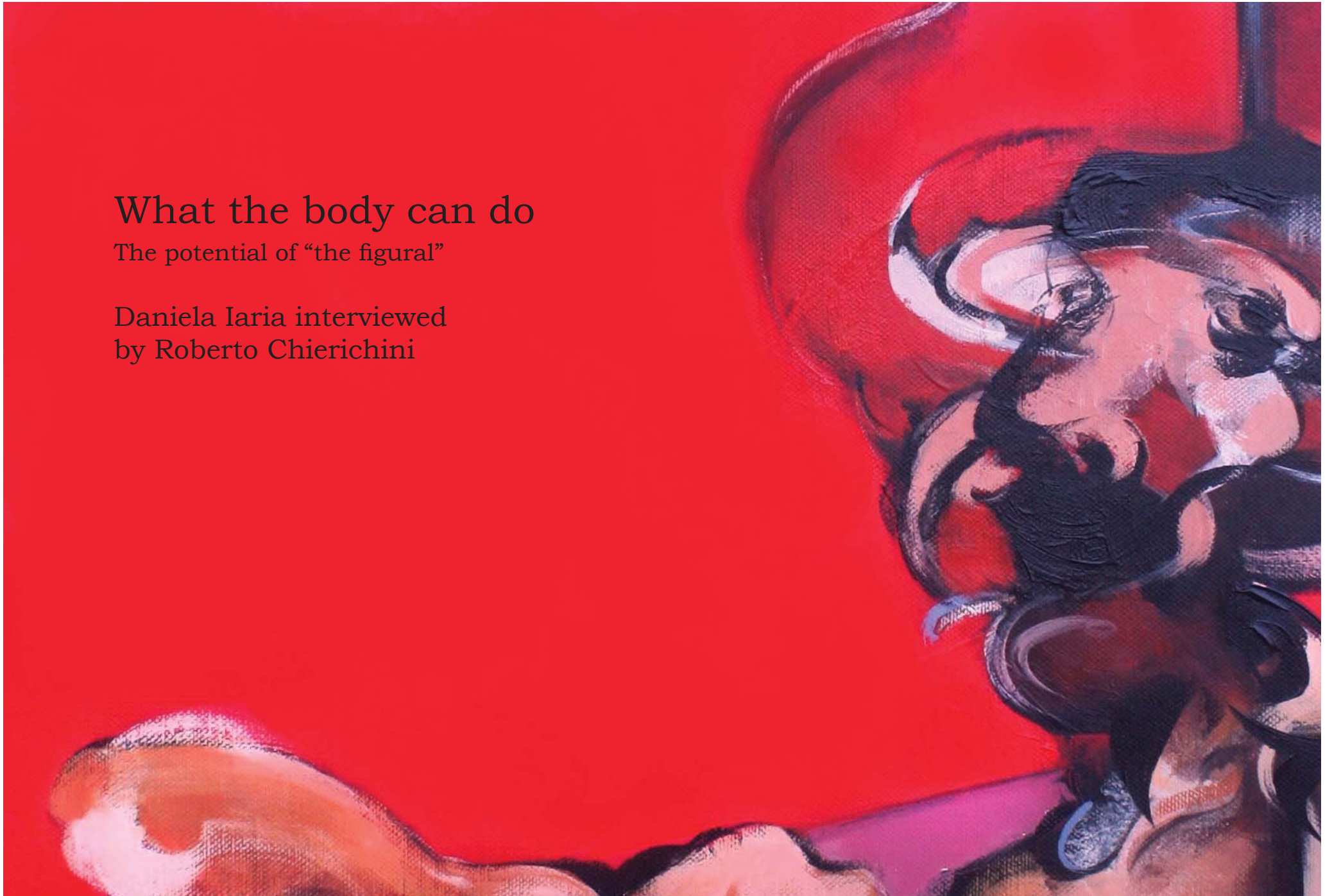


What the body can do

The potential of “the figural”

Daniela Iaria interviewed
by Roberto Chierichini



I would like to start our interview by referring to a recent editorial by Mario Perniola in the review «Agalma», where the issues concerning “materiality of works of art” and “manual skills involved in the creative process” are provocatively raised; these problems are undoubtedly present in your artistic exploration. The emphasis placed on the conceptual and authorial dimension which characterized a significant part of late 20th-century Art also generated deviations and simplifications which you try to avoid in your work by suggesting a more conscious and critical concept of Art. What do you think?

