

FEEL GOOD

Mateas Pares

Critical text

Although the gaze is strongly drawn to sculpture, the canvas is at the center of Swedish artist Mateas Pares' practice. Through the juxtaposition of various materials, assembled in ever different ways, he has found his own very personal and congenial balance, using the canvas as a surface for multiple, sculptural abstract concepts that amiably define and complete it. Thematically, Pares often questions both what it means to live with the means of life available to us and the persevering telluric effort driven by the need for a "quiet" life. All, without ever forgetting that, in the words of the intellectual Emil Cioran, penetrating life itself takes the form of a progressive advance towards nothing, coming from nothing. What ensues is that very particular sensation in which sculpture and canvas seem to be forced into a seemingly unresolved coexistence, obsessively performing a rhythmic and perpetual pendulum oscillation, here to be understood as an inescapable therapeutic movement, dictated by that Cioran assumption according to which "walking prevents you from languishing with unanswered questions, while in bed you brood over the insoluble to the point of vertigo."* And it is for this reason that Mateas Pares laboriously works, at first, to track down every patch of simplicity, calm and equilibrium, and then reunites them, hoping to fully overcome that stage of oblivious uncertainty and profound solitude in order to begin a long crossroads towards the locus amoenus—a place where one can judiciously reflect on one's destiny, being able to metaphorically lie down before the clear, fresh, and sweet waters so dear to Francesco Petrarca.

Consequently, there is a transposition of the aforementioned emotions onto his works, which are strongly limited to a few materials and characterized by a minimalist visual expression. Despite this, his nature often pushes him in the opposite direction, thus triggering a sort of antithetical poetics of counterpoint, between misunderstandings and simplifications. On the basis of such precepts, this new exhibition chapter entitled "Feel Good" was born, imbued with all those strongly stentorian, glittering, and luxuriant nuances that characterize the times we live in. With this new body of work, Pares, by analyzing movements and trends in art, interfaces with the relationship between the rampant increase in the consumption of antidepressant drugs and the anomalous success of artists who, in contrast, generate a stubbornly optimistic and carefree art. In other words, with "Feel Good" he wants to probe that complex issue that defines us, in D'Annunzio's manner, as skilful creators or image-makers, according to which the projection of an apparently perfect, digitally managed life inevitably coincides with the spread of depressive stages that become more and more acute, since generally what one aspires to is hardly achievable, thus triggering a sense of deep dissatisfaction. In this regard, Pares publicly takes as an example from one of the most prolific artists of this genre, American artist Austin Lee, who, ranging from digital media to painting and sculpture, adopts

superficially lovable cartoon-like images to address the issue of the engulfing consumption of art online. Starting with 3D digital sketches that are painstakingly translated from the screen to the painted canvas or in the form of sculpture, Lee's work is deeply respectful of the canons of Renaissance painting, while embodying the interconnected digital landscape that augments the perception of current reality. With exhibition titles such as "Aah," "Constant Joy" and "Paradise," Lee depicts humans, animals and anthropomorphic objects in an almost dreamlike state of bliss: colorful, lush flowers sprouting and growing on noses, smiling hearts replacing fingers, and joyful, singing birds playing with human figures in a paradisiacal world, free of prey and predators. Lee's works provide an optimistic vision that does not flinch away from reality, understanding the dream of the perfect life as both the cause and the resolution of this sense of depression that has always gripped us. Therefore, by repositing Austin Lee's art and using the title of one of his exhibitions "Feels Good," removing the "s," Pares shows us the transition from the attempt to represent a perfect life to the need for a creed that can motivate it. By depicting individuals, whose forms are borrowed from the pre-existing ones that make up Lee's surreal world, with "Feels Good" Mateas Pares questions the reason for our asthmatic race towards a perfect life and the consequent choices it forces us to make. So, in a world where, according to Plato in his Sophist dialogue, "the wolf resembles the dog, the wildest animal resembles the most domesticated animal," what could be the wisest next step?

Domenico de Chirico

* E.M. Cioran, *Al culmine della disperazione*, ed. Adelphi - Collana: Biblioteca Adelphi, 1998