

maria cristina carlini

Maria Cristina Carlini. Environment Work

Every thought formulated in the presence of Maria Cristina Carlini's works seems to originate from binomy, antinomy, or both together and find its place, spontaneously, on binary paths, in an open and unlimited journey, which gives the impression of the conquest occurred, but not yet definitive, and indeed it is the point of departure towards new horizons.

The spatial element, which – with reference to sculpture in general – is a term given for granted, considering the volumes of bodies, takes different and complex values that transcend the physical perceptions.

Environment / Work proposes itself as a positive challenge that induces to reflect on the meaning and significance of appearance and essence, of vision and content, of the idea and the material mass, in a frontal approach, according to the system of titles of each work itself, of which "Giardino di pietra" ("Stone Garden") may represent a paradigm for its poetical suggestion, by the side of philosophical depth, along with the aesthetics of form and physicality of use.

It follows that the work is something other than a simple condition of static and inanimate object. It is a creature, universe, microcosm and consequently an environment added to the one it occupies and modifies, resulting in symbiosis with it and inseparable unity with this latter. It is a stratified idea of space - both physical and temporal, intangible, of the environment as a place, a territory or container, a prismatic concept whose facets reflect the awareness of current events and historical memories, the responsibilities of civilization and respect origins, the coveted acculturation and the trend towards the pleasantness of instinct.

The possibility of joining such a variety of conditions, be they similar and opposed as poles apart, is an opportunity to establish here the dwelling, the house of man, where to find again at the same time profane and divine, emotion and reason, current affairs and history, which flow from the power exercised by the interplay of materials and shapes.

Maria Cristina Carlini is aware of her personal skills and knowledge that do not prevent her from testing discover continuously, so as to transmit generously to her works an ever-increasing richness, drawing from it unconditional joy in handling tools and materials for their creation.

Shapes, volumes, dimensions do not find any obstacles or limitations. They are similar to her enthusiasm renewed every day and directed towards other targets, so that any final result is never definitive and announces ever-changing developments, always incorruptible and faithful to her unmistakable personal style and language.

With the self-confidence she owes to her concrete, mental, physical and even sensual pleasure to manipulate and mould the various materials, selected according to the shapes

and dimensions, but with enhanced preference for plastic ones, namely earth, stoneware, clay and plaster.

They are used mainly for works made in her studio, privately and in solitude, where a real dialogue can be established through concentration and dedication than cannot be profaned external events.

Earth as a mouldable matter, water as pollen and gluing agent for separate particles, the action of hands as the loving breath that generates and animates, the power of fire as confirming energy. In other words, the four primary natural and vital elements take part in the consultation of creation according to the universal equilibrium.

So sculpting, according to Maria Cristina Carlini, is the same as moulding a material mass generated from nothing, restoring order in chaos, following an alchemical process that originates in the simplicity and disparity of the constituents and pursues the ennoblement of their union in properly and genuinely sculptural forms.

This occurs both in the privacy and isolation of her study, where small and medium-sized works are born, and in workshops and forges where professional craftsmen help the artist making big-sized works. Each time, whatever the place intended to house the new birth is, it becomes a sacred place, where silence and reflection are required together with loving care in the creation process, mindful of the human history and evolution with all the related epoch-making and everyday experiences.

Shapes, volumes, surfaces, dimensions, and ultimately scansions, angularities, reliefs and depressions have specific values in determining the aesthetics and poetics of sculpture, the silent rhythm of time flowing in its crystalline appearance through the successions, the luminist variability of the progressive alternation of day and night, light and darkness, wonder and mystery.

They are charisms emerging in every work, each one being always new, the first, the only one, enhanced by the author's expressive verve, by the passion lavished in the action of moulding being such as to reconcile distinctiveness and rationality, which conditions are mental first and then physical, and allow certain outcomes tending to essentialization of constructive data so as to be led to a kind of minimalism along an axis that combines the idea of poor art with the clear metaphysical atmospheres, i.e. to a new sculptural concept close to history and away from any nomenclature.

Different and complementary are the moments of the realization of small and big-sized works; they have distinct characteristics in the use of certain equipment and working modes, but it is above all feelings that accompany and guide the situations and goals to be pursued.

Crucial for both is the study on the definition and employment of space meant not so much as a vacuum to fill, but as an entity imperceptible to the eye and to the senses in the absence of material bodies.

Let us think of two situations as examples that trace out the details of an ideational map on the manipulation of space, meant not only as ether to be moulded but also as temporal reality.

The first is "Il Vasaio" ("The Potter"), of 2003-2004, a work that Maria Cristina Carlini thought and realized for the exhibition "Nutrirsi con (l')Arte" / "Feeding with/on Art" and that was exhibited at the National Museum of Antiquities in Turin; the second is "La Vittoria di Samotraccia" ("The Victory of Samothrace"), of 2008, of monumental dimensions, placed permanently in Piazza dei Valdesi in Cosenza.

