**The Body of Sculpture**

**In the Beginning There was Earth**

*Vittoria Coen*

As one enters the studio of Maria Cristina Carlini, one is immediately overtaken by the strength conveyed by her sculptures—a strength that has always belonged to her as a distinctive trait of her perpetual research.

The dawn of her career was marked by her work with ceramics, though she would later venture into other materials and techniques, and the challenges these pose, including wood, iron, resin, corten steel and glaze.

Carlini is a sculptress in the round, and this is perceived straightaway in her works. In them is an exceedingly personal exchange, an ideal embrace between air and material—a push towards the heavens—especially in her large-scale works. The artist is not afraid of challenges, and the unpredictability and surprise generated by the kiln. In fact, it is from this very immersion and emersion that the mystery of her structures arises. They are at once physical and mental—at times, enigmatic.

I am reminded of the inspiring essay written by Rainer Maria Rilke about Rodin, and his curiosity to experience the inner workings of man, as a source of knowledge, in order to better understand the sentiments that generate creation, without a sense of dependency. One does not necessarily have to coincide with the other. A child can be very different from their mother, and yet their relationship can be strong—very strong, even. An artwork is the child of the artist, but at the same time, it is also the child of art, which, in itself, is a restless soul. One is chosen by art.

Much has been written on the monumentality of Carlini’s works, which, albeit abstract, seem to take on the appearance of giants, of silent combatants in a sea of possibilities, a sea that is in a constant stormy state.

In Kantian fashion, we plunge into the complex of sensations. We analyze them, with a close-up lens, as we embark on a search for what amazes us and what terrifies us—in short, the Sublime.

Old recovered wood has a former life, with past functions. It is embraced by the creativity of the artist, who literally revives it and affords it new meaning and significance.

For Carlini, wood is like a second skin. She creates forms, allowing them to emerge from raw, seemingly inert, material. Hence, an old consumed door is transformed into a sculpture that is evocative of a contemporary altarpiece, with fragments of gold leaf.

The great energy released by Carlini’s sculptures catches us by surprise, like a sudden unveiling that elicits a sense of marvel, as if we were to see the works for the first time. We can touch them, pass through them, walk around them.

There is not a single vision, or a single point of view. They are frontal sculptures, regardless of the angle from which they are observed. And yet the perception of light and shape does indeed change. The unveiling is complete. The chromatic nuances and luminous vibrations enhance the energy and vital force of the material. All it takes is for one sunbeam to traverse the studio, or for a rain shower to wet the garden, and the material changes appearance.

For Carlini, the unfinished—that is, what makes her stop at a specific point—creates the possibility and prospect of another opening. Her ceaseless questioning, without seeking answers, leads to the outcome of continuous discovery. She faces the world without ever seeking closure.

It is no secret that the paths of the history of art have been long and winding. They have been charged with uncertainty, making them difficult to travel.

The interpretations of theorists and critics are, inevitably, made from a distance, but when the opportunity arises to meet the artist, everything changes. And this is the present case. The artist takes us by the hand and accompanies us, expressing her sensibilities and passions. The distance is thus removed, and we come out with greater empathy.

Maria Cristina Carlini’s expressive style is evocative. Her works are enlightened by titles which, on occasion, recall classical culture, while remaining terse in their apparent essentialness.

The artist’s international endeavors verify her desire to continually put herself to the test and confront new spaces and horizons without limitations or intimidations, thanks to the power of her ideas.

Air, water, fire and earth—the primary elements—are the vital nourishment of her relentless research, which explores solids and voids, pure geometric shapes and articulated constructions.

*Guardini del segreto* is a commanding and powerful work. Slender and charged with symbols, it reminds me of Stonehenge and its ultra-famous megaliths, whose existence continues to be a source of mystery. These harbor a relationship between man and spirituality, much like *Fantasmi del lago* and its undulating creatures that silently emerge, mysterious and unsettling, like the protagonists of a dream.

Among the many works in this exhibition at the Fondazione Stelline, one in particular is comprised of three tree trunks that surface from the shadows with a light that resembles a burning fire. We find ourselves in the presence of a material and archetypal elevation, as in many of Carlini’s works.

They resemble the totems of a lost ancient civilization, and yet they are extraordinarily contemporary.

The work *Scudi* is an admonition, the strenuous defense of liberty against the banal and the obvious, trends that exist even in the world of art, to which the artist opposes herself with all of her distinguishing resistance and intellectual honesty.

In the work of Maria Cristina Carlini, form is bent and subjected to the desire to continue the journey, like an exodus that makes its way farther from its origin and closer to the present. A new readymade.

What we have is suspended balance, tension among elements, a subtle clinamen that never stops surprising us.

Her sculptures are impactful living organisms, breathing between the heavens and the earth. They are somewhere in between, and they cannot be avoided. They are a warning. They are our preconscious. They are a Babel of languages. They are high-performance material.

We are unexpectedly greeted by two columns in space—columns like the discs of a spinal cord, which are anthropomorphic, in the figurative sense.

Plasticity and linearity, a strong relationship between technique and style, suggestiveness and assonance, emotions and spirituality, all repeat themselves, act after act, intervention after intervention, in a magical flow of a timeless alphabet. Despite being vigorous and heavy, these works have wings, as well as an alarming interior force. Every last part is imbued with emotional energy and absolute sincerity.

Much like other important artists of the early twentieth century, Carlini eliminates all rhetoric from her narrative form, working through formal subtraction, and attaining a greater conceptual complexity, while globally overcoming the concept of three-dimensionality. The strong cohesion among her works is like a symphony in which all musical instruments merge at an exact point, achieving a unanimity of sound. Without this sense of total equilibrium, the melody would not be efficacious—of this the artist is well aware.

Carlini’s passion, her crescendo of emotions, is precisely what we experience before the outcome, as we allow ourselves to be accompanied on this interior voyage.

At this juncture, it would seem reductive to speak simply of sculpture. Rather, this is a “breakthrough” of traditional space—a true reformation of the very concept of sculpture.