

# The Grotesque and The Surreal in Gian Carlo Riccardi: Some Psychological Considerations

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**Abstract:** *The main purpose of this study is to analyse some graphic and pictorial works created in the 1970s by the Italian avant-garde artist Gian Carlo Riccardi (1933-2015). The main theme seems to be the grotesque representation of contemporary society and the individual victim of a homologising and apathetic humanity. This research intends to show how the artist's experiments are expropriated of an aesthetic function, to impose themselves as a traumatic and reactionary force, thus investigating the body and unconscious of the protagonists of his works, the drives, the collective and individual anxieties. Through a pictorial grammar that traces the contours of bodies with an incisive sign and vibrant colours, Gian Carlo Riccardi opens up space towards a transfiguration of reality. The artistic scenario expands its limits towards an illusory and disturbing vision, an architectural space formed by industrial relics and the detritus of a massified society that contaminates and penetrates man. The architectural landscape becomes a sort of theatre stage that opens the curtain on the human unconscious, its traumas and repressed and repressed desires. Gian Carlo Riccardi synthesises physical and moral decadence in the subjects that crowd his representations. The clowns and machine men are not a representation of the circus world, but a metaphor for contemporary society concealed behind a mask. The fairy tale and the dream of the surrealist works burst into the artist's works. Irrationality and the unconscious are constantly observed by Gian Carlo Riccardi, who through his graphic and pictorial works constantly intervenes in reality with an ironic gaze.*

**Keywords:** Psychology; Art; Gian Carlo Riccardi; Grotesque; Surreal

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The intention of this work is to offer the reader a careful psychological and introspective analysis of one of the greatest Italian avant-garde artists of the second half of the 20th century, Gian Carlo Riccardi. At the same time, it is deemed necessary to make a peculiar psychological and analytical reading of the artist's creative products, which in this case are the graphic and pictorial works he executed in the 1970s, the main subject of which is linked to the theme of a grotesque vision of contemporary society. The protagonists depicted by Riccardi within his works are often examples of how man is the victim of a standardised and homogenising humanity, often contextualised within architectural landscapes made up of industrial remains and man-made elements, thus giving a more disturbing and dystopian vision of contemporary society that remains as if concealed behind a mask. Gian Carlo Riccardi has been defined by the art critic Enrico Crispolti as a Multimedia Artist as he has been able to practise interdisciplinarity and at the same time find a link between the various artistic expressions he practises (painting, theatre, sculpture, writing, music) (Riviello 1978: 112,113).

One of the most elucidating aspects of the artist's personality is undoubtedly given by the execution and realisation of his artistic works, gradually succeeding in giving an iconographic reading of the works of art that we consider to be inevitably the product of an unimpeachable vision of the subjectivity of the observer (Tomassoni 2020: 159-163).

During this study, which encompasses many disciplines such as art, but also psychology and literature, some of Gian Carlo Riccardi's works will be analysed. The characters represented by the artist within his works as clowns or machine men, sometimes by means of incisive signs and images in vibrant colours, encapsulate the vices and weaknesses present within modern man, synthesised, through careful strokes, in their physical and moral decadence.

Our research therefore remains focused on the artist's work and not simply considered as a starting point, but rather an analysis that fundamentally focuses on the product of creation, while keeping in mind both the creator and the historical period in which his works were created (Tomassoni 2018: 176-178).

## **OBJECTIVES**

The intention of this study is to examine a relationship between art and creativity, or rather a relationship between the creative process and what led the artist to produce a certain series of works through an innovative approach to painting, while at the same time extrapolating the most relevant aspects of Riccardi.

