a bluish line that embraces the landscape all around, a celestial sparkle so beautiful that it seems magic, so beautiful that Zip was frantically and stubbornly pulling in the direction of the fields near the embankment, where the mud was so thick that it was knee-deep. But no

Zippetto, Stefano insisted, let's not go in there, he said; and he held on for his own sake, at least until in the distance he saw an ugly mug that he seemed to know, a tall and corpulent guy, with a greyish helmet and a mastiff on a leash, and so he chose to go down the dirt road towards the fields instead, which were already beginning to get foggy.

Ah, thought Stefano, how beautiful the fields are when the mist rises vigorously, in a moment engulfing the ankles and in a second obliterating everything, or when it is so thick that the wind blows its top away, leaving only the sky above. Lost in that epiphanic vision, he received such a tug from Zip that he almost found himself in the lot. Don't pull, don't pull, Stefano yelled through clenched teeth, but Zip didn't give a shit and darted boldly towards one of those fogs that smells like manure, but also has an air that makes your skin crawl, always. They're dense and greyish, they take all the light around them and smear it on your eyes until everything is orange, white or purple, so much so that the walls of mist seem to move, with the banks of drops dragging each other along.

His uncle, whitened by the dust, would always warn him, as long as he had a voice: be careful, because sometimes the fog eats up centuries, if not millennia. We don't know when it was born. Maybe it is the rage of the reclaimed land, maybe the anger of the workers, maybe the anger of the machines. Maybe the land oozes water precisely because it reminds us of the old sea, and so, just for fun, it bleaches for dozens and dozens of kilometers, so that if you see it from above it really does look like a puddle of milk. In short, the advice was to avoid entering it, and Stefano chose well to heed Zip's canine intuition and cross the threshold of a dull, drained canal to enter a field that, as usual, had no end.

THE FOG

The uncle wasn't joking. Stefano had been wandering in the fog for who knows how long, and between a whiteness and another he had no choice but to imagine what was around him, and it's easy to say: every protuberance was a demon with a rodent-like feature, every tree adorned with ivy an entity ready to attack him, every barn a macabre slaughterhouse in which ripped pigs were certainly hanging. As if that wasn't enough, he still seemed to be seeing that guy who, just like him, wore a helmet, and who, thinking back, even looked like him. He could see his footprints in the mud, on the wet grass at one time and in the distance at another, as if that guy was really him and the fog was reflecting him here and there. He spent so much time following Zip as he toiled through the soft earth that the day faded into night. Nothing was heard, nothing was seen, the dogs no longer sniffed. Yet still his dangling was followed by creaking, by little steps, like a shuffling a few metres away and in the very direction he was going. His heart in his throat tasted like an unripe pomegranate, and Booster let out a howl. Who's there, help, cried Stefano, and instead of someone he found a stray dog standing still, looking him straight in the eye and seemingly crying.

THE DOG THAT CRIES WITH JOY

Cosa cerchi piccolo cane, perché lacrimi, borWhat are you looking for, little dog, why are you crying?" muttered Stefano's metallic voice, and he replied, without words, that he was crying with joy because a little further on, behind the blanket of fog, the Highest had just woken up. Stefano was intrigued by the unquestionable attribute, and asked where the expectation came from, whether it was a giant gentleman, very tall like that fellow, or someone in a hunting turret, or whether he meant Himself, the Highest Dog, who settled

here by force when the muddy marshes still from time to time smelt of methane instead of shit, or whether he meant one of those serpentine beasts that recurred in almost all the accounts of all the elders of every village from there to Emilia. But the weeping dog, annoyed by Stefano's childishness, which he said was not so different from the annoyance that the salesmen of the Folletto (a hoover) give when they call at home and struggle to leave, interrupted him abruptly with a yelp and only made him understand that the Highest was the Highest Dog, and that, besides towering over old truck-sheets, he was tall, not in stature or location, but in spirit, and that if he had the decency not to annoy him any longer he might find him in his Shack, right in the middle of that field towards which Zip had been pulling since forever. Stefano then began to cry, as usual. Not because he had been mistreated by the dog, but because he invariably cried when others cried, as if every tear was always his too. Why are you crying, little dog, Stefano cried again, and at that point the tearful dog could not tell him anything other than that the Highest was saying words that were too beautiful, that with every syllable it was as if one were dispersing in the fog, as if one were one drop among many but always one and only one, that for a moment one could see oneself in the skein that binds the movements of one to another, that at that moment it was as if he had managed to nibble on his own pigtail after a life of infinite disappointments. But that was his impression, and that he would go to the Highest himself and not be too fussy, because the fumes of the fog in that area are not just moisture, and everyone knows that if you stay there too long, the straight lines of the plain end up curving around each other until there is nothing left.

