

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA MARICONTI

By Eleonora Aimone

EA: The exhibition at Ghisla Art Collection celebrates the last ten years of your career. Before this one, another solo exhibition celebrated the previous ten years. In which way, compared to the previous decade, have you grown, as an artist and as man?

AM: there is a link between the paintings of ten years ago and the latest bronzes, that's why I've wanted to choose the works which could express this evolution between the paintings and the sculptures of the series *Naeuma Antimatter*. I realized, while I was planning this exhibition, that my art does not follow a linear progression and that signs, shapes, landscapes, materials I had been using for twenty years in my paintings seemed to blend in the sculptures by osmosis. It is still the material that set the subject, never the opposite. My role, as a contemporary artist, is to shape that material, that subject, not what there was before.

EA: Indeed, you often said that what leads your artistic research is the material, more than anything else. It seems that this attitude has given an organic nature to your works, a nature that cannot be torn apart from them. Among the materials you have used so far, which one is the most suitable for you?

AM: I am particularly fond of ash. For me, it is colour and body of a heritage. It keeps a biological and creatural history, the memory of a place, the life of wood, that is, at the same time, burnt and purified. Any pigment, in my whole works, is nothing more than the natural shade of every material. The objects, the substances are not conceptual symbols, I do not want to use them like metaphors. They *are*, they exist in their own essence.

EA: When or where was this endless research born?

AM: My research on the material comes mostly from the School of Dusseldorf. My path to the expressive search of materials has been influenced by Beuys, Kiefer, Richter but non only. There are many other artists who work in this field and deeply believe that it is the organic nature of the material to give birth, firstly, to a work of art. This kind of art reminds us that the relationship between our body and the reality of things goes beyond a simple visual exchange. Actually, tension and relationships relate us with the objects of the world, in order to make us realize the deep affinity and belonging between us and it. In that way, I always considered art as the main expansion of my own body, which shows the tension by carrying them out.

EA: I think that your interdisciplinary pathway is a natural consequence of the experimentation of the material. It deals with painting, printing, sculpture/installation art, artistic crafts and conceptual art. Even music and archaeology have inspired you, not only contemporary art. To which subject do you owe your being an artist? And in which way?

AM: I don't approach different media in the same way and, above all, I never followed a precise order or rule. For example, I approached bronze sculpture because I was fascinated by the shades of the colour. I loved the patina: turquoise, variable and always living. So, first, I fell in love with bronze as a painter and then, I discovered bronze as a sculptor and the lost wax casting process. I think that a total artist can express his art and his skills through all the media he has, and he

studied. We are researchers in artistic field, we look for depth and when we do that, we find unexpected discovers.

EA: How important have your studies at Brera Academy been?

AM: My studies have deeply influenced my interdisciplinary pathway, however, meeting people and researcher of different cultural and artistic fields let me find a new direction for my work. There are easily understandable themes but there are also many others, less direct and evident. I constantly follow my “masters”, what they do, say or write.

EA: Is your work methodical or is it a consequence of an extemporaneous impulse?

AM: I’m one of the least methodical people I’ve ever known, but painting requires its own method and even rituality: we must repeat the same gestures a thousand times before finding the right one. J. Beuys compared it to a shamanic or alchemical process, which put materials in relation to each other. Besides, you know, you can fulfill the experimentation, the technical research only through mistakes and attempts. You explore an unknown field, which stands on the threshold of other worlds. Often you walk paths which go nowhere, but then, you realize they are full of new discoveries and cultural references. Let’s say that this process is the base of what we call Serendipity, but in this way, it refers to artistic research. If we look at great masters’ biographies and works of the last millennium, we see that the greatest intuitions are often fluid and they flow from an artist to another, from a century to another and from different directions.

EA: Most study behind a work of art is not visible to those who look at it. People often think that a work is just what they are looking at, what they perceive through their eyes, a retinal fruition we could say. How do you feel when you think about it?

AM: I’ve been trying to give access to the traces, as they were archaeological traces, of the process behind the work that people see. That’s why, the materials I use have a key role. We can relate to great artists, alive or not, through the practice and the study of the Art and we can know their artistic practice through experimentation. This technical-exploratory consciousness was always in my mind every time I met a great master, like Anselm Kiefer, I had the honour of seeing him at work or many other painters I was so lucky to meet along the way.

EA: In which series of works can we find all this?

AM: I tried to make my idea clear in the sculptures *Neuma* and *Neuma-Antimatter*. However, for me good art, art which is meant to be immortal (Caravaggio, for instance) can’t be reduced to a retinal-visual fruition, but it goes beyond sense perception. So, it can lead us towards paths which bring us back to our childhood, subconscious and archetypal images. The deep energy between human beings comes back through an exchange of matter and relationship. Our gestures are meaningful only if they are reproducible through an endless communication.

