



*May the wind be gentle
and quiet the wave
and every element
sweetly respond
to our desires*

These are the splendid words—winged with the lightest of feathers—chosen by Venezuelan artist Arturo

Herrera as the title of this, his third solo show produced by Franco Noero.

These lines by Lorenzo da Ponte were written for Mozart, for a very famous aria from *Così fan tutte*, which premiered in 1790. *Così fan tutte* is the perfect “opera buffa”, entirely built upon symmetries and balances that are fragile and solid both, as well as a wonderful mastery of genres, conventions, codes: of costume, of the theatre, of life, of the human heart in relation to itself and to others. Herrera’s exhibition is, *si parva licet*, a lesson well learned as to how one can be contemporary and yet classical at the same time.

Soave sia il vento / May the wind be gentle

It happens quite rarely, in a frenetic time such as ours, that an artist manages to do justice to the compliment that someone once used in describing the great Saul Steinberg: “like Charlie Chaplin, he is admirably equidistant from two opposing dangers: esotericism and vulgarity.” This exhibition, which finds Herrera personally and artistically at the fullness of his maturity, confronts the visitor with at least four different languages: Manipulation, Interior Design, Painting, Urban Art. I would like to link each of these languages with a particular line from the Mozart *aria*.

Tranquilla sia l’onda / and quiet the wave

It is the last thing—or perhaps the first thing—you notice about this exhibition. It has to do with a very evident act of urban art, which consists of gifting the residents of an apartment building on Corso Novara, behind the gallery, with a set of fabrics with which to replace the balcony curtains that had been hanging there, protecting the kitchens and dining rooms from prying eyes or bad weather. It is an Ariostan gesture, like an *external wave* of colors and shapes that interact with the shapes and colors of the *internal* exhibition.

Ed ogni elemento / and every element

What is striking in Herrera’s work for *Soave sia il vento* is that it utilizes many diverse media in a way that is both sophisticated and, at the same time, “natural,” restoring an idea of variety, of a multiform cosmos, faceted and prismatic. One of the rooms of the gallery was in fact re-defined thanks to a special design intervention of large industrial windows that separate the wall from the street: a photographic film was applied on each window, each depicting a different mural in Berlin, thus weaving into a single image, which is also a transparency, the urban density of an unstable relationship between the outside and the inside. The mural technique is then taken up on a wall of another room of the gallery, imbuing the entire operation with an ulterior quality – a brazenly repeated tendency toward décor. Then there are sculptures, small ironic interventions, such as giant posters of kittens, quite like a digital breach into physical space. Every element seems to be connected by the graceful volition to use the gallery as a possible geography.

Benigno risponda / sweetly respond

One of the variations that attracted me the most among this rich sequence of places and options is the *Wunderkammer* of painted books. The use of the book-as-object by contemporary artists, living here and now in the Age of Distraction, is always significant and essential. In Herrera’s case, the volumes, found in flea markets, become instruments of a furious and tender visual score: they lose any editorial meaning, ceasing to be semantic objects, choosing a kind of sacrifice within matter and color. Like those of other artists who have recently worked in this particular medium, Herrera’s books ask us: what are books? Means? Ends? Transparent bodies? Bodies trapped in sarcophagi of ink and glue? Considering the reluctance to read of so many stakeholders of the art world, you leave the room (dominated by the aforementioned cat eyes) with the doubt that the rows of Herrera’s embedded volumes could be a *memento mori* for an entire phase of human culture—a valley of pessimism, slightly lightened by that whisper of hope, which “sweetly responds.”

Ai nostri desir / to our desires

Desire is a pink wall that comes to meet us as we stop to view the most exciting and volatile of the different stations of this gentle road, this via soave—in which eight paintings, layered and objectual, on canvas and various textiles, are installed on a pavilion of pages of the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, glued one by one to form a checkerboard of black words on a shocking pink background. In Herrera's work, the life of the mind always has more than two dimensions, and is always “playing on several boards at the same time”: he cites Rauschenberg, but with an Italian flavor, having fun with one of the pop icons of our own country: a pink sports daily.

Now is the moment to turn back to Mozart, to that *terzettino* for tenor, soprano, and mezzosoprano, which is considered one of the greatest arias ever written: a sweetly horizontal musical structure that exalts words of universal understanding; a sort of augury for muted, pizzicato strings, addressed to our species, to all humans, beyond the heavy morality and rigid customs that ballast our need to escape death. “I am dead because I have no desire”, wrote René Daumal, the author of *Mount Analogue*. In the immortal writing of Mozart as well as in the beautiful, contemporary temerity of Arturo Herrera, there is the will to affirm, with every necessary medium, that being alive means, above all, to inhabit a catalog of desires.

