

“LEGENDS OF THE DOLOMITES”

The "Cröp Sclauris" or "Pale Mountains" is the other (the true?) name of the Dolomites. The name derives from the fact that in times long past, they were transformed from mountains of dark and gloomy color as they were, into mountains of lunar color, capable of taking on the most intense shades of pink and orange in the light of dawn and sunset. But how were these incredible wonders possible? The answer must be sought in the enormous heritage of myths and legends that the population of the Dolomite valleys has passed down orally, from generation to generation: a heritage, now candidate for UNESCO recognition, essential for understanding the true soul of this particular environment that surrounds us but, as all great stories do, also a bit of our own.

The cycle "At the borders of heaven, legends of the Dolomites" by artist **Luisa Rota Sperti** comprises about 70 works, 13 of which, exhibited at the Castle in this exhibition, were recently donated to the Istitut Cultural Ladin Cesa de Jan. For those who wish to delve deeper into the theme, in this "handbook" you will find the synthesis and origin of the chosen legends.

A suggestion: the drawings should be looked at very closely, "with your nose on the glass" as the author herself suggests. Only in this way will you be able to appreciate all the details hidden in Luisa's very dense pastel strokes!

ENTRANCE HALL

1) THE COUNTESS OF ANDRAZ (from *"The Sorcerers of the Delamis Wood"* in K.F. Wolff, *"The Pale Mountains"*)

Unhappy is the fate of many of the female protagonists of Dolomite legends (often true tragedies), and that of the Countess of Andraz is no exception. Victim of her husband's mad jealousy, tormented by a wicked nurse who would become none other than the Stria (witch) of Sas de Stria, a mountain just steps from the castle, kidnapped by two sorcerers and transformed into a horse without ever being able to quench her thirst... Her destiny will only be redeemed when her husband realizes his error and sets out in search of the kidnapping sorcerers to find her again. After riding to Alleghe and then to Val di Zoldo, the count reaches the *Ciada Delamis*, a distant wood that Wolff identifies with the Cansiglio forest, where, having overcome various trials also thanks to the help of the countess/horse, he will finally manage to escape and free his wife to return to Andraz.

Welcome to her castle!

CHEESE CELLAR

2) TRIBUTE TO CORTINA

(from "The Crystal" in Severino Casara, "Under the Sun of the Dolomites")

3) THE NYMPH PAVOLA *(from "The Legend of Valparola" in Dino Dibona, "Unusual Guide to the Dolomites")*

These two paintings take inspiration not from K.F. Wolff's collections but from the reworkings of two celebrated authors connected in various ways to the Ampezzo territory.

Severino Casara (1903-1978), originally from Vicenza, was a great and passionate mountaineer but also a writer, director, and photographer. Climbing companion of Emilio Comici and Walter Cavallini, he opened about 130 new routes in the Dolomites. He is buried in San Vito di Braies, at the foot of his beloved peaks. The protagonist of the painting is the Queen of the Dolomites, Cortina.

Dino Dibona (1936-2014) was born in Cortina d'Ampezzo, in the heart of the Dolomites, and was a profound connoisseur and popularizer of the mountain. Graduate in Forest Sciences, he was a university professor and writer, touching, with the over 50 works he authored, various literary genres, from scientific treatises to children's fairy tales, from poetry to the lyrics of some songs. In Livinallongo he is remembered with affection by the many children, now adults, who were able to enjoy his knowledge of the natural environment through numerous school projects. The protagonist of the painting is the Nymph Pavola, who gave origin to Lake Valparola.

4) THE PELNA *(from "The Fatal Song" in K.F. Wolff, "The Soul of the Dolomites")*

"A Pelna up in the mountains sings her last song: you will see your springs flow, but forever I depart". Through her last song, the Pelna, nymph of the waters (*gana*) transformed into a green dove by a very rare spell, expresses her destiny before death. The Pelna of the story thus makes her last sacrifice, to restore to men the precious and healing fountains of Valiate, which had made rich the father of her dear friend and lover Londo and without which his family would have fallen into ruin. Her gesture of love and extreme kindness contrasts greatly with the greed and ingratitude of adults but also with the cunning of the *Salván*. The latter had indeed originally given Londo's father the precious water resource, but basically only to obtain in exchange a precious red silk dress. Perhaps having the most unhappy fate of all this time is precisely Londo who, neglected since childhood by his father too absorbed in business, finds no other consolation than in playing the zither. At the loss of his beloved Pelna, he dies consumed by grief.

