

ABSTRACT

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**The critical debate on contemporary sculpture in Italy
(1960-2010)**

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Around 1960 in Italy the research concerning sculpture innovates, experimenting new and unexpected relations with the surrounding space with the intention of establishing a closer and intimate dialogue with the public. Far from being put on a pedestal, sculpture looks for a tightened and conspiratorial relation with the environment, shuttering down the separation between the dignified field of art and the common space of everyday life. From this new perspective, sculpture rejects what is "figurative" and denies the "uprightness" that have always characterized it, changeling techniques and traditional materials. The notch and the modeling fade away while the experimentation of new constructive processes such as the stockpile and the assembly, which do not require specific manual skills, develops; traditional materials are put aside or, in some cases, they are supported by materials that come from the industry or, directly, from nature. Sculpture starts a radical process of aesthetic renovation that led it through linguistic territories whose borders were no longer clear and definite: their decryption is no longer a matter of fact that, according to Meneguzzo, sculpture became "the hardest discipline to define"¹

The difficulty to determine the space of sculpture and its contemporary perimeter was central for Italian critics that analysed it through different perspectives, voices and plural suggestions placing the cultural debate into a larger context, into the net that includes the relations constituting the complex system of art, where who "acts" are artists and reviewers, on a side, and, on the other, museums and places for exhibitions (in the case of sculpture they are parks and gardens). Plus we also can find the category of the collectors, scholars and keepers whose critical effort is very high, linked to the trial nature (more often unfinished).

We are dealing with a huge scenario whose precondition is the historical reconnaissance and its developments concerning Italian sculpture of 1900, a topic that will open the first chapter of the present work. The historical summary here introduced, was realized by considering some of the most popular personalities of the XX century, placed in an organic path, chronologically determined, due to offer a varied background of the Italian

¹ M. Meneguzzo, *La scultura lingua nuova*, in *La scultura italiana del XXI secolo*, catalogue of the exhibit, by M. Meneguzzo, Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation, Milan, 19 October 2010- 30 January 2011, p.12

plastic of his century. This attempt also provided the possibility to track influences and common features between the first and the second half of this century.

The choice to underline the importance of some of the most important sculptors of this century was according to the will of taking a quick read of historical events. This first part came out to be a necessary frame to introduce the following chapters. This first chapter closes up with a *focus* dedicated to the contemporary sculpture in Naples in the second half of 1900 and, specifically, to the different theoretical interpretation given to Renato Barisani and Augusto Perez's works.

In the second chapter the main subject of this work is presented by reconstructing the different "voices" that have animated the critical debate of contemporary sculpture in Italy. The first part of this chapter opens up with a set of exhibitions dedicated to contemporary sculpture that took place in Italy around 1965 until nowadays, showing their purpose to offer a critical debate through the expositive tendency. It emerged that many theoretical divergences characterized the twenty years between the 60's and 70's, a cultural moment in which the critique was split into two incompatible parts: on one side those who were in favour of an avant-garde sculpture, characterized by innovative materials and experimental techniques; on the other side were those who supported contemporary sculpture, strongly bound to traditional materials and techniques. This duality was also provided by the exhibition of *La sovrana inattualità. Ricerche plastiche in italia negli anni Settanta* that took place in Milan at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in 1982 by Flaminio Guadalonì and that showed an example of the Italian plastic characterized by the double tendency of innovation and tradition.

Once analysed the critical considerations on sculpture and its developments "displayed as an exhibition", the work examines Mario De Micheli, Luciano Carmel and Marco Meneguzzo's point of view on the Italian critic scenario even though they are not contemporary. This choice was made due to their contributions throughout these years. Deeply bound to traditional values, De Micheli gives a personal perspective of the developments of the Italian plastic model: moving away from "each evanescent motion"², sculpture, for De Micheli, is legitimated by the "craft" and by the comprehension of the hidden message. Carmel shows a deep interest into the most

² G. Seveso, *Attualità e pertinenza del pensiero critico di Mario De Micheli*, in *Da Picasso a Gattuso. L'arte secondo Mario De Micheli*, catalogue of the exhibit by M Noja, Milan, Foundation- Library of via Senato, 25 November 2011- 15 April 2012, Milan, p.15

innovative aspects of sculpture and, investigating the work-motive, he recognizes the modern roots of the art of the XIX century, the tendency of the research in the 30's and 40's and the artistic forms after the second World War until our times. Meneguzzo's interest is more focused on the contemporary sculpture, he provides key-concepts to interpret and, at the same time, to announce future developments.

