



*Lea Mattarella – la Repubblica Art Critic*

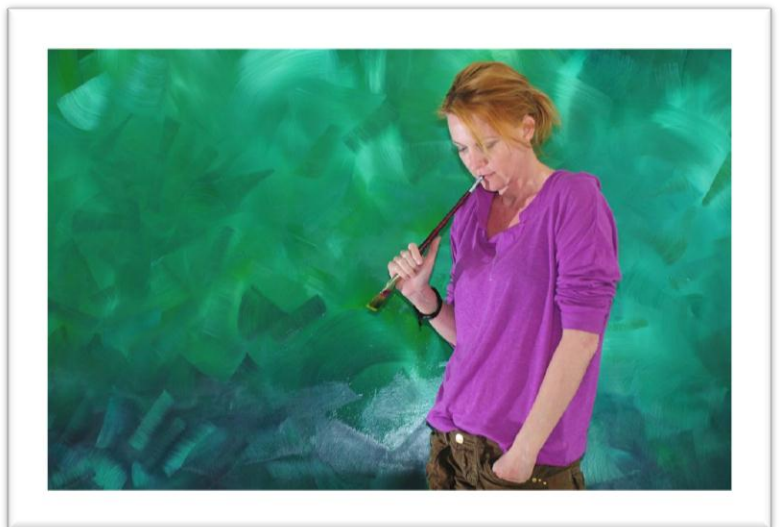
The sublime is now is the title of an article written by Barnett Newman in 1948. I was reminded of it while looking at the paintings Laurel Holloman prepared for this Venice solo show. There are two main reasons for it. First of all, Holloman's paintings follow in the great tradition of American abstract Expressionism: thence she draws her powerful and expressive brush, the large size of her works as well as their strong emotional impact. Sublime is the idea conveyed by the creation of art revealing a powerful spiritual component, using nature and the surrounding cosmos to reveal its mysteries, making the invisible energy holding them together palpable. If I were to trace back Holloman's paintings to

western art, I would start with Turner tempests and Caspar David Friederich's meditations on landscape to get to Edvard Munch's moonlit nights, Wassily Kandinsky's symbolic colour down to Rothko's bright surfaces and Barnett Newman himself. Her paintings are a step along this long and romantic journey through shapes, colours and brightness, all originating from a visible world and all seemingly wishing to reveal its hidden skeleton but perceiving at the same time the need to transcend and reach the spirit, reveal the secret fissures in a hardly discernible universe. Each has its own cosmogony. But Holloman's works do not confine themselves to capturing a given moment or object in time. They pull everything together into a broader system of inextricably connected elements. Here the work of art becomes the link between man and the intangible, the imponderable.

In the words of the Dervish Shams, the extraordinary character of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, it opens the door to the divine. Holloman's brilliant, fluid colors become the symbolic expression of ungraspable mysteries. Rothko always maintained that his outsize works were not a bid for pomp and circumstance but rather intimacy. Holloman has also chosen the monumental dimension. Like her American predecessor, her works draw the viewer in, taking him literally into the painting. They capture the gaze. Through the small window of the eye, you become part of a magnetic force that erupts from the painting and spills over into its immediate surrounds. (Which is why Holloman's works need lots of empty space around them.) The colors seem to spread beyond the canvas and over the frame into the world of the viewer.

Looking at the deep blue of *Let Me Fall*, we slip, or rather fall, into the painting, becoming that searing ray of light in *Luminosa*, are caught up in the whirling forms as they take substantive shape of *Gravity Always Wins*, or enveloped by the converging waters of *Between Two Seas* – a title that, I believe, is not a chance reference to the book, *The Junction of Two Oceans* about the similarities of Hindu and Sufi spiritual traditions, written in the 17th century by Muhammad Da ʿrā ʿŠiko-h – and which cost him his life. One cannot help think that if only the world had heeded that poet prince it would be a very different place and the scourge of wars of religion would be unknown.

Holloman is driven, as I see it, by the desire to unify, harmonize, and bring together rather than divide the various elements of the universe on the premise that as parts of the universe, they are inevitably similar. While not shying from the ill ease and melancholy that pervade our world, Holloman seeks an uplifting accord, and the beauty that springs quite simply from arousing emotions. She digs deep into the human condition in the incandescent morning of yellows and reds of *Grace*, I walk alone, And I love You, into the darkness of a troubled night in *Memory Loss*, the fury of primordial forces in *Free Falling*, and the lacerations and suffering of *Wounded*. Yet there is also another world, a sort of Garden of Eden where harmony triumphs as in *Parent/Child*. What emerges from this tangle is that the here and now, the Sublime of which Barnett Newman talks in his article, is also something that transcends time and space.



Laurel Holloman – *Free Falling*

Holloman seems imbued with Leopardi's sense of the infinite that stems from a very real sense of man's finite boundaries, like the poet's confining hedge. Matter dissolves into a mystical, wordless luminosity; shimmering images that hail from afar sweep away the encroaching gloom. In a word, Holloman's paintings take us elsewhere. And this, at the end of the day, is what art is all about. To become one with the throbbing pulse of this boundless world that is ours.