In my opinion some important expressions of Contemporary Art (from Duchamp to Kosuth) have gradually become a real hindrance for artists who wanted, and still want, to keep that genuine enthusiasm for the present, which those experiences were originally capable of expressing. Unfortunately, today the exaltation of the “author” and his or her “idea” often results in a lack of ideas and frequently only titillates our nervous system. Mine is an attempt to perform within a perceptive dimension, while being concerned for those “manual skills involved in the creative process” you mentioned. I realize that my position may easily be misinterpreted as a “return to order”.

Following Bourdieu, I believe the time has come for us to deal with the problem of an “entry fee” for artists. We must not be too cautious, nor should we feel ashamed when acknowledging

how the “triumph of ideas” (please forgive my Plato) has allowed crowds of “scientist-artists”, “philosopher-artists and “non artist-artists” to acquire space and opportunity, thanks to the laws of a patronizing and thoroughly ignorant market. Your “blameless concern” for manual skills and materiality in your work today poses crucial questions, and switches our attention to the work of art and its theoretical, practical and perceptible values, thus countering the by now sterile and tedious recreational tendency in Contemporary Art. In my opinion, your insisting on painting and exploring the possibilities offered by physical matter, the human body and sensitivity does not imply a conservative attitude; on the contrary, it allows you to go beyond the limits of a hyper-modernist exaltation of Post-Medial Art.

I would like to point out that my exploration derives from a book by Gilles Deleuze, which is important to me since it develops Jean-François Lyotard’s extraordinary intuition of the “figural”; I recognized this as a possible direction to follow and explore, though I am aware I cannot possibly stop here. Thinking that one only needs to use or re-invent new media, in order to feel part of the present-day debate, is extremely reductive. Of course, a nostalgic attitude towards a recovery of painting, whether figurative or abstract, has had its day; my figural bodies place themselves entirely outside all this. My choice of painting as a medium is not merely intended to exalt “the origins”, but rather to render material what cannot be represented, by giving shape to the shapeless.

Your works show the extremely fragile and subtle separation between human and animal dimensions. The complicated torsions and evolutions of your bodies-without-organs induce us urgently to reflect on how little we know about the potential of the body and its possible transformations. The difficulty of exploring what cannot be represented does not seem to frighten you, and is part of the indispensable courage an aware artist must have today. How can your painting effectively lend “shape” to all this?

My interest in the transformation of sensitive matter appears clear from the titles of my works: my bodies unfold, gain space and become space, they attempt to give shape to the evaporation of matter which becomes the body itself. Colour constructs the surface of the canvas through liquid layers, traces of an organic stage, matter in its energetic potential which, at the same time, becomes a palpable bass-relief of sensations. My brushwork gives life to forces within the sensitive field, which literally cause the body to explode and unfold on the surface, thus creating an alternative space, even improbable places. The body is never complete; it is dismembered, maimed, and at the same time moves within space while multiplying and dislocating. Shape is forever unresolved, constantly fighting in an impossible attempt to define itself.

The force of a figural exploration lies in its refusal of certain clichés of Modern Art. Painting as narration or as an expression of Self is obviously

distant from your work. The impossibility of form resists the temptation of clear representation of both inner and outer space, thus allowing the senses to perceive forces which would otherwise be imperceptible.

Painting possesses in itself a great capacity of persuasion and is a dangerous medium since it is capable of producing immediate fascination. In my works, painting is not pure colour expressing itself, nor is it the trace of hidden Self. I do not think Art must flatter, but rather cause uneasiness both in the author and the viewer, by rousing questions which cannot be easily answered. In works such as *Smembramento I and II* (Dismemberment I and II), *Distrazione I and II* (Distraction I and II), *Perturbamento I and II* (Perturbation I and II), my bodies are so transfigured as to be unrecognizable; they offer themselves to the eye, but at the same time they both return our gaze and involve us - they “regard” us; they cause our perturbation since we are unable to enclose them within a shape, which unleashes the force of our sensations.

Viewers are usually reduced to “useful idiots”, willing to take part in powerless transgressive games or be the expression of trivial or otherwise inner Selves. The rigour and seriousness with which you tackle your role as an artist show that such a metaphysical vicious circle can be broken. The “regarded” viewer receives an unresolved, problematic perspective both of the work of art and him or herself, thus restoring Art’s critical value.

In this particular historical period it is a duty to be critically aware of one's own role as an artist and of the viewer. It is important to provide for both the theoretical and material aspects of the work of art by creating a continuous relationship. I believe this to be the only way we can influence our times, without necessarily giving in to the art game rules in order to feel in play, since more and more often those rules follow a merely commercial logic. One can resist the apparently excessive force of such rules thanks to an outsider's awareness, and I hope my research of the "figural" properly interprets such urgency.