"The Potter" is made up of approximately fifteen small stoneware elements, various pieces of crockery and a primordial cooker which made up the kitchen set and look like archaeological artefacts due to the impression of unfinished they give, which is corresponds to wear, chipping and erosion. Giving as a fact the sculptress's ability in

moulding clay, which is here extremely evident in the care of details and in the achievement of certain effects, it must be clarified that this is not the exercise of a virtuosity aimed at “mimicking” the original finds;

It is a sculpture with full rights which is able to recognize its origins and creates the link between antiquity and modernity, moulding in this sense the centuries-long lapse of time to speak to today’s humanity, so much so that it deserved, on the occasion of that exhibition, the position next to the Treasury of Marengo.

The big, in every sense, both for its physical proportions and for what it is, “The Victory of Samothrace” (“La Vittoria di Samotracia”) rises from the earth, which accompanies such an important, birth –which is itself blossoming – i.e. rising to its feet creating a relief in order to give impetus to the rise of a goddess who is ascending dynamically with gentle power and imposes itself gloriously, unlike the celebratory monuments from other times which, on the contrary, weighed downwards.

She is lightweight and aerodynamic, projecting upwards with centrifugal force and taking strength from her unfolded wings, like those of a butterfly composed of several lobes.

Her aerial bearing structure made of perforated sheet metal, with a corten steel frame, is partly covered with epidermis of corrugated fibreglass.

The interaction and symbiosis with space and light is established and confirmed on such devices.

Air and light circulate freely around her surface and inside of it, creating effects each time different and ever changing of refraction, reflection and absorption.

The light beam generates colours, shadows, sparkles, while the breeze composes ever-new music through the holes and the rhythmical scansions of her profiles and surface. Space – which is physical but invisible because aerial – is moulded on the outside all around the work and inside of it, same as it occupies its space in a mutual interpenetration or projection, which modifies a small portion of universe, which was anonymous before the plastic intervention of the sculpture.

We can see thus revealed the many-sided vocation of the sculptress Maria Cristina Carlini to mould, create and recreate shapes and physical, conceptual, emotional, temporal spaces of any size and for any destination, provided that the enjoyment is complete and not just visual, enlarged and not elitist, directed also towards those who are smitten with frenzy of everyday life, who are distracted and not led to seek beauty, even if they find it all around them and even under their feet, e.g. while walking amongst the elements of the sculpture “Il Giardino di pietra” (“The Garden of Stone”).

These places located in city areas of intense transition (as it was in Paris, where the sculpture just stayed for a period in Place du Panthéon, or currently in Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid), alter the usual pedestrian flow and trace out a new urban route.

The atmosphere we can breathe here is old and modern at the same time, between evocations of natural formations smoothed by atmospheric agents and suggestions of Mayan and pre-Columbian civilizations handed down and infiltrated into new planimetries, next to more recent architectures.

Each of the eleven elements is an autonomous sculpture and, since they are separated from one another, each installation will change according to the different locations, producing, therefore, unprecedented landscapes and ever-renewed and changing compositions capable of adapting, including by extension, to the places where they are housed.

They are mountains or truncated conical menhirs emerging from the ground and rising up so that they pierce the air gently and without violence, at equal levels in a gradual increase.

The amalgam of structures, which determine shapes and dimensions, seems to be spread with loving care, caressed, accompanied with the hands and not with instruments and tools, smoothed over or left rough as to mean the randomness of the final effect, which is similar – also for its white colouring – to blocks of marble cut, roughed out but not polished. This creates a fantastic play of lights and shadows that alternate and follow one another, both amongst the elements and on vertical surfaces, while the cut tops the natural beam strikes the bounded areas producing a new radiating light source.

It is an almost spectral presence, a landscape of other unknown planets, highly suggestive in its metaphysical proposition, which intensifies, instead of vanishing, in the presence of people who walk across it.

The contrast originates in the combination of the life of the humanity flowing normally and the landscape petrified by the atomic bomb or by a natural seismic event, similar to that occurred in Pompeii, which should have erased any vital principle.

To another nature – yet always winking to the presence / absence effect – belongs “Letteratura” (“Literature”), made of corten steel and consists of three separate elements of different sizes, which, in this case too, allow variables installation.

They are sheets folded vertically in half, which have detached from the book binding and flown away scattering elsewhere, transported by the air or by the events, i.e. by the fate or civil history. On these pages, these minimalist walls, was written and handed down a culture that time or human indifference have immersed in a corrosive etching and which has left an indelible mark in the weeping oxidations and above all in shapes, whose Euclidean geometry confirms mathematics and rational knowledge.

On the large, rough surfaces everything was written and – in the same measure – everything must be rewritten; there are traced out and erased experiences and stories, be they collective and individual, which were, are and will be.

Time flows through the angular space and faces humanity exhuming memories, raising hopes and dreams.