The detailed objectives of the study are:

1. Identifying and analysing the grotesque and surreal elements and recurring symbols in the artist's works.

2. Compare and analyse the various forms of execution and expression in Riccardi's works.
3. Analysing the architectural landscape in which the protagonists of Riccardi's graphic and pictorial works of the 1970s are contextualised.
4. Identifying and analysing the creative element in Gian Carlo Riccardi's artistic production.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted and pursued thanks to a careful and peculiar study of encyclopaedias and books concerning contemporary art and contextually thanks to the analysis of texts concerning the works, history, and life of Gian Carlo Riccardi, while also examining texts on general psychology and behavioural analysis.

Our line of study in the field of psychology, art and literature is based on the Psychology of Art and Literature founded in the late 1970s by Professor Antonio Fusco. The subject deals with the study of the psychological motivations that led to the creation, that is, the interpretation of a work and the implicit and explicit symbolic elements present within the author's works (Fusco & Tomassoni 1982: 67-89).

Following the analytical path made by Professor Antonio Fusco, through an in-depth analysis aimed at understanding and interpreting an artistic work, attention is focused on the themes addressed, drawing detailed proposals for interpretation, through both a psychological and sociological representation of the historical and existential reality narrated and its characters, as well as a psychological approach to the artistic universe (Lungu 2022: 107).

Psychiatrist Silvano Arieti emphasised how the artist can access the primary process and thus privilege the world of metaphors and images and its various expressive nuances. Arieti in fact coined the expression “tertiary process” to illustrate the capacity obtained by the Ego to access and contextually manage the contents of the unconscious. The tertiary process, through particular forms and mechanisms, unites the two worlds of matter and mind and in many cases the rational with the irrational. What is primitive, rather than being rejected, the creative mind integrates it through normal logical processes into what appears to be a magical synthesis from which the new gradually emerges. The tertiary process, as opposed to the primary and secondary ones, according to Arieti, would require from the artist a particular receptive ability to the materials of the unconscious, as well as the ability to know how to manage these contents optimally (Arieti 1990: 81-83).

In the course of his studies, Sigmund Freud dealt with and was interested in various artistic works by psychoanalytically interpreting the unconscious movements of artists, asserting that art is a form of sublimation of conscious and unconscious conflicts of a sexual nature. Art, therefore, has a therapeutic function since the artist is able to “sublimate” his conflicts through his artistic work. Creativity, therefore, is understood as a defensive result that gives the artist the possibility of resolving his conflicts, in a kind of “masking” that is acceptable to himself and his surroundings (Gombrich 2001: 51-53).

Our research therefore remains focused on the artist's work, not considered simply as a starting point, but an analysis that fundamentally focuses on the product of creation, while keeping in mind both the creator and the historical period in which his works originated. Moreover, one of the goals we have set ourselves is to extrapolate certain elements that cannot be explained through an exclusively analytical “motivational key”, which can become more realistic in a broad, psychological approach. Ours is a careful research that seeks to explain, in terms of a conceptual message, the often incomprehensible contents of a work of art on a first reading. Therefore, an assiduous search for symbols, recurring elements, metaphors, and analogies that must be seen both in the context of the individual work and of the artist's entire oeuvre is fundamental. In addition, critical-interpretative analyses of the artist's personality and his works have been carried out (Fusco and Tomassoni 2008: 34-37).

The focus of our study is particularly on the hidden motivations that drive artistic behaviour and the interpretation of the deeper meanings symbolically manifested within an artistic work. The focus of our work is particularly on the personality of the artist, as well as the material of investigation and reflection that is based on induction and intuition, or is otherwise deduced directly from the artist's work, together with biographical elements of those who created them (Argenton 1996: 13,15).

## **BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND MADNESS**

The attention of psychologists has always been deeply linked to the problems of recognisability and meaning in the perception of verbal and non-verbal representations concerning living beings, objects, events, and environments. In the psychoanalytic field, the possibility of signification through opposites has been emphasised, as a consequence of masking mechanisms and the presentation of meanings in cryptic or inverted forms, which can be deciphered through the possession of certain sensitivities and keys to reading by contrast. These meanings can appear in the construction of dreams, fantasy, everyday behaviour in this case of artistic creations (Biasi and Bonaiuto 2022: 275-278).