EA: You talked about the series *Neuma-Antimatter*. This project seems to blend musical and physical rules that then we find in visual works of art meant for a multisensory fruition. How was it born?

Once, Gustav Malher wrote that tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire. It’s such a beautiful and meaningful sentence. Indeed, it’s this tension that gave birth to *Neuma-Antimatter*; it’s a bond of organic forms whose origins can be found in images of termite nests, in

archaeological and anthropic forms inspired by weapons and artifacts of Copper Age. From these formal lines I prepared drafts and drawings, in search of a synthesis which could represent a balanced hybrid, just like a plumb bob. Even the colour is a feature of the works, paintings as well as sculptures, and it's the result of a chemical patina or of not synthetic pigments. My favourite material has been bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, but the core of the creative project has been lost-wax casting. When you want to create a bronze sculpture, the main material you work with is clay. You never touch bronze, you pour it, at 1200 degrees, from a crucible down into drains that direct it to the underground "shell". When you create contemporary art, you can *interfere* with the pouring bronze process, and you free the spring forms of the melted bronze in a physical fortuity.

EA: It seems a noble synthesis of the arts...

AM: Yes, we could say so. The form of the sculpture comes after the sound and the tone quality. At viewer's sight, it represents a musical "entity", suspended in time and space, living its own life; and this is possible thanks to lost-wax casting. So, as a result, we have alien sculptures which show their technical creation, as well as an exhibition born from the exploration and the research of any lost-wax casting process.

EA: Now, I'd want you to answer in a not diplomatic way. How is your relationship with the Italian art system and how do you see it?

AM: For me, it's anachronistic to talk about Italian art system without placing it in a greater context, at least a European one. I think that any gallery or cultural organization which does not believe in a network of relationships or in the sharing of knowledge and that focalizes only in observing the same, cultural models, will find hard to survive. We should diversify the cultural communication through the relations between different types of publics. In this way, Italian art system has still a great job to do. If I could freely imagine my relationship with Italian art establishment, that would involve the Italian heritage, both tangible and intangible. Even the dialogue between museums, academies, institutions and art galleries and art system should be strengthened and reconsidered in a more contemporary vision.

EA: Your new exhibition takes advantage of the collaboration with *Isorropia Homegallery*, an organization born in Milan, which has a brand-new look in conceiving exhibition places and in promoting visual arts. Where does this happy collaboration come from?

AM: The aim of Isorropia Homegallery is to promote contemporary art through a network which could provide a greater and wider fruition. When I heard about this network, we immediately realized the potential the bond between contemporary art and the evocative sites of our cultural heritage could have. It's this research that Isorropia has been exploring. The themes we have already dealt, and we will deal with are archaeology, cultural heritage, the mystery and the charm of all those sites barely unknown. We have met by pure chance, but this exhibition represents only the beginning of our collaboration.

EA: If we think about the contemporary art, in general, and the enormous debt it owes to the ancient and modern art, could we imagine a new art which doesn't look back to the past, like prehistoric and Mesopotamia civilizations did?

AM: My research has always been founded on the significant potential of the material and I have always considered History of Art as a fluid and continuous unicum. Lost-wax bronze casting is a very ancient technique which had an essential role in the development of human civilization. It makes us see eternity and it makes us wonder about our creatural existence on earth, our ecological and demographic impact, our impermanence. Actually, bronze will outlive us, but first of all, bronze is colour and sound in a paradoxical oxymoron matter/antimatter. I don't believe a "new" art could truly exist and I don't believe in a sharp division between ancient and modern, either.

EA: I think there are only few studios and "botteghe" (workshops) where to make sculptures like yours, so faithful to ancient techniques but, at the same time, so eager to give back contemporary elements.

AM: The foundry where I work has been in the middle of the plain for centuries; there, with the help of the workers, I create my works, following rituals that for me have the taste of an alchemical process. The foundry was born and developed as a high-quality center for the production of lost-wax bronze statues. Here, in this place set in a secular tradition, we can reach such a high standard of quality and formal-musical research, and, at the same time, I can interfere with the historical, artistic, anthropological background in a contemporary way.

EA: How is the relationship between landscape and material?

AM: Landscape defines material and material is fulfilled and sublimated by an intangible sound. Bronze keeps the traces of this process, of this "map". I think, I hope, that the viewers, when they look at my works, can find themselves hanging on an undefined time horizon where History of Art shows its own complexity. It is like an endless stream of experiences, questions, everlasting or transient signs.

EA: If you should tell your children about only one artist in each main period of human history – Ancient Times, Modern Age and Contemporary Period – which one would you choose?

AM: *Ancient Times* – Jusepe de Ribera, because I consider him the greatest painter ever and his works are still to be discovered and studied. *Modern Age* – I don't know whether Beuys or Kiefer, even if this one is now considered a contemporary artist; in any case they form an essential duo. *Contemporary Period* – Theo Jansen, I like him so much and I have often compared him with Giuliano Mauri.