**Maria Cristina Carlini. Le ragioni del luogo/Maria Cristina Carlini. Purposes of place**

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Maria Cristina Carlini’s work continues, intensifies and expands, becoming substantially more complex.

She surrenders herself to a wide array of inventive skills, an increasingly pressing visionary approach, and a sumptuous, emotional, poetically introverted and subtle reinvention that allows the creation of sculptures endowed with a detached intensity.

This is becoming more evident as in her works the essential reason and vocation of materials to express themselves in unique shapes prevail, in contrast to a degree-oriented education, consistent with the uncertainty of the ceramist’s imprinting.

Knowledge belongs indeed to the ceramist, but thought – as a building process – is here intended as a fundamental human act. It is like listening to the materials – being them as natural as possible, like wood, or as artificial and cold as steel – until the decisive eureka moment that enables them to become *place*, the purpose of their spacial trait where history, memory and the sweet longing for the passing of time meet.

In Carlini, everything starts from an awareness of the making process, which is her well-known primary explanation of experiences. To make is to be open to experience the material, to a surprise that is relived every time by listening closely, in a creative awareness of materials endowed with not only a past existence of shapes, but now also a past expressiveness of artistic uses with various evocative results that, however, are not considered influential: wood, in Brancusi, Di Suvero and Andre; steel, in Chillida and Serra and Spagnulo, just to mention a few.

Materials declare their shapes *in potency*, and Carlini rethinks them in a non-linear process until she can grasp the point of applicability and at the same time of transfiguration, their openness to become something else, image or situation.

Carlini’s artistic view does not involve a defensive approach in style, but every time she ruthlessly *questions* herself, starting again from the basics and nurturing her intuition, unravelling and deciphering it until its final completion becomes obvious: i.e. a work of art and, above all, purpose of place.

Since the 1990s the artist has always meant her *far di terra* (lit. making out of earth) as in the fundamental meaning of *aedem facere/to erect a building*, to build something reduced to its primal characteristics, its vertical feature and right place in space, its permanence and impermanence, discovering its limits and finding an opening, claiming an inside and testing its continuity or discontinuity with the outside.

Obviously, these are visionary inputs, where the poetic diversity of a place is rendered as a powerful physical presence, in the full acceptance and stimulation of the physical characteristics of materials. With them Carlini engages in hand-to-hand combat, an identity and energy transfer that inevitably summons the physical essence of the viewer, and makes sure that the sculpture does not establish a discontinuity with its space of existence, but affirms itself as an accident with a strong understanding of its living and feeling alive *here and now*: for the artist this takes form in the physical environment and experience of her workshop.

The process that brought about the birth of three of Carlini’s works from her bustling 2016 is emblematic.

*Guardiani del segreto/Guardians of the secret* develops from works like *Legni/Woods*, 2012, *Samurai*, 2013, and *Obelisco/Obelisk*, 2015, where pieces of salvaged wood are reinvented according to a formal mechanism that repeats their brisk assertiveness from the point of view of an iconographic dazzlement. The strong exposition of physicality, working according to creative thoughts – almost eccentric heirs of the Renaissance “*bilico composto*”/*complex balance* – and, above all, the continuous pursuing, through daydreaming elements, of the borders between the delicate aspect of nature and a subtle self-contained iconographic transition, all show the sweet fight Carlini submits herself to. Not only when she is making something, but also mentally towards her own work: her careful analysis of the shape she obtains - that is the first degree of the artificial affecting the natural – investigating the strong *shape* of metal, is also in the a-systematically way in which the artist lets surface the memories of a sprouting *vie des forms/life of forms*, through precise and intuitive steps. Just as, on a different level, art has unravelled these memories.

*Guardiani del segreto/Guardians of the secret* are an architectural ancestral example, a triumphal arch, a threshold between the extraordinary and the ordinary. They willingly and overtly reflect a passage of very contemporary culture, *Guardians of the Secret* (now at the MoMA of San Francisco),by which in 1943 Jackson Pollock challenged himself with the formal archetype, feeding on the artistic environment, ancestrally magic, of the art of the Native Americans. This happens neither through a direct reenactment, nor a reference, but by nurturing - in pure juxtaposition between the past and present physical characteristics of wood, and the minimalistic structure of metal – a complex mind-set, a vivid experience of form and place.

A different but solid case of transfiguring exploration, where the main role of architecture is strongly felt, is *Khmer*. Here what comes into play is the character of clay and sandstone: intimately colourful and decorative, naturally aesthetic, not devoid of enjoyable physical dissymmetry. The small columns created by Carlini, silent and graciously bristly, draw their creative origin from another fascinating display, a design among the highest, Khmer art, where architecture and sculpture greatly interact and combine as outcomes of the same concept of form and place.

In the Banteay Srei temple, the “citadel of the women”, not far away from Angkor, a series of small pillars, which are devoid of any purpose, rhythmically define fake windows, in a crescendo as per abstract patterns like in a very forced and theoretically infinite germination. That is the ancestor of *Colonna senza fine/Endless column* by Brancusi, and example of every truth that has been not only revealed, but also embodied into a sculptural being endowed with direction and inborn purpose.

Again, here is *Meride* where, as in *Khmer*, Carlini turns to her most deeply-rooted crafting soul, *touching earth*. The trigger is the wonder that is relived every time by reading into the Bausteine/building blocks, into the architectural building materials, the fossil imprints of another time, a natural and primitive time that centuries have subjected to an estranged *détournement.* The fossil is there embedded in the rock, grasping a time that seems to hold the entire history of the world, that the human being recreates by experiencing its extremes, its biological form – which is aesthetically layered as well -, and the modern device that makes this material the cell of another expression of forms.

The title tells of a place, Mount Saint George in the Swiss canton of Ticino, and of Meride, which is the heart of the canton, where the concentration of fossils is such as to be like a metaphorical natural inventory. This is the trigger of Carlini’s work: a series of slabs that become her very personal scientific collection of collisions, stratifications and happy accidents of form, and develop with a floor-like resemblance, the perfect abode for the human being, and at the same time into a situation that is internally elusive and surely indescribable.

One must not forget that these new works build their own distinctiveness on the proliferation - at a consistent low height - of the sumptuous *Crateri/Craters* that have always and relentlessly been expanding on the floor of the sculptress’ workshop. They were an explicit homage to Lucio Fontana and his being an historical point of reference for every modern way of using clay, a primary conceptual focal point between nature and manmade forms. Consequently, it becomes self-obvious how these new works fully embody Carlini’s absolute need for creating art.

Her magnificent, naive and frenzied *docta ignorantia/learned ignorance* in the face of art, her unwillingness to settle for biased thoughts and only one aesthetic expectation, her attempts at durability, intensity and perfection, that are not necessarily in accordance with the aesthetic canons. Her way of working, mostly a step at a time and without a compass, but with the certainty of what directions are not to be taken, and the sincerity of the soul that feeds her images in a compelling and continuous flow.

Carlini’s sculptures are real bodies that unmistakably, but without fuss, claim their own relentless necessity of being, the purpose in their forms as purposes of place.