We began this work with the idea that one of the peculiarities of art is its ability to express human emotions in a unique and powerful way. In fact, in his extended vocabulary, the artist can make use of colour, words, sounds or shapes to manifest an emotional message that can be understood, or in our case, interpreted, directly or indirectly, by the scholar. Through artistic creation, it is possible to investigate those emotions, fantasies and thoughts that might be complex to explain by simple verbal explanation. According to the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, the real goal of art and creative activity consists for the artist in achieving beauty and the ability to release the tensions and conflicts in his unconscious. An artistic process, therefore, seen as a form of aberration, i.e. an energy discharge linked to trauma, generates a transition of the psychic representations that reside in the unconscious to the sphere of awareness (Mastandrea 2021: 120-122).

A fundamental role is certainly played by the artist's personality, which in some cases can be considered as a little crazy and non-conformist, i.e. not complying with the behavioural rules of most people. In fact, the new and creativity are limited by common ideas and standardisation. Therefore, the artist needs to research and find his own ideas and his own world. Although at this point the gap between mental illness and normal function seems to be blurred, it must be borne in mind that even the irrational can be the product of a properly functioning mind, although very often judged with fear

of diversity. To the extent that madness consists of rejection of standardised thinking and escape from ambitions and desires, it can be creative. Art is also madness, that is, liberation from the rational for the exploration of one's inner chaotic world. A striking example is Erasmus of Rotterdam's *In Praise of Folly* (1511), in which he presented madness as an indispensable part of creativity (Maffei and Fiorentini 1995: 103-105).

In our study, it is important to understand how the factor of psychological subjectivity is always and in any case present in the study and reading of the artist's pictorial and graphic works. Artistic creation represents a mode of elaboration of profound content, in a pathway that each artist tackles through his or her own creative energies (Giannini, Marzi and Viggiano 2011: 117-120).

## BIOGRAPHY

The artist Gian Carlo Riccardi was born in Frosinone on 21 October 1933. He graduated in 1961 in Scenography at the Academy of Fine Arts in via Ripetta in Rome and later in Theatre and Film Direction at the Experimental Centre in Rome. Between the 1960s and 1970s he worked for RAI as assistant-collaborator to set designer Cesarini Da Senigallia and at the same time as caricaturist for satirical magazines such as *Il Travaso delle Idee*, *Simplicissimus*, *La Tribuna Illustrata* and *Il Bertoldo*. An author of texts and audio-visuals, Riccardi was part of the historical Roman theatre avant-garde, collaborating with Memè Perlini, Carmelo Bene, Pino Pascali, Giuliano Vasilicò, Mario Ricci, Nino De Tollis, Filippo Torriero and others in the realisation of avant-garde shows and festivals throughout Italy. Between the 1970s and 1980s, he frequented artists and writers such as Alberto Moravia, Cesare Zavattini, Libero De Libero, Umberto Mastroianni and Mario Lunetta. A considerable part of Gian Carlo Riccardi's artistic production is characterised by drawings (Riccardi, 2001: 78,79). Much of his work is oriented towards the abstract using collage and the ready-made. In recent years, Riccardi recaptures the time of childhood through the creation of works related to childhood and childhood. From the 1980s onwards, Riccardi created so-called "Rooms", i.e. installations, which he executed through walls coloured according to abstract motifs, fragments of wood and everyday objects. His works have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The Italian artist was also the author of narrative texts and screenplays. Gian Carlo Riccardi died in his hometown in 2015. Critics and writers such as Angelo Maria Ripellino, Elio Pagliarani, Nello Ponente, Vito Riviello, Giovanni Gigliozzi, Filiberto Menna, Cinzia Baldazzi and André Pieyre de Mandiargues have written about him (Riccardi 2013: 11). Through his ceaseless industriousness and continuous experimentation, he is considered one of the most sensitive artists of the contemporary era (Lunetta 2007: 4, 5).