5) THE FILADRESSA

(from "The Painter of Mount Faloria" in K.F. Wolff, "The Pale Mountains")

In ancient times, a mysterious and solitary maiden appeared near a mountain hut in the valley carved by Rio Bigontina, on the slopes of Mount Faloria. She possessed an art then unknown to the Ampezzans: she could paint perfect portraits on wooden tablets, which amazed all the inhabitants of the nearby village of Miljera. The painter was well received in the village and became engaged to Verlòj of Fernamusino, but when she discovered that her beloved had betrayed her by marrying another for money, she gave in to the desire for revenge. Thanks to the witch Svalazza she obtained magical powers and, transformed into a vulture, began day after day to kidnap the children of the villages, to transform them into little birds and to trap them on the mountain in filigree cages. The spell was broken thanks to the love of young Ghedìn and from their descendants were born numerous painters and artists, including the famous Tiziano Vecellio.

SECRET CHAMBER

6) TANNA AND MARCORA

(from "The Queen of the Crodères" in K.F. Wolff, "The Pale Mountains")

Tanna, queen of the Crodères of the Marmaròle, possessed a human heart instead of stone like her subjects. For love and pity of men she forbade the rocks to fall and the avalanches to roll, transforming the inaccessible mountains into green pastures, which angered the Crodères. The climax was reached when Tanna married the (human) count of Aquileia, who however left abandoning his wife and son Salvanèl and leaving them to live far from everyone, on the icy crests of the Marmarole. Once grown up, Salvanèl set out in search of his father and met Marcora: the two fall in love and decide to return to Tanna, on the mountain. Here, where the queen no longer possesses the crown and therefore cannot govern the avalanches, Salvanèl succumbs under the snow. Tanna and Marcora thus spend their time, in solitude and persecuted both by the Crodères and by men because they are believed to be witches. Once Salvanèl's body is found, Marcora dies of grief and Tanna, newly recognized as queen, returns to live on the mountain: after all the misfortunes experienced, she has become icy and insensitive like all the Crodères.

7) THE GIRLS OF THE MOON'S ARCH

(from *"The Knight of the Colchicums"* in K.F. Wolff, *"The Last Flowers of the Dolomites"*)

The Queen of the Bedoyères, desiring a male heir, asks for help from the sorceress Ergobanda. All the female daughters of the queen and of the women of the kingdom (who for some reason gave birth only to girls) are thus given to Samblana, the lady of winter, after crossing a magical, lunar rainbow, and being transformed into colchicums (*mirándole* in Ladin). In exchange, the queen is given a child, with a crown of colchicums on his head: the male son so desired. Thus begins the intricate story that sees the birth, shortly after, of a legitimate heir and another princess, who this time is not given to Samblana but entrusted to a company of wanderers. Twenty years later, love affairs between brother and sister unaware of being relatives lead to a series of tragic deaths, including that of the elderly queen of the Bedoyères. Today no one knows where her castle stood.

KITCHEN

8) GARDIS

(from *"The Enchanted Foundations"* in K.F. Wolff, *"The Soul of the Dolomites"*)

The destiny of those who build their fortune on evil and deception cannot be propitious, as demonstrated by the story of the castle of Pincana, near Mount Balest, built by a knight who had stained himself with numerous crimes and who wanted, through the fortification, to dominate the Via dei Pagani to rob travelers. To make the castle impregnable, built on rather friable rock and close to the precipice of Pincana, the knight resorts to a witch's spell. Along with the witchcraft comes a curse: all the women who live in the castle fall ill and die prematurely. Moreover, on every full moon night, heartrending screams and indecipherable words are heard coming from the foundations: it is a prophecy, which will be fulfilled through the death of Gardis, brave granddaughter of the castellan who, in attempting to free the numerous prisoners trapped by her grandfather, dies. *"Under the foundations a virgin is walled up, and if another virgin dies in the castle, the castle must fall"*. At the bottom of the precipice thus lies the ancient castle, together with its evil lord.

9) LADY CHENINA

(from *"The Children of the Sun"* in K.F. Wolff, *"The Pale Mountains"*)

Elba, daughter of the Sun, lived in the mysterious White Lake near Canazei. She fell in love with the poor shepherd Bolpin, a foundling raised with foxes, and married him despite the threats of the king of Soracrepia. The jealous king killed Bolpin and imprisoned Elba with little Cian Bolpin. Forced to marry the king to save her son, Elba died after giving birth to Soreghina.

Once grown up, Soreghina married the famous warrior Ey de Net, but when he confessed to still loving another (none other than Princess Dolasilla), she died struck by the Silent Midnight, as her mother had predicted.

