

Ismaele Nones

When the icon becomes contemporary

by Matteo Chincarini

Ismaele Nones is an artist who has chosen to swim against the tide, looking back in order to speak powerfully to the present. His work stems from a profound dialogue with medieval and Byzantine iconography, not as a simple stylistic reference, but as a true expressive language. His works seem to come from a suspended time, in which images had a symbolic, ritualistic, almost sacred function, and at the same time speak with surprising clarity to the contemporary viewer.



Chiara confusione I, 2023, acrylic painting on canvas, 190x320 cm



Incontro veloce lungofiume, 2024, acrylic painting on canvas, 190x150 cm



Detail of exhibition "A chi parlo quando parlo" (Who am I talking to when I talk) , 2025, curated by Stefano Raimondi, at the Mac in Lissone (Italy)

Looking at Nones' paintings, a constant dialectic between antiquity and modernity immediately emerges. It is a tension that is never resolved, but deliberately kept alive. On the one hand, there is the careful study of icons, religious scenes and ancient mosaics; on the other, the inclusion of contemporary references, especially through objects that burst onto the scene with naturalness. This fusion is neither ironic nor provocative: it is a silent encounter between eras, which coexist in the same pictorial space without overwhelming each other.

Two-dimensionality is one of the most evident and declared elements of his work. Nones consciously rejects perspective: he is not interested in it, he does not need it. In this type of expression, illusionistic

depth would lose its meaning. Everything must be clear, legible, placed directly in front of the viewer. It is a choice that directly recalls the medieval iconographic tradition, where the image was not a window on the world, but a presence, an object of contemplation. The gaze does not enter the painting: it stops, it confronts, it remains.

Colour also follows this logic of clarity and rigour. The colours are flat, without nuances, clear and decisive. There is no room for chiaroscuro or technical virtuosity for its own sake. Each shade is carefully chosen as part of a coherent visual grammar. They are "clear" colours, to use a definition that aptly describes their strength: direct, essential, capable of constructing the image



A chi parlo quando parlo, 2024, acrylic painting on canvas, 190x270 cm

without the need for artifice. In Nones, colour does not describe light: it constructs meaning.

One element that immediately strikes the viewer is the presence of contemporary design objects. Chairs, lamps and furnishings appear in scenes whose composition and setting clearly refer to the ancient world. This contrast generates amazement and gives character to the works, without ever seeming forced. The floors are particularly significant: worked surfaces, coloured tiles and geometric patterns become a veritable exercise in style. Here, the artist demonstrates great attention to compositional structure, transforming an often secondary element into the silent protagonist of the work.

The bodies and faces depicted by Nones are similar to each other, almost archetypal. They do not seek individual resemblance, but a form of universality. They are pure, chaste bodies, even when naked. Nudity is never malicious or provocative: it is symbolic, essential, linked to an idea of original purity. The body becomes a sign, not an object; a presence, not a spectacle. In this sense, Nones' work is radically different from many contemporary representations of the body, which are often charged with psychological or sensual tension.

In Ismaele Nones' paintings, animals are never what they seem. They are neither naturalistic representations nor simple decorative elements:



Deposizione delle armi. Giornata libera, 2025, acrylic painting on canvas, 110x100 cm

they are allegories. Figures suspended between the real and symbolic worlds, tools through which the artist constructs a space of identification for the viewer.

The animals in his paintings do not exist as such. They become vehicles for deeply human emotions,

tensions, ambitions and conflicts. It is precisely this departure from reality, while remaining anchored to it, that generates an ambiguous and fertile territory in which the viewers can recognise themselves.

This approach has its roots in medieval tradition, when animals were not depicted as mere living



Volevo fare bau ma ho detto ciao, 2024, acrylic painting on canvas, 190x140cm

creatures, but as embodiments of moods, moral values and existential situations. Nones recovers this symbolic dimension and reinterprets it in a contemporary key, interweaving it with cultured and visual references.

Animals become instruments of criticism, allowing the artist to maintain a distance, to observe and denounce without falling into a didactic or overly explicit narrative. For Nones, animals are in fact a

shield. An emotional filter that allows him to tackle intimate and complex issues, such as an uncertain future, guilt and inadequacy, with greater clarity.

Ultimately, painting animals allows Ismaele Nones to say what really matters while maintaining a vital distance from reality. It is precisely in this distance that his work finds its strength: a symbolic space in which the personal becomes universal, and the viewers is called upon to recognise themselves.

Behind the apparent formal simplicity of Nones' paintings lies a great study of the ancient world. Icons, religious scenes from illuminated manuscripts and Byzantine mosaics are not only visual references but conceptual structures. Nones seems to question the profound meaning of the image, its role in history and its ability to transcend time. His canvases are large, they occupy space and demand attention. They cannot be viewed distractedly: they impose a physical, almost monumental presence that engages the viewer.

Ismaele Nones' work is, ultimately, a clear homage to the past, to that late medieval culture often overshadowed and undervalued in art history. But it is not nostalgia. Rather, it is an act of recovery and respect, an attempt to bring back a way of thinking about the image as a place of meaning and silence. In an age dominated by speed and visual overload, his works invite us to slow down, to look directly at them, and to rediscover the power of simplicity.

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