

The world evades us because it becomes itself again.

Albert Camus

The shape of time

Alberto Fiz

For Andrea Mariconti, sculpture represents the natural evolution of his painting, as the transformation of the materials has been the centre of his artistic research for twenty years. Since the beginning, he has refused to give his works a priori features and they have taken on different aspects to explore unknown frontiers. The traditional techniques are turned upside down: the use of ash along with oil painting make the continuous change the core and the essence of the artistic composition. The artist says: "we have to negotiate with ash: it does not let you have a total control, like oil paint pigments and acrylic paint do, but rather it struggles and prevents you from realizing the idea you have in your mind in the way you would do"¹.

Mariconti hoped to escape the comfort of the representation and to lead it towards a physical field, that's why, at the beginning of his artistic career, he experimented so many different extra-pictorial elements, such as land, oil or cement among many others.

Imprinting dates back to 2010 and it is the first series of sculptures which express artist's will to be one with the nature, according to the theory of the philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, a reference for Mariconti, like Alberto Burri, Joseph Beuys and, above all, Anselm Kiefer are his references in aesthetics (in 2005, Mariconti collaborated with Kiefer in Milan, during a workshop at Hangar Bicocca concerning the installation *Seven Heavenly Palaces*). We can see imprints of limbs but also portraits made of land, resin and ash where the image is part of a process willing to find the essential shape and refuse given paradigms. In a small plaster, dating back to 2010, ash and beeswax were blended, as if these organic elements reminded us of relics of an ancient and mysterious civilization that denied the separation of history and nature.

Didi-Huberman writes: "the imprinting means a whole of material relationships which gives origin to a concrete object...the imprinting is, at the same time, process and paradigm: it gathers both meanings of the word experience, the physical meaning of an experimental procedure and the gnoseological meaning of comprehension of the world"².

Therefore, sculpture never had a background role in Mariconti's research because he always believed that the shape was inside the material, in a progressive creative tension. The exhibition at Ghisla Foundation, then, is the occasion to show how sculpture has become the centre of the most important project he has ever realized so far.

In a very big exhibition, where paintings, drawings, sketches and engravings of the last five years are collected, sculptures represent the possibility to create a new synthesis between sign, sound and material, in a circular space full of obstacles that let Mariconti show his inner landscape. Doing this, he refuses the traditional paths of representation that in any case he had already dissected in his painting and the battlefield where he proves his planning and technical ability is the three-dimensional surface. Besides, the title itself *Naeuma Antimatter* is not just the name of the new series of sculptures but also the key to understand the whole exhibition and it makes us understand the ending of a complex research. This research aims at emphasizing the meaningful and dynamic process which transcends the image to identify the sign-sound in its endless change. Antimatter is not in conflict with matter: both belong to the same quantized field where the interaction between particles and antiparticles causes transformation and produces electromagnetic radiation, according to Albert Einstein's formula. The relationship between matter

and organic forms leads to an energy that truly represents the main characteristic of Mariconti's research; indeed, he makes his bronze sculpture through the lost-wax casting technique and the results are unbelievable. He writes³: "during the process of pouring molten bronze, so similar to lava, we can intervene and free the spring shapes into the physical chance". His intentions are obvious: he wants to free his creativity through the action on the material, so that the bonds between things disappear and the outlines become less clear. In this way, bronze catches the thoughts and dissolves, in the same place, natural elements like branches and leaves which are in harmony with the vision of termite nests, symbols of a primordial architecture. Trimming and mnemonic analogies have marked this work, so that we can see many signs of different molds in the bronze that are the results of uncommon techniques such as cyanotype and photoengraving. In this way, a new stratified land arose where a contemporary eye scans past data making them alive; the alphabet becomes bigger and bigger and we can hear the echo of what Paul Klee famously said: "art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible".

Hiding and revealing, on the surface fall elements issued from ancient nautical charts but also archaeological shapes inspired by the Camuni, an ancient civilization dating back to the Iron Age. They are meaningless signifiers which get back their place in the physical space of the matter through the rock engravings and then, they sink and create a sort of transference relationship with their original position. Mariconti explains that "the organic nature of the memory creates the work of art" and he marks bronze with hieroglyphics presenting fortuitous or transient elements aimed to suggest unknown and enigmatic mind maps. The imprint goes along with the sound amplitude, since the core of the project is the balanced musicality developed by sculptures hanging inside Platonic solid figures.

The studies on the relationships between art and sound characterized the 19th century, let's think about Marcel Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* and Luigi Russolo's *Intonarumori*. But we could say that the first example of sound art was the church bell that developed in the 8th and in the 9th centuries.

Mariconti was inspired by this model but with *Naeuma Antimatter* he transformed the traditional shape and created a group of visual-acoustic sculptures that are not limited to the acoustic element although he had to face a series of technical difficulties in making them. The true hardship was to create free shapes which could give "a strong sound, not harmonic but with harmonic functions"⁴, like the bells sound.

They are sculptures with a double soul that develop their potentiality of sign and language and, at the same time, act as a connection between the material sphere and the immaterial one. All that flows into an interesting, singular solution, according to synesthetic and performative experiences. The artist chose to create a solid of revolution (the sculptures, even if different in size and design, share the same mold) characterized by two elements linked together and whose hollow surface makes the sound possible. To do that, he could have used basic geometric shapes, instead, he created "alien sculptures" (Mariconti call them that way) which float in a not immediately recognizable dimension. The resulting image reminds us about a natural element, an acorn indeed, hanging like fruit on a tree. But this research refuses any categorization and it's not by chance that the ambiguous structure of the sculptures evokes a Chinese box, because it hides many other suggestions and references to past worlds and we can perceive urns, jars and prehistoric utensils. What arises is the shape of time, made clear by the research of an artist who creates labyrinths and puzzles where coexist termite nests and rock engravings, acorns and urns. The origin of things does not matter, but the elective affinities, the ability to link and connect each other outside

conventional paths. Then, signs and sounds swell and cause the birth of only one tune, *Naeuma*, indeed.

¹ Eloisa Montagna, "Interview with Andrea Mariconti", *Andrea Mariconti, Quia Pulvis, Exhibition Catalogue*, Galleria Pittura Italiana, Milan, 17th May-30th June 2007.

² Georges Didi-Huberman, *La somiglianza per contatto. Archeologia, anacronismo e modernità dell'impronta*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2009, p.30. (*Resemblance through contact. Archaeology, anachronism and modernity of imprinting*).

³ Andrea Mariconti, Introduction to the exhibition, *Naeuma Antimatter*, Fondazione Ghisla Art Collection, Locarno, 4th September 2022-8th January 2023.

⁴ Maurizio Bertazzolo, "Naeuma Antimatter, sound archaeology and musical spectrography". Essay published in this volume.