FRA IMMAGINE E PITTURA
(Between Image and Painting)

Michael Conrads, Tonino Lacertosa, Manuel Portioli

Curated by Emanuela Romano

Every work began with an image. It may be a photograph, a face, a landscape, a memory, a detail gathered from everyday life, or a fragment from a personal archive. Before becoming painting, the image already existed. In the exhibition *Between Image and Painting*, the works are therefore not neutral surfaces: they carry with them a memory, a history, a layering of meanings. The question, then, is not what the works on display represent, but what happens to the image when it passes through the process of painting.

As John Berger wrote, “the relationship between what we see and what we know is never stable.” It is precisely within this space of instability that the painting of these three artists continues to assert its necessity: not as a simple translation of the visible, but as a practice capable of slowing down the gaze, questioning the image, and transforming its meaning.

Between Image and Painting brings together Michael Conrads, Tonino Lacertosa and Manuel Portioli around this shared condition. Their practices differ profoundly in language, technique and references, yet they converge in the idea that painting is not a place of reproduction, but of transformation. The image constitutes the point of departure, never the point of arrival.

For **Tonino Lacertosa** (Bra, 1964), figuration maintains a direct relationship with lived experience. Faces, family relationships and fragments of everyday life become occasions for reflecting on memory and identity. The subject remains recognisable, but is never simply described; instead, it is traversed by the pictorial matter until it becomes a site of emotional sedimentation. Painting does not document memory; it conveys its duration, its alterations and its inevitable gaps.

In the work of **Michael Conrads** (Grevenbroich, 1977), the image instead confronts construction. Figures, objects and references to the history of painting coexist with geometric structures, grids and spatial systems that seem to emerge from within the composition itself. Geometry is not a superimposed element, but a tool through which the image is analysed, broken down and reconstructed. His work, developed between Berlin and Mexico City, constantly moves along the boundary between abstraction and figuration, bringing visual memory, material culture and the construction of pictorial space into dialogue. The surface thus becomes a site of continuous negotiations between order and instability, control and process.

For **Manuel Portioli** (Reggio Emilia, 1987), painting instead coincides with a process of accumulation and erasure. Photographs, notes and images collected over time are layered through watercolour, graphite and mixed media, generating surfaces in which the subject seems to continually appear and dissolve. Nothing is definitively concealed or definitively revealed. Each intervention preserves the trace of the one that preceded it, transforming the painting into a temporal material, where memory remains perpetually open to new possibilities of interpretation.

Although they begin from different premises, the three artists share a common attitude towards the image. None of them considers it a definitive given; all treat it as a material to be traversed. Every painting indeed emerges from a distance: the distance separating the original image from its new pictorial existence.

In this sense, painting can be understood as a form of translation. And as with any translation, something is preserved, something is inevitably lost, and something comes into being precisely through the passage from one language to another. The aim is not to seek fidelity, but to produce a new visual experience. Moreover, images are never definitively given: they continue to transform each time they are looked at. The painting of these three artists makes this dynamic condition evident, showing how every image always remains available to be rewritten.

Many of the works presented in the exhibition were created specifically for it. The exhibition thus takes on the character of an open laboratory, in which painting is observed in the very process of becoming. The works do not illustrate a theme, but bear witness to a process: the process through which an image ceases to belong to the world from which it originates and becomes an autonomous space of experience.