Carving Clouds

Elysia Byrd, Riccardo Morandi

Text by Beatrice Corda

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In *Kamakura-bori*, a traditional Japanese technique in which wood is carved and then lacquered, a form takes shape through a succession of incisions. Picture the blade sinking in, shifting slightly and cutting again. Side by side, the marks trace soft scrolls that seem almost to move. *Carving Clouds* starts from this image. A cloud appears to have an outline, yet up close it dissolves into a suspended matter in constant transformation. To carve it would mean fixing its form, and the only way to try is by repeating the gesture. Elysia Byrd works with light materials. She dyes silk and muslin with colours drawn from plants, immersing the fabric again and again. The dye seeps into the fibres and spreads, leaving uncertain edges that open into rosy haloes, like the sky at dawn. Then Byrd returns to the surface with a needle and, stitch by stitch, sews on stones, shells and fragments of ceramic, small weights that hold down the lightness of the cloth. Riccardo Morandi, by contrast, works with the density of oil, on canvases ranging from 24×18 centimetres to formats of nearly two metres. Here colour settles on the surface and builds up. Morandi saturates it with short, tight brushstrokes, layered until heads studded with eyes and teeth surface from the thicket, creatures that seem to have fled the margins of an illuminated manuscript, where in the late Middle Ages hybrids and monsters crowded together, the *drôleries*. They are unstable figures, assembling and dissolving as you look at them. Both build the image slowly, by accumulation, returning to the same gesture as the blade returns to the wood. And they ask a similar patience of us, the patience of someone who stops to look at the sky. Faced with a cloud, perception searches for familiar shapes and sometimes recognises a face. This is pareidolia, a recognition that can be triggered within the first fractions of a second and does not last, because by then the cloud has already changed. In Morandi's canvases the faces are painted, yet they emerge from the weave of brushstrokes like the 'strange airs of faces'. In Byrd's fabrics the eye chases gradations that have no edge to stop at. The image thus finishes forming in the viewer. Ernst Gombrich called this contribution 'the beholder's share', the title of the part of *Art and Illusion* that opens with the chapter 'The Image in the Clouds'. At Tube the two artists' works follow one another like the motifs of a carving, finding a shared rhythm without merging. To catch it, you have to draw close and stay, with your eyes and with more than your eyes.

Elysia Byrd (b. London, 1989) holds a BA in Fine Art Painting from UCL, Wimbledon College of Art (2013) and an MFA in Painting from the Slade School of Fine Art, where she was awarded the Desiree Prize for Painting (2026). She is also one of the Sarabande Emerging Artist Scholars 2026.

Selected exhibitions include *Pods, Pom Poms and Other Souvenirs*, Block 336 (2017), *Search Party*, Tatjana Pieters (2023) and *FBA Futures*, The Mall Galleries (2014). She has undertaken residencies at Alto: Alto Paraiso, Brazil (2014) and Pilotenkueche, Leipzig (2017).

Riccardo Morandi (b. Lugo, 1999) lives and works in Urbino. Selected exhibitions: 2026, *Anti-Ascesi*, Theposito art space, Narni; 2026, *Figurare*, Kappa Noun, Bologna; 2026, *Essere Pittura*, Viafarini, Milan; 2026, *Arazzi, Stendardi, Paraventi*, Palazzo Arese Borromeo, Milan; 2025, *Pittura come?*, Spazio Torrso, Pesaro; 2024, *Chiamata alle Arti*, Italian Cultural Institute of New York; 2024, *Chiamata alle Arti 2024*, MucciacciaGalleryProject, Rome; 2023, *Sottosopra*, Palazzo Bronzo, Genoa; 2022, *Flehmen*, Museo Civico Varoli, Cotignola (RA); 2019, *ON/OFF*, solo exhibition, Akomena spazio mosaico, Ravenna.