A sculpture by Salvatore Cuschera

From rags to riches.

Luigi Sansone

Nature has been a source of inspiration for art since prehistoric times, and this inseparable combination has continued to our days. Indeed, Nature has been the inspiring muse for great artists of the past and still holds significant importance in contemporary art, especially for a particular artistic style: Land Art. Land Art, which includes artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Richard Long, Robert Morris, Christo, and Jeanne-Claude, involves the artist's intervention in the natural environment, which becomes an integral and essential part of the artwork.

The works of these artists are directly created and imprinted in the landscape using natural materials such as stones (notably Pinuccio Sciola's sound stones), wood, soil, water, sand, and even wind that gives life to sound sculptures. The artist leaves their mark in an environment where, naturally, their work changes with the variation of weather elements and is meant to either disappear or be absorbed by the same landscape that created it.

Salvatore Cuschera, a highly skilled artist who has utilized iron, wood, clay, and fabric as the fundamental materials for his creations, has also ventured into experimenting with another element: cow dung, one of the most natural substances on planet Earth. Cow dung has been used for centuries in various regions of the world for constructing houses (such as the typical enkang dwellings of the Masai in Kenya) or as domestic fuel, particularly in desert or high-altitude areas where wood is scarce.

Cuschera created the sculpture *Magical Form*, 2019, in the United Kingdom, where this unusual "material" mixed with shredded straw and sand was often used to plaster the external walls of farms. This sculpture features a wooden core and metal mesh. Cuschera molded it using still-damp dung mixed with straw and soil, achieving the desired consistency. The resulting shape resembles a massive structure reminiscent of an ancient building, complete with side openings that allow light to filter through. It recalls the structure of a stilt house as it is slightly raised from the ground, or the ancient houses carved into the tufa of Cappadocia, or it evokes the power of Stonehenge and the sacredness of Uluru in Australia.

In *Magical Form,* the coating of Siena's soil, with its warm reddish tones, highlights rounded shapes and soft protrusions, some of which exhibit anthropomorphic characteristics echoed throughout the composition. These elements capture light, revealing the plastic and material qualities of this original sculpture-architecture.

*Magical Form* transports us backward in time to an abstract dimension of light and matter, where energies and phenomena dominate what science will never fully comprehend. This is because there are realities that lie beyond our deepest understanding.