

## SPECIAL DREAMS

Elena Ovecina

“Why is death the first night of stillness?”

“Because one finally sleeps without dreams.”

For his masterpiece film, Valerio Zurlini chose a title the authorship of which can be attributed to Goethe, who remarked that death is the first night when one sleeps without dreams.

Sleep, while offering the sight of a relaxed and often voluptuous body, also brings with it pitfalls and disturbances: it is the dimension from which we are pervaded and immersed in the inability to face, traverse, and resolve the happenings of our waking state. The individual retreats into a cocoon, adopting postures revealing a need for protection, such as the fetal position, which is catatonic. It is a period of stasis, of apparent emotional and physical immobility. The subject is in deep apathy, a limbo in which the outside world seems to have lost all ability to evoke responses. The resulting image is one of a freezing of daily functions.

Elena Ovecina's works explore the very infantilism of the artist, her emotional immaturity declined and translated into that sweet relaxation that tends toward languor, also seen as stasis, regression, passivity, and resignation, as an inability to cope with external situations, and hence now translated and sublimated through sleep, through a dimension of a dreamlike matrix, now silted up toward a granitic drift of absolute immobility.

In Elena Ovecina's shots, there is no propulsion or drive: bodies, gazes, even furnishings inhabit a shoddy reality that is an amalgam to which to adapt placidly, even resign oneself, an oxymoronic motionless flow; even some dissonant element concerning the substantial and predominant color palette of the photographs struggles to emerge, as if sucked in, dragged by that exquisitely inevitable and certainly contemporary torpor in the strict sense.

Even the formal choice of never portraying the figure in its entirety conceptually suggests a suspension, of stalemate: the only rhythm detected is that of a dilated time, not free from distress but rather distressing in its prolonged weakly flowing. Bodies suspended between a contemporary reinterpretation of Pre-Raphaelite taste (but, unlike Pre-Raphaelitism, with the exclusive use of male, rather than female bodies) and a light that we might call Caravaggesque (but far duller, glacial, and livid): the body becomes still life and sleep becomes an aestheticizing medium as opposed to a healing one.

Like Endymion for Selene, Elena Ovecina's subjects live from a sleep that seems eternal and incorruptible, similarly to the myth the viewer can operate his or her observing by trying to brush against a youthful and persistent beauty, precisely because it is motionless and inert.