[the chess line is by Charles Simic, “Prodigy” from his *New and Selected Poems*]

Gianluigi Ricuperati

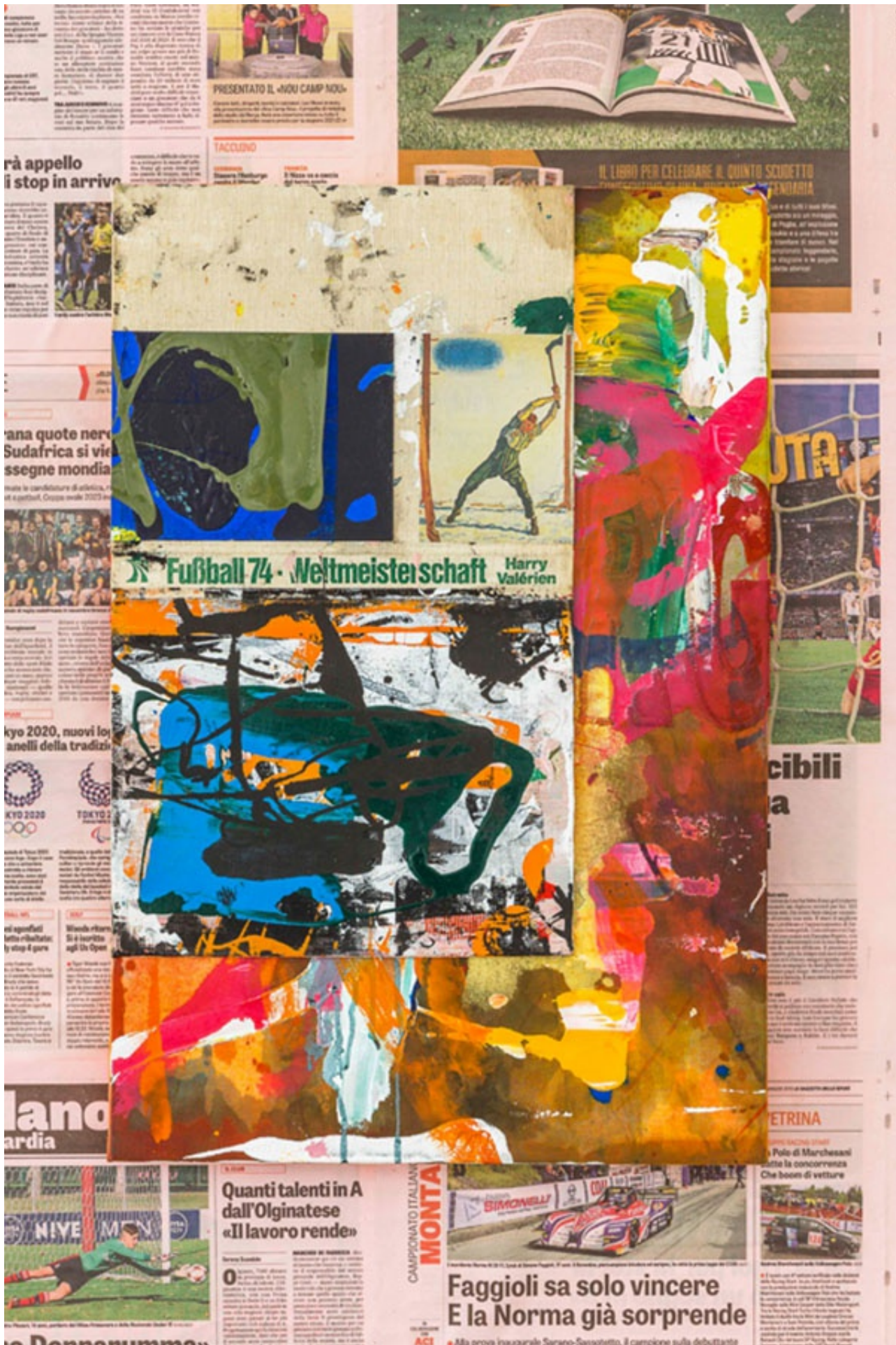
[at Galleria Franco Noero, Turin](#)
until 10 September 2016











Arturo Herrera "Soave sia il vento" installation views at Galleria Franco Noero, Turin, 2016

Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin.