

STARDUST

A Conversation Between Laura Cherubini and Alberto Di Fabio

"Science is first and foremost a visionary activity. The scientific thought feeds on the ability to 'see' things in a different way than we did before" (Carlo Rovelli).

"From the Big Bang on, the various elements of physics have been merging together in perfect harmony; yet, if we have our own earthly heaven now, we only owe it to uncertainty processes" (Alberto Di Fabio).

From a mental, Himalayan landscape, the journey of elevation and permutation underlying Alberto Di Fabio's work increasingly widens its horizons to embrace the whole cosmos. Alberto talks about supernovae, about *Magnetars*, neutron stars with a huge magnetic field, which evolve into black holes that take energy and give it back.

Carlo Rovelli writes that "The heat of the black holes is like a Rosetta Stone, written in three languages—Quanta, Gravity and Thermodynamics. It is still waiting to be deciphered, so it can really tell us what the passing of time is". How is your work related to these concepts?

I dream of becoming dust again. When we become atomic dust, we might finally be able to recognise the quantum god, and get a grip of these magnetic forces in spatio-temporal contexts which are completely different from those we perceive now. The three main forces of the universe are *gravity*, *electromagnetism* and *nuclear force*. What can we know about the black holes unless we go through them? The dream of becoming an atom again is a mental journey across the Infinite.

Somehow, your work represents this dream. What, in particular, distinguishes the artworks exhibited at the MACRO from the rest of your work?

They are *geographies* of the cosmos, large works connected together by a universal music playing in the background, as it happens in a dance. I try to deal with other languages. There will be a video projection which is the result of many years' work. It is an animated picture titled *Cosmic Dance*. The exhibition is meant to be a journey through space and time.

I am fascinated by this idea, especially because the most recent scientific research, after the *Higgs boson*, has revealed the presence of parallel worlds and matter types that we cannot see yet. I dream of becoming different matter. I wish that our soul could get closer to the black holes. We will become dust again, and once we are stardust, we are *atoms*. My exhibitions at the **MART** and at Castel Sant'Elmo were inspired by galaxies and constellations. The Castalbasso exhibition, instead, was dedicated to the purity of alpine landscapes - mental landscapes between elevation and permutation.

The research you pursue is on the borderline between religion and science. Rovelli argues that science makes us look at things in a different way than we did before. But this is what art has always done, is it not? The relationship between art and science entails a great difference, but also a deep similarity. With respect to these remarks, would you like to tell us something about your own experience at CERN in Geneva?

I started to draw and paint landscapes as a child. As I was born and bred in Abruzzo, to me the mountains represent an elevation from the earthly world, an image of purity. Then, I devoted myself to reading the scientific books of my mother or my sister, who was studying Medicine at the time. From them, I would copy images of cells and other biology, chemistry or physics illustrations. By getting familiar with landscape and macrocosm views, I approached the topic of “magma”. I got interested in mineral fusions and in the composition of silica, quartz and gases. All this is at the basis of my love for science as related to the spirit. At CERN in Geneva there are the top mathematicians and astrophysicists in the world. They are very interested in my work about our mind, about the hemisphere of fantasy and spirituality and about the perception of the invisible. Fantasy and creativity are not a simple exercise; in actual reality, we never develop the oneiric part of our brain enough. Einstein used to say that whenever we get closer to the truth of a formula, it always appears under the guise of a new riddle, which our rational hemisphere alone cannot solve. A great astrophysicist told me: “We have invited you so that we can hear things that we mathematicians are not able to see”.

When did you visit CERN?

One year ago. I did a conference first and then an exhibition.

How do you choose a title for your paintings?

They are inspired by scientific theories: *Magnetar*, for example, is the name of highly magnetic stars. I would actually like to become an atom to go and visit them. Everything seems to be born from the black holes, which are the result of the death of a star and its rebirth. A huge magnetic force arises, which swallows up energy and gives it back.

One of the most beautiful works is called *Tiziana*, after your sister, an exquisite poetess whom I have also met...I would also like to ask you about how you work.

Yes, it is the name of my sister, who recently passed away. After losing two sisters within a few years, to my eyes the line between life and death became so blurred that they merged into one single source of energy.

I often paint lying on my front. I interpret each painting as a *mandala*. I have been to Nepal and India several times, to gain some inspiration from their techniques. This position helps me to collect all the emotions of spirituality, science and art - three elements of prayer. They are like exercises for spiritual elevation and permutation, aimed at reaching knowledge and attaining the revelation of the absolute dogma, which I try to convey to the observer. As I said, my works are open to different levels of interpretation. My goal is to produce a sort of electromagnetism through two-dimensional painting, to create waves which can stir emotions among the observers.

So you lie on the floor or on the table like Carla Accardi, don't you?

To paint these large canvases I had to lie on the floor, of course.

Lying on your front while working is different. Carla often said that it gave her great energy and marked an ultimate turning point in her work.

When standing, you can see your work from a distance, you have the time to think; when you lie on your front, instead, painting is more of an instinctive activity. Blood rushes to my head, my breath dilates, poetry flies up high in the sky.

Which colours do you use?

I use acrylics or watercolours, so that when the brush slides over the paper or the canvas, the different nuances fade into other glazes. They remind me of the movement of the Earth, of rivers, of neural synapses. The dream of the observer who, disturbed by my bright colours and signs, can travel through parallel worlds, is what I pursue and what I believe in.

They are natural forms... Carlo Rovelli writes that “The very weave of the universe, dotted with galaxies, should be imagined as stirred by waves, just like the sea. Sometimes they are so rough that they create fissures - the black holes”. Alberto, this reminds me of our beloved Alighiero Boetti, who argued that everything moves by waves...

My dream starts from the electromagnetism of our synapses. I dream of catching cosmic noises, of speaking to God...Artists are particularly sensitive, like aerials that perceive the planet's heartbeat...

The MACRO pavilion is a very large area. It is also to break up this hugeness that at the end of the exhibition there will be a video featuring a stellar sound. I always bear in mind Lucio Fontana's black environment and Alighiero's quantum geographies. Even Democrito and Anassimandro talked about the *antimatter*. The magnetic and sound waves can help the observer to get closer and closer to the cosmological constants. In church, for examples, this function is fulfilled by the organ, the scent of incense and the incessantly repeated prayers. At the MACRO there will be a round aerial installation, that acts as a church, a minaret, a synagogue for the mind.

What about the concept of “aerial installation”?

Aerial installations are dreams in the gaseous state. Tungsten, iron, all the forces of nature that we have before our eyes today, were in the gaseous state millions of years ago...These different canvases suspended in space in mid-air still represent the formation of elements, that are volatile before eventually merging together. I call them *quanta*. Each *quantum* is part of a whole. I am thinking of the *quantum God*. Alighiero talked about geographies of the *quanta*. Just one sentence was not enough to understand Alighiero; more elements were needed...

Aerial installations are compositions of many suspended and levitating elements, connected together by invisible ties, like the stars of a constellation. On the whole, they mirror an idea of lightness. I recall Gabriele Basilico telling me that he was no longer able to tell anything with one single picture – he needed more elements ...

An astrophysicist once told me that we only know 4% of what surrounds us... My video and my works pursue the research of a fourth dimension. A prolonged journey, dilated beyond the space and time that we are familiar with. The sensory is something that makes us dream, that makes us experience life on different frequencies.

Which idea was your starting point for this?

I started from the idea of recreating an observatory, a scientific cabinet, just like a sort of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* recreated through objects. I imagine building a window onto the cosmos and bringing everyone on board in a *spaceship*. I conceived the museum itself as a spaceship to enter the atom, which is one of the main forces of nature, along with electromagnetism and gravity.

The elements of your aerial installations seem to stick together by virtue of mutual magnetic attraction... Overcoming gravity, which keeps us anchored to the Earth, is a goal shared by many artworks...The most emblematic case is that of Gino De Dominicis, who claimed that overcoming gravity meant accessing immortality. In conclusion, how would you define this exhibition of yours?

A spatio-temporal portal.