## CLOWN AND TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGERY: A SURREAL VISION

Caricature was to be a fundamental starting point for the artist who "arrived at a production of humorous painting, never conceived as coarse laughter, but as a means of expressing absurdity, anachronism and paradox" (Riccardi 1981: 83-85). The theme of the grotesque emerges particularly in the paintings and drawings executed in the 1970s. An illusory and disturbing world is represented in these works, where clowns crowd around. It is not the world of the circus that the artist wants to depict, but the surrounding world, which forces man to wear a mask and the costume of a clown. In Figure 1, a multicoloured landscape made up of naturalistic and architectural elements opens up in the

background, encompassing a stage of hieratic figures disguised as clowns who, with an empty, impassive gaze, watch life flowing around them.



**Figure 1. Gian Carlo Riccardi, Rapporto n.1, 1971, Ink on paper, 60 x 80 cm, Frosinone, Private collection (reproduced with permission of the Riccardi family).**

In Riccardi's paintings, satire, the grotesque, the surreal and fairytale worlds burst forth. The artist, using anonymous characters presented in misleading contexts, operates a violent critique of contemporary society, characterised by a strong moral, political and social condemnation always mediated by a poetic language. "Man must live and not let himself live".

These characters present sad and painful expressions: the clown-woman who dreams of a serene motherhood she may never have, the clown-children initiated by adults into circus life and difficult acrobatics. Poignant contrasts between a world that wants to amuse its neighbour and a neighbour who cannot see the problems hidden behind those colourful, shiny clothes. A painful realisation of a life that tends towards opulence and amusement and does not bother to look behind the facade; that wears itself out in laughter and song and, in the end, has nothing but sand in its hands (Zani 1971: 11, 12).

Riccardi's clowns are each indifferent, absent to the other, defeated by history, they replicate their gestures ad infinitum. Despite the gesture, despite the tension, each is for himself, each is equal to the other (Cardamone 1971: 16). Play becomes the extreme desperate choice of life: man becomes a puppet, clowns play in order to live, they play for themselves, they play because they live. Riccardi's clowns are not melancholic puppets, they are scary because they emanate from our time. "They accuse, through their play of accusation, all those who have forced them to play in order to continue living and not to kill themselves immediately" (Zani 1971: 11, 12).

The human unconscious and contemporary society are constantly observed by Gian Carlo Riccardi, who intervenes in reality with an ironic gaze through his paintings. A disturbing and grotesque reality is revealed in its impostures and the emptiness of daily routine and inhuman humanity.

Also, in the 1970s Riccardi executed numerous works using Indian ink that were exhibited for the first time in 1977 at the Galleria Cecchini in Perugia (Coletti 1977: 21). These works are characterised by black and white characters that stand out against the coloured background.

In Figure 2, the man in the foreground attempts to have a sexual approach, inside a bathtub, with a woman. The latter invites the observer to look beyond the open wall in the background, where a crowd turns its back on a hanged man shrouded in darkness. The architectural structure articulated on the scene is characterised by a two-dimensionality through the use of ink, the presence of a thin, rapid stroke and a strong chiaroscuro contrast. The backdrop outlines a theatrical backdrop that is essentially geometric, through the scansion of elements modulated in linear, rectangular and circular directions on the floor and wall.



**Figure 2.** Gian Carlo Riccardi, *Untitled*, 1972-1976 ca., Ink on paper, 40 x 50 cm, Frosinone, Private collection (reproduced with permission of the Riccardi family).