It is a quivering work in its secure and stable presence, which welcomes and rejects according to everyone’s ability to find a page where to write down evidence, their own history, or a wall into which to bump: it is the individual’s instinctive or intelligent inclination in time and contemporaneity.

Irremovability and incorruptibility are undeniable features in “Legami” (“Links”), whose structure is proved by solid parallelepipeds with vertical slenderness and resting upon large bases soundly anchored to the ground.

The corten steel of the square bodies has oxidized surfaces whose colours exhale and is similar to that of the earth, while the continuity of the flat faces is interrupted by geometries carved on the skin and painted in black.

The ties are made of curly silvery sheets of lead and form a cross that reminds the idea of a meeting point between heaven and earth and amongst the cardinal points, which results in a centralization and compact consolidation through the centripetal force which acts in the sculptural microcosm like the force of gravity on earth, attracting to himself the surrounding reality.

In its formal simplicity and compositional elegance, there are the noblest peculiarities of two contemporary currents of thought, namely the paring down of matter dictated by poor art and the complexity of contents having conceptual roots, while the attention and overall care of proportions and details of classical origin - and consequently corresponding to the personal culture – still remains.

This great and extraordinary sculpture was recently placed permanently in Paris and we do not err on the side of self-importance if we imagine it as an omen of lasting peaceful union of Europe, an obelisk erected to the people and culture of our continent.

Particular fascination is exercised by “Mistero” (“Mystery”) in its apparent total evidence and simplicity of the image, if it were not for the title that shakes our memory and leads our thinking to the right dimension.

It is a place of encounter between man and nature, a kind of Celtic temple in the forest rebuilt with the cut-off, crownless trunks of birches composed and kept on a cubic corten steel base, from which, on two adjacent sides, as many walls of the same material rise, as an extension upwards, and form a right angle, a shell, a treasure chest that contains, protects and releases life and nature with all their mysteries and the magic of being.

Full volumes and empty volumes; flat, smooth, polished, perfect surfaces alongside those uncultivated of trees; angular shapes and irregular cylindrical bodies; colours that reflect each other; this work effectively combined constructivist rationality and unconditional natural freedom, existence and its double, almost a sort of soul of humanity.

In many ways similar to each other, the spherical “Inizio” (“Beginning”) and “Madre” (“Mother”), in corten steel and resins, are made with the union of multiple “sheets” shaped, curved, bent, each one adapted to its neighbour by superimposition, joint or binding, so as to form a bud that opens and to provide materials and shapes with incisive expressiveness.

The volumes are moulded on the external convexities and internal concavities, from which are also obtained the peculiarities of negative / positive, the variability and alternation of lights and shadows, evident and concealed, existence and origin, as suggested by the titles themselves. The specific gravity of materials is nullified by the aerial nature of the shapes swollen around and on their content, which is invisible but perceptible, captured by the surrounding environment and which must be explored on its surfaces, inside and outside, through which oxidations which veil its assumed reflective capacity.

With an equal incisiveness as in the monumental sculptures, the same characters are imprinted in works of smaller size. Just look at “Globo” (“Globe”), made in bronze, or at the even more evocative “Africa”, in stoneware, iron and earthenware, made up of several spherical elements, open and wounded, upon a silhouette with the profile of the continent to which it refers; on this land mangled by violence, the spheres open like sprouting seeds in the hopes of new life expectancies, future and progress.

Suspended between a crude vision of reality, the disappointment for events other than the desires and optimism for a better future, “Muro” (“Wall”) and “Stracci” (“Rags”) are both made of stoneware and iron and their different formal structures show an extraordinary technical ability, a sound adherence to the linguistic expression and style of their author, both the former in its compactness and impressiveness and the latter with the aerial lightness of the stoneware “veils” hanging by a thread, soft as silk shaken by a slight breeze.

The above-mentioned works are all recently built, i.e. over the last three years, and as many others in addition to these with the same artistic commitment were created in the same period, we can understand the enthusiasm which animates Maria Cristina Carlini and consequently the considerable work she had to endure, along with the necessary quantity of energy and time.

Almost always - if not in all her sculptures, at least in many of them - the artist creates a monumental version and one, or more, of reduced proportions that could be meant as a sketch, while in reality it is a finished sculpture: moreover, the use of materials too changes with the size.

Stoneware, earthenware, clay, bronze, wood and iron are preferentially for small and medium-sized sculptures, while for big-sized ones the materials used are corten steel, resins, mixture of various kinds, lead, wood and even iron.

Earth, untreated, powder often represents the primary binding agent, which is essential to the finishing of the work and ensures that this is always different in each location. Similarly, the project and the structuring of the works made up of several elements changes in each new installation.

This feature belongs to the total capacity of adaptation to the environment that Maria Cristina Carlini's sculptures have as their primary quality, not as a submission to the existing site, but, on the contrary, as a living presence that improves life and is able to keep man company, from whom it wants nothing in return.

Giovanna Barbero