

Art critic Vittorio Sgarbi presents the Collection “Predators”, whose first exhibition took Place in Milan at the Natural History Museum in 2007

Predators

Italy's first Museum of Natural History and the Aquarium of Milan have entered into dialogue with Contemporary Art, and similarly Palazzo Reale and Rotonda della Besana will soon host a major exhibition of Darwin. But already the special [MiArt 2008] event with all the museums and exhibition venues opening their doors to the public, with extended hours on April 5th, has allowed the Museum of Natural History – ever popular school trip destination – to broaden its base of visitors, and to start to reconsider Darwin through the extraordinary graphic works of José Molina. The artist's perceptivity is spot on: through his drawing, in fact, he proposes such a realistic appearance that we feel as though we are looking at photographs. Such confusion often occurs in realist and hyperrealist painting, but in this case (upon “reflection”) the illusion seems all the more insidious and deceptive because the more the anthropological (and anthropometric) subjects seem not imagined but reproduced, derived from the existing reality, the more real and believable they are.

No inventions and no tricks. In this way the craftsmanship, the technical skill, so often scoffed or considered obsolete, is put at the service of science, developing what the mind imagines but the eye cannot see: it is a privileged condition that bears witness to Art's primacy over Science and technology, art being the highest expression of technology as applied to fantasy. What else is this but Leonardo's experience? José Molina is not thinking of Leonardo, but he copies the artist's method, demonstrating Darwin's theories through his drawings and making them an ascertained reality, a photograph reproducing a reality that is possible but that was impossible to reproduce because photography did not yet exist. This imaginary documentary value attached to Molina's work brings him closer to Borges, the writer who invents prose, places, historical events that are nonexistent but absolutely believable, with a strangeness about them, though, that prevents us from

distinguishing the true from the false, exalting, with insuperable naturalness, the semblance of truth

Molina's anthropology could be a handbook integrating Borges' Atlas of imaginary places that Alberto Manguel, following modern-day explorer Gianni Guadalupi, has redefined in renewed itineraries. In this journey through exotic (and nonexistent) places, it would be possible to meet up with, as they approach from unexplored areas, Molina's men, hitherto untold.

What better place, among those possible for this perception, than the Museum of Natural History, where what is – or was – real, seems as if it were invented for a film?

Vittorio Sgarbi

Art critic and art historian