Overbearingly emerging in these works are dreamlike and mythological themes brought up to date through the use of a sharp sign and uniform background. Scenes connected to dreams and mysticism enhanced by a primitive graphic plasticity, hieratic and simplified forms of esoteric matrix. *Femme fatale*, pagan idols, and icons of perversion, all taken to a level of paroxysmal and hallucinated metamorphic deformation full of sexual obsession. These are illustrations made with a pungent and penetrating stroke, transgressive images between the grotesque, the perverse and the burlesque satire. In Riccardi's drawings, the fable and dream of the Surrealist works burst forth, the ability to stimulate irrationality and the unconscious. Figures are placed in a misleading context by playing on processes such as enlargement and incongruous association. The dreamlike character, often with the possibility of affecting the senses and the erotic perception of forms, constitutes one of the underlying means. The sinuous linearism is characteristic of some of the drawings of these years (Poli 2007: 39-49), moreover, in numerous works Riccardi experiments with a different texture through the use of wax that is "scratched" from the surface and on which the artist intervenes by drawing in ink.

The evocations of memories, the shivers of unquenched anxieties, the swing and play of the past return in Gian Carlo Riccardi's graphics. A paper castle of illusions, in which the ambiguous and unreal element is mixed with a few episodes scattered here and there on the daily occurrence of reality. [...] Riccardi returns to ancient positions, a sort of recovery, a bath of humility, reinvention and discovery of pure drawing to express the effervescence of the state of mind. His become hypotheses formulated on the rhythm of the dream, where, in Pirandellian fashion, the contours and boundaries between the world of the imagination and the everyday world are blurred. But however evasive this barrier may be, the melancholic awareness of a primordial state, of uncorrupted customs, emerges undisguised. Hope and fantasy, then, unite in a bitter and light dance, emphasising the luministic and intuitive counterpoints, the glimpses of memory, the assonances, the shattering of ideals. The surrealism that might come to mind, the hooks with oneiric symbolism exist only as a starting point, since the unfolding of the author's programme and mental idearium is ultimately free to sweep across other horizons. As a result, the composite is enlivened by the reversal of perspectives, by shots no longer held to canons of chemical equilibrium, by the modulated existence of man's solitude and the estrangement of being (Coletti 1977: 21).

The evolution towards a pictorial abstractionism and the use of composite and heterogeneous materials allows Riccardi to investigate in depth the individual and collective unconscious of contemporary society. In the cuts, in the burns, in the violent colour contrasts and in the presence of plastics and metals, it is possible to identify an iconography of suffering, a crisis that is, however, the side of expectation, of improvement, of resurrection.

It is possible to discern most of the myths of our society, which, with its highly technological nature, perverts the true substance of humanity. These paintings testify to the ethical, almost pathological basis of this society, in which the "loneliness" of man prevails. His technological material is almost primitive and simple, in his work one feels the vibration of a man in pain, obsessed with sex, overwhelmed by his anxieties. Riccardi is not only the denouncer of the dynamic of contemporary man, but he really feels it, because he is truly distressed by the ups and downs of our lives (Bonaviri 1979: 273, 274).

The eroticism underlying Riccardi's formal research emerges forcefully within his works through an innovative artistic language that uses different techniques and materials such as drawing, ink, collage and photomontage as a means of penetrating reality and investigating the female dimension. In Figure 3, the woman's body becomes a kind of technological labyrinth, the image and product of industrialised society. A creative machine, but one that at the same time pursues the ephemeral myth of beauty as an end in itself, subjugated and demonised by the perverse mechanisms of a consumerist logic. A woman-machine whose technological gears interpenetrate and mingle with the artificial landscape of the background, inhabited by relics of industrial society.



Figure 3. Gian Carlo Riccardi, *Proposta e Stop*, 1974, Ink on paper, 40 x 70 cm, Frosinone, Private collection (reproduced with permission of the Riccardi family).

## MAN BETWEEN GROTESQUE FAIRY TALE AND DECADENT CORPOREITY

Riccardi practices, with blind and absolute faith, an art form somewhere between painting and theatre (Tomassoni, Spilabotte and Coccarelli 2022: 1748-1764). An individual imagery populates Riccardi's papers, a symbolic and surreal imagery that represents a call to “memory”, a return to the world of childhood and innocence. In Gian Carlo Riccardi's artistic experience, it is possible to speak of a cyclic

or spiral evolution. “Gian Carlo Riccardi uses sign and colour in the same way as in a theatre scene. Inspiration leads him to dialogue with the self and with others, to express himself in a plastic and allusive key, to model the background of things and objects with a unified clarity, almost in an attempt to project the whole beyond and beyond the curtain of reality and appearances” (Castellani 2002: 152).

