

maria cristina carlini

Maria Cristina Carlini's nomadic sculpture

Maria Cristina Carlini's monumental sculptures penetrate the heart of cities, only to be dismantled and resume their migrations. Large bodies of steel, bronze or grès, on a flying visit; the mind boggles. This is not how we have been accustomed to perceiving public art, like nomads.

But the idea of site-specific sculpture as being eternally shackled to one place, regardless of changes in the times, now appears obsolete and authoritarian. Monuments and sculptures in public space are characterised by the moment when they were created. Sometimes, ideals come to appear trite and hackneyed, and not all works can survive the clarifying light of history.

In this perspective, Maria Cristina Carlini's temporary interventions in the urban space stand out as a courageous and conciliatory gesture, like a renegotiation of traditional doctrines and approaches. She repeatedly introduces her sculptures into a wide variety of settings, as if to point out new orientations in the urban nervous system and blood circulation. Her address may seem intrusive, but a more subdued gesture would not have opened up the buildings surrounding her sculptures and made them speak.

In the spring of 2009, eleven brilliant white volumes settled like perching birds with craning necks in front of the Panthéon temple in the Latin Quarter of Paris. However, what initially appears to resemble the birds in *The Stone Garden* (Il Giardino di Pietra, 2008) is, in fact, rough surfaces, without limbs or other facial features – abstractions of living creatures or timid mythical animals encapsulated in fibreglass-reinforced plastic shells.

The tension between the firm Corinthian columns and patriotic and patriarchal motto above the entrance "Aux hommes la patrie reconnaissante" of the neoclassical church of Jacques-Germain Soufflot, and the brutally severed tops of Maria Cristina Carlini's ground-level sculptural group attracted the visitors' attention. The contrast between the reduced bodies of the work and the illustrious men in high relief along the pediment of the mausoleum, caused a provoking dissonance. The sombreness of this startling encounter between artistic approach and hero worship was enhanced by the location of the site on top of the hill of Sainte Geneviève, overlooking the French capital.

Maria Cristina Carlini's art is characterised by contrasts between strong and weak, polished and rough, steel and organic materials. The uprightness of the birch trunks in *Mystery* (Mistero, 2008) reminds us of the figure in *The Stone Garden*, but in *Mystery* the insularity and silence have turned into pain. The white-mottled trunks cling to one another

and howl into eternity. It is suggestive of Staffan Hallström, the Swedish painter whose vulnerable, anxiety-ridden dogs paved the way for a neo-expressionist style in Nordic art.

Maria Cristina Carlini's birches reveal large and strange wounds, a stigmatisation beyond the hope of healing. They have the same visual impact as a medieval crucifix. In *Mother* (*Madre*, 2008), the expression is tuned down. In the spring of 2009, the bronze sphere hatches like an egg at the junction of Boulevard Saint Michel and Boulevard Saint Germain. A delivery-in the midst of pedestrians and motorists. A month or so later, the sculpture is uprooted from its position, and all that remains is a memory of something affecting that brought time to a standstill for a moment. Our perception of the Panthéon, and of the nearby Musée de Cluny with its *La dame à la Licorne*, will never be the same again.

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