The third part of the second chapter deals with the analysis of an academic magazine, "I quaderni di scultura contemporanea", that, from 1997 until now, has represented an interest starting point to examine different aspects and different topics linked to this discipline.

The academic magazine also provides a good place to compare different voices that animate the modern debate. They are the witness of artists, critics, teachers, students and art gallery owners in relation to their personal and professional experience. In "quaderni di scultura contemporanea" new contributes have been also published on unknown topics and essays that have given credit to some difficult studies in historical and critical terms such as the debate on sculpture after the second World War and the new tendencies in the 60's. The second chapter closes up with some considerations written by those artists whose voices were necessary to understand the programmatic intents, the operative process and also to reconstruct the cultural weaving in which the artists studied and operated. The contributions provided here are by Pietro Consagra, whose writings have been fundamental to understand his biographical and professional path in order to fully define his poetry. The analysis of his writings revealed two aspects of his artistic biography that haven't been studied deeply, yet. They refer to his political militancy in the P.C.I, between 1947 and 1956, and they show some ideological divergences in the artistic field- "Me and Turcato were considered to be a couple of black sheep in the faction"³.

In the third chapter a critic consideration on the "places" of contemporary sculpture is offered. It analyses the reality of the Sassi di Matera where, for more that twenty five years, many exhibitions have taken places under the administration of the cultural group "La Scaletta", especially in the striking places of the two country churches of Madonna delle Virtù and San Nicola dei Greci and where, from 2006, there has been MUSMA, the first italian museum dedicated to contemporary sculpture of 1900 and to the first

³ Consagra, *Vita mia*, Editor Feltrinelli, Milan 1980, p. 68).

years of the new millenium. MUSMA was instituted by Zétema Foundation (in affiliation with "La Scaletta") whose main purpose was to give a home to their collection, that had greatly increased, and to deeply root the contemporary sculpture in Sassi through a private institution accesible for visitors all year round.

Furthermore this work analyses the Arnaldo Pomodoro foundation in Milan that has also given attention to contemporary sculpture by keeping and valuing the works of its founder, Arnaldo Pomodoro, and spreading it through exhibits, congress and scientific publications. Pomodoro has instituted two vital organs which are the archive, that represents the mind, in other words the center of memories and of the artistic effort, and the exposing space that is the beating heart of sculpture, the possibility of meeting and discussion of works. This was possible by tracing back the origin of the Foundation (in 1995) and by presenting some of the exhibits that took place throughout twenty years of cultural and artistic activism. The chapter ends up with a consideration on parks and private collection on sculpture *en plein air* that in the last thirty years has gained relevant proportions especially considering that in *Guida ai parchi d'arte contemporanea in Italia* of 2007 about fifty five parks have been reviewed⁴. At the first it was necessary giving the definition of park-museum, garden artist and private recollection *en plein air* mostly because it was essential to understand if all this nomenclature refers to similar places or different ones. Once clarified, it was possible to underline the critical thought submitted to the birth of parks and private collections with some examples.

This work ends with a brand new case-study: the Parco della Rotonda in Viù, in the province of Turin, also called "Museo del silenzio e degli affetti" (Museum of silence and affects), which was not included in the guide of 2007 and in the critic analysis of the "Giardino dei Lauri"⁵ in Città del Pieve (PG) and that exhibits part of Lauro's collection never examined until now.

In the last chapter, the critical debate on the preservation and restoration of contemporary sculpture is examined, offering some examples made by GNAM on Pino

⁴ - M. Marzotto Caotorta, *Arte Open Air. Guida ai parchi d'arte contemporanea in Italia*, 22 Publishing, Milan 2007

⁵ to be clear the "Giardino dei Lauri" is both the structure in the closed park in which were placed about six five works by italian and stranger artists in possession of the collectors, and it also needs to be clarify that the works in the park are not something on which the artist operated directly in the open space, but the result of some staging choices made by the collectors

Pascali's works. The reflection on some examples of restoration was made by consulting scientific essays already published. Among the examples provided, there are some interventions on the works of "Stazioni dell'Arte" in the metropolitan stations in Naples, documented by original materials.