The glossy “merchandise” explodes into a grotesque and surreal “fabula” made up of burning houses or black and white smoke, beasts, men, boats and burning houses. Underlying his irony is a primary concept of knowing how to read life and humanity: a profound knowledge of man and his unconscious.

These testify to Riccardi's surrealist and metaphysical vision in the realisation of his works, which are characterised by dreamlike, fantastic, and grotesque themes, improbable juxtapositions and disturbing provocations, linked to memory and remembrance. Riccardi's pictorial compositions disturb the viewer by a common obsessive matrix that recalls periods of the historical avant-gardes. The impasto and spreading of colour are magmatic and at the same time ductile, formed by disjointed and uneven backgrounds. Images drown and reappear on the surface as if evoked by pagan or primitive rituals (Castellani 2002: 151).

In fact, the characters depicted by Riccardi hardly have any points of contact with each other, they all fluctuate as if jealous of preserving their own autonomy or independence. Figures drawn by untainted hands and minds, they unfold in an alternative world in which actions take place against the backdrop of improbable flat horizons, densely spotted with orange dots on a cobalt background, or yellow ochre on a red background that give the space in which the scene takes place, a vibration otherwise absent (Facci 2007: 14). Riccardi introduces characters constricted within the physical limit of the painting onto the scene, which is always very small, as if to provide the work's viewer with all the ingredients of a fable, the threads of which have nevertheless been lost, and just as in his theatre the spectator was invited to participate in the event, so in the paintings the viewer is imagined to be able to remix the ingredients of the painting at will and thus actively contribute to recreating a new composition, a different order in the scene set by the artist, knowing full well that more than the coherence of the story, it is important to provide the listener with the possibility of glimpsing other subterranean and personal meanings in what we say.

The artist looks at the world as if it were a mirror, discerning sincerity and beauty in it with quiet irony. Beauty of primordial forms conceived and seen through the naive eyes of a mature man. His is a painting-poetry interwoven with subtle colour games that recall the world of childhood, the innocence of adolescence, when everything seems to be suspended in a space-time dimension far removed from the struggles and anxieties of everyday reality. A return to childhood mixed with nostalgia that recalls stories and places that have the flavour of a fabulous world. Every one of his paintings, every one of his scenes, is a fragment of a continuous discourse, of a tale that starts from the pain of lack and projects itself towards the joy of fulfilment, in the return to a fulfilling situation already experienced and apparently lost (Zani 2006: 19). Figure 4 is characterised by flat faces, a dancing figure whose anatomical conformation suspends all laws of reality, abnormal dogs and a house burning and shedding a cloud of grey smoke. The work is characterised by a cursive and deliberately childish drafting, by broad fields of flat, incandescent, and anti-naturalistic colour, a dense and mellow chromatic material fixed on the canvas with rapidity, far from any idea of planning, which is abolished by exalting the

aesthetic potential of spontaneous, primitive, childish language, as if it were a drawing, or a child's doodle. At times, coloured dots frame the paintings, emphasising the two-dimensionality of the work. All architecture is reduced to the essential, and the background becomes a large field of flat pigment, representing an illusory world devoid of logic, pervaded by a motionless, rarefied, and silent atmosphere and a mysterious sense of expectation, a world in which hierarchical laws are subverted and where anarchy dominates (Poli 2007: 226-229).



**Figure 4.** Gian Carlo Riccardi, *Untitled*, 2006, Acrylic on paper, 40 x 54 cm, Frosinone, Private collection (reproduced with permission of the Riccardi family).

