

## Anna Keen

Arnaldo Romani Brizzi

The Gallery, at the time, was in via di Monserrato. She came in, moving with decision on her muscly legs encased in dark brown tights. More than her legs, however, I noticed her immediately for the frankness of her face, framed with a mass of hair, which, if it had not been so lively, might have been called Pre-Raphaelite.



She looked at the work on show very attentively – it was a collective exhibition which drew together both figurative and abstract works, something we loved to do when we were starting out. Some of the works were by a friend of hers, a highly sensitive artist with whom she shared an apartment-studio, but I did not know this, and she did not introduce herself.

Some time passed, but not much. The artist whose work we had exhibited alongside the others invited me to visit his studio in order to show me his latest paintings. He came to answer the door, and, while he was showing me through to his studio, said to me “there’s a good English painter in there,” (for us Italians the British are always English). The painter was not there, but her paintings were. That day I left the studio carrying the memory of the English artist’s work – more than that of the painter whose work I had come to see.

I did not know the name, but one day she showed up again in the gallery. I still did not know that she was the same painter whose studio I had somewhat fraudulently visited, but I was shortly to find out. She introduced herself and showed me some of her drawings – and the penny dropped. She had been born in 1968 on the Isle of Wight. And from that point, about sixteen years ago, began a beautiful relationship.

Some time later, by now we were already our current gallery in via dei Banchi Vecchi and her hair was perhaps already short and boyish like today, she brought into the gallery among other things a painting measuring 40x30cm. While she was removing it from its wrapping paper, helped by Massimo, I was on the telephone, but I saw it immediately from a distance, and I said to myself “that’s mine”. Love at first sight, to coin a hackneyed phrase. Love for always (and then some!), because you never, ever give away a painting you love. What kind of a collector would you be? If you collect for love, or by period (and not merely as a series of business transactions, which transforms art into a stock market of quick purchases and quicker sales, following the dictates of fashion which prioritise the tastes of others, never one’s own), you may show the jewels of your passion, but not give them away unless extreme exigency demands it. To give away, without those exigencies, is the work of beggars (spiritual ones); to conserve, that of princes (*storia docet*).

Presumption aside, that little painting, so marvellous to me, depicted the bridge of the Castello Sant-Angelo, but without the Castle, seen from a distance, perhaps from the Umberto I Bridge; and the dome of Saint Peter’s towers in the background to the right, as if rising from green hills. A trio of clouds, breath or puff of divine thought, is reflected in the Tiber and Rome seems beautiful to me, as it seems now no longer. The colour and the light were and are the colour and light dreamt of and

longed for by someone who, coming from the North, imagines from a distance how Italian, and especially Roman, skies might be, before having actually encountered and reproduced them.

Only a few years ago, you realise? The work is from 1994 – now, thirteen years later, and however much Rome might have seemed already degraded at the time, it is rising (descending?) to the heights of degradation. Every morning in front of that painting, those sky-blues seen and yearned for by an “English painter”, in front of that Rome, I pine a little. I say to myself “I have lived it”. That is enough for me, and I thank my Keen Keen Keen.

*Consolations and Desolations of Rome*

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