

# Theatrum Mundi

Tiziano M. Todi

From ancient Greece to Baroque literature, through Shakespeare and Pirandello, *Theatrum Mundi* is a metaphor that has crossed cultures throughout the ages: the world is our stage, where each of us enters without knowing whether we are the protagonist or merely an extra.

Antonella Cappuccio's exhibition *Theatrum Mundi* finds its stage in Rome, in the halls of the Boncompagni Ludovisi Museum of Decorative Arts, Costume and Fashion of the 19th and 20th Centuries, a place that preserves the history of Italian fashion and costume in the twentieth century. Within its collection are numerous garments by designers and ateliers that have traced the evolution of our cultural roots. Here, Cappuccio engages in a dialogue with the museum through an exploration of the very nature of clothing, approaching the theatrical costume as a living object. She creates a narrative journey in which stage costumes become absolute protagonists, detached from the bodies that once inhabited them, autonomous narrative elements capable of evoking both past and possible identities.

The artist engages with theatrical and cinematic costumes, portraying them in their plastic and poetic essence. This research began in 1997, with a series of staged costumes depicted in their most concrete and physical dimension. Over time, her far-reaching vision has prevented her from remaining tied to a single formula, allowing her to continually renew her practice. In this evolution, colours have grown more transparent, brushstrokes more gestural, and her perspective has opened towards airier works, as if she had dismantled cages, granting her subjects an eternal movement. The strength of the works on display lies not only in their aesthetic power but also in their scale: the decision to render the costumes life-size reinforces the profound reflection they embody on the body and identity. Identifying with the character in order to reveal its nuances seems to be the key to Cappuccio's painting, which enters into dialogue with these costumes and conveys their inner tension, the history held in details and folds, as if the costumes contained something beyond themselves.

The choice of subjects is deliberate: these are costumes that have marked the history of Italian and international performance, garments that made the characters they clothed iconic, protagonists of revolutions, witnesses to the aesthetic and social tensions of their era. All are creations of Sartoria Farani, a benchmark of Italian costume design. Founded in Rome in 1962, the atelier continues to play a leading role in some of the most significant moments of Italian theatre and cinema. From Visconti to Zeffirelli, from Pasolini to Ronconi, the history of costume passes through these skilled hands. Cappuccio's art thus encounters that of legendary costume designers such as Piero Tosi, Gabriella Pescucci, Maurizio Millenotti and Danilo Donati, in a fertile exchange united by a language of avant-garde and rupture, capable of blending tradition with visual experimentation.

As a young woman, Cappuccio herself worked in this very atelier, breathing its rhythms, tensions and devotion to detail. This experience resurfaces in her painting today—a tribute to the world that taught her to look with different eyes.

Each canvas holds a story, a micro-narrative of details, a portal to imaginary stages and shared memories. Cappuccio reveals what cannot be seen, giving voice to what remains silent. The works are arranged according to a theatrical, almost scenic logic, inviting visitors to step into them as though into rooms inhabited by presences that never fully reveal themselves. All the figures evoked share a state of ambivalence, of transformation, of rupture with their own time or role. They belong to literature, theatre, opera and commedia dell'arte.

Clytemnestra, Ophelia, Don Quixote, Nora, Orlando, Hester Prynne, Polly Peachum, Papageno, Harlequin, Pierrot, Casanova, the exhibition unfolds among iconic characters, which Cappuccio reimagines with absolute freedom. We also encounter *La Rainette* and *La Mante Polaire*, enigmatic presences that seem to emerge from a dream or theatrical memory. What might at first appear as an eclectic choice of subjects reveals, on closer inspection, a profound coherence. Even when the character is well known, the artist chooses to depict an unprecedented moment, a fragility, an enigma: Ophelia not in the act of drowning, but perhaps just before; Don Quixote not in battle, but in listening; Nora not yet fled, but on the verge; Orlando both is and is not, suspended in metamorphosis. The red thread uniting these figures is that of the threshold, of passage, of transformation. Cappuccio's focus is not on the decisive gesture, but on the tension that precedes it. Her works are pages from an inner diary that traverses history, fiction, legend and autobiography, distinguished by a pictorial language that unites detail and overall vision. Her brushstrokes are sometimes meticulous, sometimes sweeping, as if alternating between moments of contemplation and urgency.

And in the end, what remains of all that theatre? Of gesture, voice, the character who vanishes behind the curtain? Nothing, except the strong authorial stance of Antonella Cappuccio, who through her generous and masterful painting has turned the performative moment into a kind of psychoanalytic session, where it is not the spectator who speaks, but the costume that questions you. For this is *Theatrum Mundi*: a world that performs, with few realising they are on stage without a script.