Riccardi's graphic representations are populated by a decadent humanity, a “bestiary” of men and women with a deformed and grotesque corporeity that becomes meat for the slaughter, parading in a macabre dance in the ink drawings published in 2011 in a booklet called *Slaughterhouse* (Riccardi 2011: 1). Riccardi extracts the hardness, the imperfections, the most characteristic aspects of those bodies, which were concealed behind a mask with clothing. In this way he fixes on paper a large sampling of men and women, who make up the varied but naked humanity, as in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Gian Carlo Riccardi, Mattatoio, 2011, Ink on paper, 21 x 30 cm, Frosinone, Private collection (reproduced with permission of the Riccardi family).**

Riccardi turns his gaze towards contemporary reality, making a harsh criticism of a corrosive society locked in a dull, black stream of incommunicability, but within which Riccardi sees a glimmer of hope. The drama of the technological process, the quiet elegy of a serene moment, the yearning impulse of sex, the mutual oppression of men, frenzied memories, social homologation, illusion, hope, the rejection of the masses, constitute the concepts and sensations that Riccardi translates into his works with a new language. These themes are figuratively opposed through the recovery of elements that recall the world of fairytales and poetry, together with junk and serial products, emblems of good and evil.

The author has made memory and introspection the nodal centre of his research, embarking on a radical and unprejudiced exploration of the territories of the unconscious, figuring fears, desires, associations, transgressions, dreams, and visions. Riccardi questions the universal themes of human existence, such as the incommunicability between people, the perception of death and illness, loneliness, and the crisis of man within a society full of contradictions in which he lives (Tomassoni, Coccarelli and Spilabotte 2023: 165-176).

A poetic attitude underlies Riccardi's vision, which identifies the transformations of society and the distortions of mankind by representing the world of childhood, with its puppets and puppet characters,

and the topicality of a world made up of masks, clowns and craving for objects that he subtracts from the imagination, but which, at the same time, the artist gives to the public in expectation of redemption.

## CONCLUSIONS

The line of study and methodology we started from elaborated by Professor Antonio Fusco of the Psychology of Art and Literature allowed us to give a critical-interpretative reading of Riccardi. This has given us the opportunity to delve into the artist's unconscious, delineating and depicting the themes, symbols and meanings concealed in his works, while at the same time getting to know his biography and the social and cultural context in which he lived and worked.

Studies have shown that in Riccardi's graphic and pictorial works, certain themes constantly recur that are linked to a grotesque and surreal representation of reality and at the same time connected to the memory of a distant past, to the memory of the world of childhood that project Riccardi's imagination and artistic practice into an imaginary world that is distant and detached from its surroundings. This is why he addresses a harsh criticism of contemporary man, massified and overwhelmed by speed and homologising stereotypes.

Riccardi represents the mask, the clown to depict the flattening and monotony that invests human life and everyday life. He draws women converted into objects of consumption, women-machines no longer capable of living, but who have sacrificed their flesh and their being in futile plastic casings and metal contraptions. All this pours into the background of his works, architectural structures populated by geometric shapes and industrial wrecks.

Riccardi's surrealism retraces the traces of childhood through a childlike painting where flamboyant individuals and animals emerge from the artist's repressed and unconscious dreams and imagination where architectural space is reduced to essential lines and broad flat colour fields enhancing the two-dimensionality of the landscape and the deliberately childlike graphic line.

Finally, he removes the mask from the corrupt and apathetic society that surrounds him to reveal the deformities and grotesque features of individuals who, naked, without any social dress, are all the same as the others. Despite everything, what characterises Riccardi's works is his ability to glimpse a glimmer of hope, a possibility of redemption for the society that he himself repeatedly reflects negatively in his works. In conclusion, what emerges in Gian Carlo Riccardi's works is always a kind of happy ending. Reality, while imposing itself with extreme brutality in his works, takes on new and colourful forms connected to the artist's overflowing imagination.

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