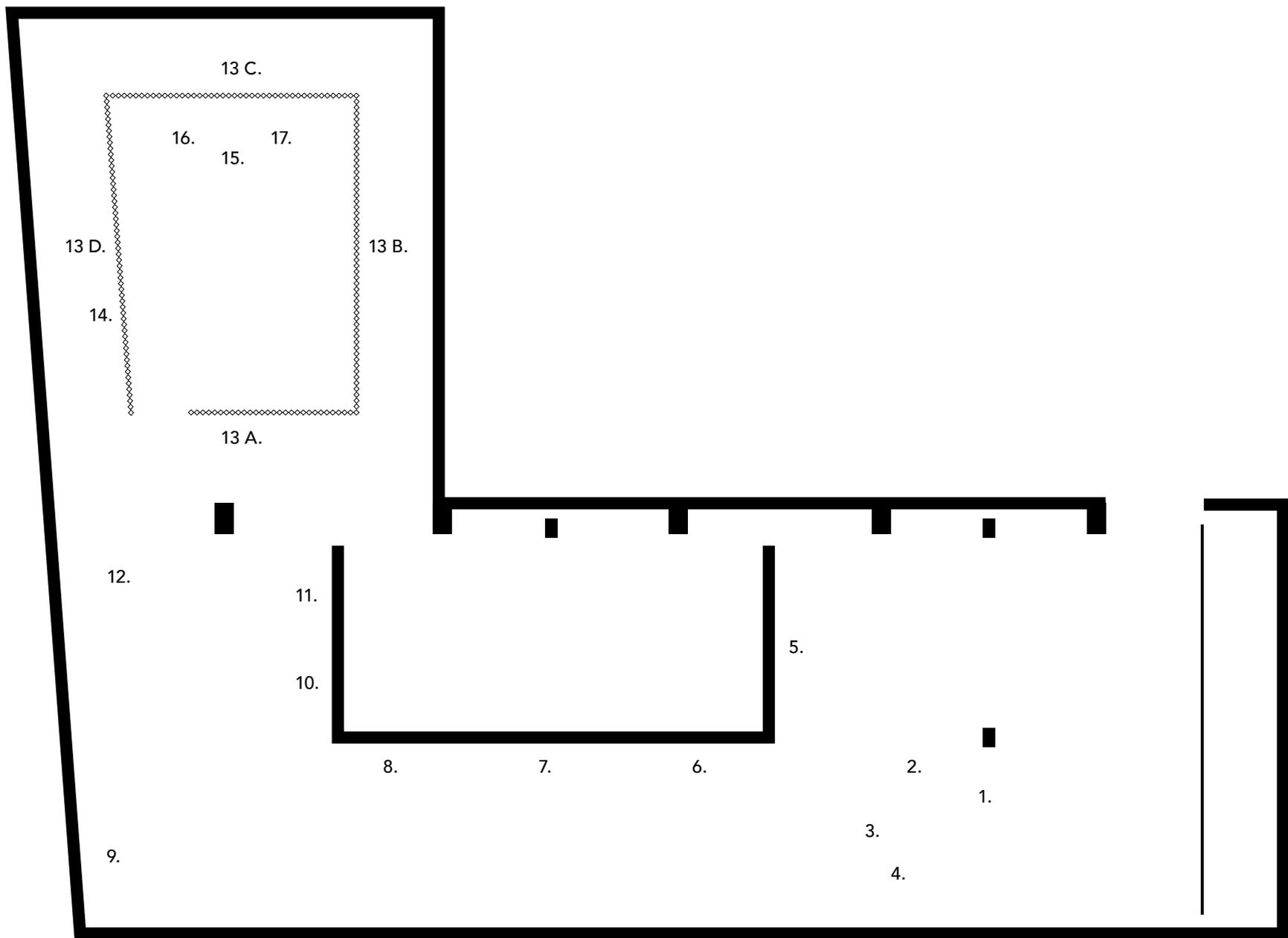
THE SHACK

Stefano wiped his tears away by sticking both index fingers into his helmet, as far as he could reach. He pulled Zip, Booster and NRG, who seemed to be charmed by the weeping dog but were still not crying, and set off, sinking his feet once in the mud and once in the shit, stepping on an earthworm and another on the stub of a corn stalk. The fog still surrounded everything, like cotton in the eardrums of the ears. A silence you could feel on your fingertips as your heart drummed on your fingernail. You know, the fog makes everything closer, and the more Stefano walked through the white-nothing, the more everything came so close with impetuosity, so close that at a certain point Stefano was no longer Stefano, but as white as the white nothing that gripped him, an infinite white such that the only plausible reference was the room of the spirit and time in that old cartoon, and therefore the dog crying with joy had fucked him, he thought, sent to die where things lose their colours and even their contours, where they lose their sounds, where not even a helmet as beautiful as his has a clearly defined curve because it is a monochrome trap, and so, he thought, what the fuck is the point, where one can only perceive oneself. And it was while thinking of this last thing, in the lysergic delirium of an October drift, that Stefano realised that this was his shack, and so he instinctively whistled, as hunters do. And there the Highest appeared before him, surrounded by a half-dead dog and an agitated puppy, all wet and damp and ready to bark in unison.

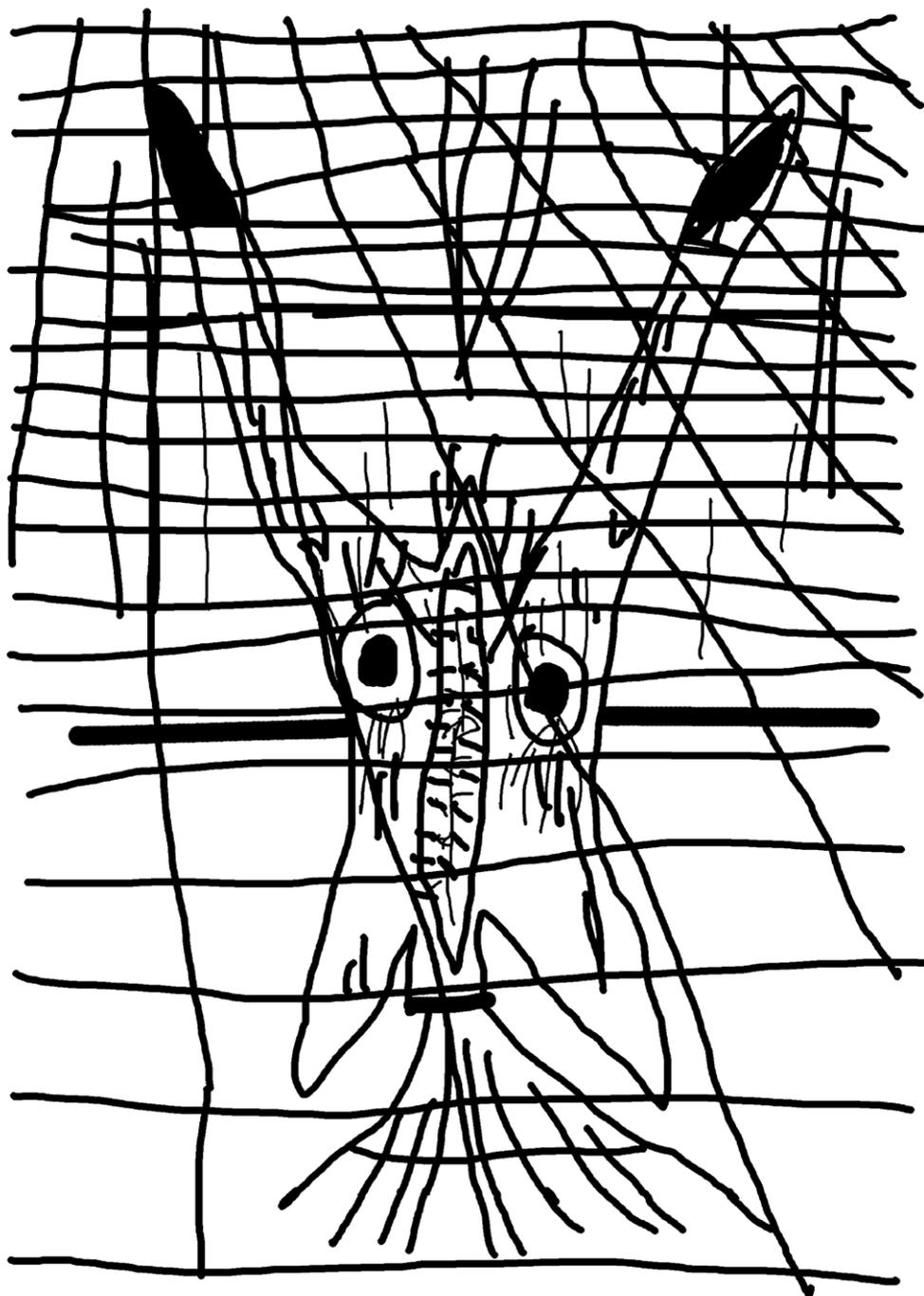
What he saw was *A day in a field of flowers when the scent of periwinkle inebriated him with rage*, the same rage as the *Tar in his uncle's lungs*, the same as that *Divinity that breeds disdain* by inciting a *Young father* to believe he's *The Fucking Prophet*, an *abstract content* flashed just before the *Car Accident*, and meanwhile there's a *Woman singing* somewhere, a *Woman looking at the ancient*

future in a *Hanging Pig* and insistently asking "why did you lock yourself in there?" "looking astonished at the *Cannibal butcher* while a *Cow is grazing* and a *monster is spitting blue balls* from the embankment to the canal.

All this Stefano saw, and when he finally returned home, he found no one waiting for him. So, he took off his helmet and realised that there was nothing underneath.



1. *Stefano, un adolescente della Bassa*
Installazione, tecnica mista
195 x 70 x 68 cm
2022
2. *Zip*
Tecnica mista su legno e cemento
73 x 85 x 24.5 cm
2021
3. *Booster*
Tecnica mista su legno e cemento
79 x 72 x 26 cm
2021
4. *NRG*
Tecnica mista su legno, cemento e adobe
60 x 73.5 x 24.8 cm
2021
5. *Autoritratto con rabbia irrisolta e proiezione astrale*
Acrilico e inchiostro su tela
215 x 150.5 cm
2022
6. *Aphex Twin 1996*
Acrilico e inchiostro su tela
105 x 75 cm
2022
7. *Mostro stella / Maiale squartato appeso*
Acrilico e inchiostro su tela
105 x 75 cm
2022
8. *Bambino con la maschera*
Acrilico e inchiostro su tela
105 x 75 cm
2022
9. *Autoritratto che vomita identità*
Tecnica mista su tela
240 x 150.5 cm
2022
10. *Uomo nutria*
Acrilico e inchiostro su tela
105 x 75 cm
2022
11. *Bambino con la maschera*
Olio su tela
70 x 50
2021
12. *Cane che piange di gioia*
Adobe smaltata, legno, schiuma poliuretanic
77.5 x 82 x 29 cm
2021
13. *Baracca / Casa interiore*
Installazione site-specific, tecnica mista
300 x 400 x 250 cm
2022
 - A.
 - a. *Un giorno in un campo di fiori*
 - b. *Catrame nei polmoni*
 - c. *Il profumo della pervinca mi inebria di rabbia*
 - B.
 - a. *Donna antica / Origine di una famiglia matriarcale*
 - b. *Perché ti sei chiusa dentro? / Storia di una donna introversa o giovane madre*
 - c. *Giovane padre*
 - d. *Un vortice mi ha succhiato la vita ma mia madre è ancora incinta*
 - C.
 - a. *Divinità che genera disprezzo*
 - b. *Il profeta*
 - c. *Contenuto astratto*
 - d. *Donna che guarda il futuro antico*
 - a. *Il macellaio cannibale*
 - b. *Maiale appeso*
 - D.
 - a. *Mucca al pascolo con mostro sputa palline*
 - b. *Incidente in macchina*
 - c. *Donna che canta*
14. *Visione interiore*
Videoinstallazione
22 sec.
2022
15. *L'Altissimo cane*
Adobe
49 x 67 x 27 cm
2021
16. *Cucciolo di cane*
Adobe e cemento armato
69 x 44 x 16 cm
2021
17. *Memento mori*
Adobe e cemento armato
60 x 44 x 16 cm
2021



ROBERTO ALFANO

Born in Lodi in 1981, Roberto Alfano develops an interest in art in the first half of the 1990s, fascinated by the phenomenon of urban art. In this period he creates his first graffiti. Over the years this practice develops into an obsessive passion for drawing and painting.

Milan, 2018; Post Graffiti Stress Disorder, Museo MARCA, Catanzaro, 2018; 12 artist of tomorrow, Mucciaccia Contemporary, Rome, 2019; Selvatici, RIZOMI, Parma; When urban attitudes become contemporary art, 21 Gallery, Treviso.

His primary sources of inspiration are traced back to contemporary underground culture, to Art-Brut and to the painting of the French masters of post-impressionism. Alongside his production and exhibition activities, Alfano has been trained in the field of clinical art therapy as an expert in running art-experiential workshops and the dynamics of artistic expression in situations of psychophysical and social distress.

In recent years, Alfano has developed his own methodological approach in the context of the art-experiential workshop, the "Generative Contemporary Art" method. This involves the practice of artistic disciplines through the introduction and use of interdependent techniques and languages, aimed at revealing needs, generating autonomy and stimulating the exploratory system.

Roberto Alfano's approach to the educational and didactic dimension leads him to focus his artistic research on the function of freedom of expression. Since the end of 2018, Roberto has also been working as a trainer as an expert in artistic-experiential workshops.

Selected solo exhibitions include: Hold on, spring is coming, V9, Warsaw, 2014; We don't need money, we need time, SSC, Milan, 2019; SSP, The Address gallery, Brescia, 2020; Grande Madre delle Stelle, Museo San Giovanni, Catanzaro, 2020. Selected group exhibitions: Rodeo Drawings Night, Antonio Colombo Gallery, Milan, 2012; 80. An international perspective. A local insight, Fondazione BPL Arte, Lodi, 2013; Avanzamento Progressivo,



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