Cian Bolpin, grown up poor but strong and courageous, married the mysterious Lady Chenina, the most beautiful woman in the world, who lived in an ice palace on Sass de Saléi. Because of strange wonders, Cian Bolpin discovers he is victim of a spell: living with Lady Chenina meant sleeping for 9 months a year and living only in summer. Thus, seized by nostalgia, he returns to the village to find the people and places he knew. The return to Lady Chenina is not easy: the road to the palace is not visible and even the magic cloak of the Tarluières is of no help. In the end Cian Bolpin succeeds in his intent, and will live happily with Lady Chenina, uniting the solar lineage to that of the snows.

10) GANA

(from "The Val de les Salieres" in K.F. Wolff, "The Last Flowers of the Dolomites")

Fickle creatures, the Gane, to be respected and possibly not angered, if you want their help. The lesson is taught to us by a shepherd who arrived in Val Gardena in search of pastures. A joker had indicated to him as a "wonderful pasture" a completely arid area at the foot of the Odle, where once he arrived he was about to lose his livestock, too worn out by fatigue and thirst. A young Gana then led him to a door barred with bronze beams which, once opened, made the much-sought water gush forth. In a short time the stony desert was transformed into a fertile pasture and the shepherd built a mountain hut where he could live and work the milk helped by the Gana. In autumn, the man went down to the valley and when he returned he had married a woman from the village: the Gana cursed him, his wife and the mountain hut and gradually the lively stream dried up completely. The farmer was forced to leave and the place returned to being an immense scree that still descends to the valley today.

STUA (MAIN ROOM)

11) THE WEDDING OF MERISANA

(from "The Wedding of Merisana" in K.F. Wolff, "The Pale Mountains")

Merisana, queen of the water nymphs of the Stream of the Virgins, in Val Costeana, was tormented by the thought of the infinite suffering creatures on earth. The King of the Rays, sovereign of a kingdom behind the Antelao, fell in love with her after glimpsing her in the waters. When he asked for her hand, Merisana set a condition: before the wedding, all creatures had to be happy. After long negotiations, the condition was reduced to just one hour: at noon on the wedding day, every suffering would be alleviated. The two spouses were given so many flowers that two dwarfs of the Amarida wood decided to use them to create a new plant: the first larch. The tree, however, was withering and so Merisana sacrificed her bridal veil to give it life. On the side of the valley that looks at Croda da Lago was thus born the first larch forest, trees that still today make us breathe the same serenity experienced during Merisana's wedding.

CAPTAIN'S ROOM

12) LADY DINDIA

(from "Lady Dindia" in K.F. Wolff, "The Pale Mountains")

A young damsel of the castle on the Gadra, between Badia and Livinallongo, possessed a green mirror capable of revealing hidden thoughts. One day a minstrel arrived at the castle who, among many lying suitors, proved to be sincere. To him the princess asked to bring her as a gift the precious Rayeta, the most beautiful and powerful magic stone in the world. Arriving in the Lamarida wood he encountered Lady Dindia, beautiful and prisoner in a castle guarded by a dragon, who told of having once possessed the green mirror and of having become its victim: desiring to always know the truth had not only consumed her soul, but had led her in a moment of jealousy to set fire to her castle and lead to the death of her husband Zan de Rame. Later she had been imprisoned by a Wizard, who had given her the Rayeta to convince her to marry him. She told the young minstrel that by killing the dragon he could free her and at the same time take the Rayeta for his promised bride, but the enterprise did not prove simple: the boy died killed by the dragon and Lady Dindia, who had deceived him, claimed him forever for herself.

13) ILDA THE LAST DELIBANA

(from "The Last Delibana" in K.F. Wolff, "White Rhododendrons of the Dolomites")

The ancient inhabitants of Colle S. Lucia and Livinallongo were miners who extracted iron from the black Mount Pore. It sometimes happened that the metalliferous vein would be exhausted, bringing misery and despair to the population. The only remedy was then the sacrifice of a Delibana, a young woman who had to remain for seven years in the depths of the mine in order to make the miners' work propitious; once the term expired, the Delibana could be ransomed or continue to remain in the bowels of the earth for another seven years. Very important was the ritual: the Delibana had to wear a precious dress created with very particular iron flowers, collected during the night of St. John.

The last Delibana was precisely the daughter of the captain of the castle of Andraz, who would have instead wanted to interrupt the cruel custom: his attempts were of no use because his daughter, moved to compassion for the desperate miners and their families, decided to sacrifice herself without second thoughts. At her death, the mines were actually closed, the castle abandoned, and the knowledge of iron flowers was lost forever.