

Spin-off#2, Une proposition de regard

Sylvie Coëllier, Promenade en sculpture. Concept = matière

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Text from the video lecture :

In response to the kind invitation made by Documents d'Artistes, I thought of speaking to you about sculpture through the works of several artists listed on their web site. I like sculpture because it is an art form that transgresses its definitions, or at least has done since Duchamp. Today artists rarely produce only sculpture, they use it for its three-dimensional aspects, for its way of articulating space, or even for its trans-historical solidarity as it is the oldest art form that we are aware of. For thousands of years sculpture was the act of carving into a solid and lasting material. Etymologically, to sculpt is to cut out, to carve. To carve was thus the appropriation of the brute form of nature that surrounded Man, it was to render it human yet also to transcend the human. In fact every technique involved a set of conditions that brought a specific meaning to the work produced. Today, for example, raw nature is no longer really found on every street corner. Nearly all everyday materials are transformed : wood is recovered, re-glued and made into MDF. When artists carve, they show how this transformation differs from traditional sculpture. *La Réalité* de **Noël Ravaud** (Nole Ravaud's Reality), for example, evokes the beginning of a marble sculpture, it could be Brancusi's « Kiss », a monument, a pedestal, but the ensemble is made from polystyrene that is crumbling away. Yet even when in polystyrene, a sculpture questions the object of reality for the viewer, more than a painting or a photograph does. Here Reality resonates like some form of weakness of reality : the word comes from a text written by a person suffering from schizophrenia and which is engraved in the material. We all suffer from some form of schizophrenia when facing Reality, it is always split between the material present here and now and our imaginary world, our fantasies, from the mildest to the wildest.

There is however a technique that is perhaps as old as sculpture, that of modelling in clay or wax : modelling is the other main technique traditionally used in sculpture, that which Michelangelo said is produced by adding to. Modelling clay evokes the fantasy of breathing life into the material, it refers to the myths surrounding the creation of Mankind, the golem, monsters as is shown here by **Dominique Angel**, with a certain form of the humour characteristic of many artists today which leads them to both using and to demystifying the myth at the same time. Clay is so very elastic, so manipulable that it can be used to reveal an expressiveness, an impulse, a deformation. It reminds us of childhood, of playing in the mud which so strongly resembles excrement, the teddy bear used as an outlet for our aggressiveness...

To make clay last, we discovered baking and invented ceramics which revealed itself as being highly functional. Ceramics have retained a certain craftsmanship, whether it is used for decorative or functional purposes. Here again it responds to our humour through a form of deflation : if the face of the artist, which here we have of **Saverio Lucariello**, has become an element of a still life, a sort of medieval gargoyle, it is an attack on the idea that art or the artist is superior, and/or a statement on the economic aspects of art as an element of decoration, of consumerism. To preserve the modelled clay or wax, moulding techniques were rapidly perfected using plaster and then, later, alginates or other polymers. Modelling was not previously considered as an art form, it was mainly used to produce several bronze statues of the same initial form: thus a reproduction or re-edition.

In our era, where everything can be reproduced, even genes, modelling brings out this reproductiveness. For **Gilles Barbier**, the modelling of his body reflects the notion of cloning, and even further here as the colour of the models recalls the wax anatomies of the 18th to 19th centuries that revealed the mysterious system of the organs to doctors and the general public. The ability we have today to reproduce just about everything enables us to guarantee the preservation of nature in small orderly, tranquil squares in a suitable Disney-world fashion, Hollywood style : but, as is often the case in art, one affirmation also produces its negation, and in producing his simulations, **Marc Etienne** reveals these, as fun and yet gratefully calm, open to nothingness, to loss through their very state of being artefacts: we can already see that the best part is being worn away.

One of the factors that has changed the art of the 20th century the most is, of course, the ready-made. In sculpture this is not often taken on as a question of aesthetic indifference, but through the way of exhibiting the work or through assembly. We can understand, after careful observation, what and how objects such as a chest of drawers or corks, for example, are made, because their origin, as this work by **Mijares** shows, is pre-industrial. On the other hand, their reproduction in industrial quantities manifests the craziness of consumerism. Yet most of the objects we have around us in our day-to-day lives have gone through many steps in the process of their transformation, their material is synthetic, how they were made is often beyond our understanding. They are artefacts that have distanced themselves from nature which is often summed up by us like a hunt for mushrooms. Here in **Emilie Perotto's** work they are carved out of pieces of re-glued MDF, and it is once again the consumerism aspect that is most important. The synthetic objects take over from our environment while sucking up our natural resources as these stumps and dead trees of **Laurent Perbos** suggest. Today's software and new technologies can certainly help us to rebuild what we are losing; landscapes, trees, the moon. Pierre Maplhettes' landscapes make us think that Man can always reinvent a poetic form of the artificial, in 3D, with trees that are losing their leaves, a mirror-swamp, a rock for meditation. But they are all very melancholic.

A form of assembling which does not use objects but materials that are already profiled has existed since the constructivists; planks, metal, elements of construction. A very efficient way of capturing relationships to space, and most of the time it is a way for sculpture to reflect on architecture or on what it contains. Thus *Utopia bianca* by **Christophe Berdaguer** and **Marie Péjus** re-activates, on a smaller scale, an object that invites reflection, the project of an Italian architect, which, in 1974, provided people with the plans for them to build their own furniture. The artists have built enough of them for the 400 families of a phalanstères as Charles Fourier had initially planned. Here we have the proposition that could enable us to

re-appropriate a way of living, a non-consumerist aspiration. With the sculpture built, one can dream of other worlds, universes, utopia. However if the artist or utopian, like every human, accepts a lop-sided world he risks building nothing more than universes that are shaky or without freedom, as **Alain Domagala** shows. We have devoted too much thought to the world from the wrong angle. The natural movements of the body have become repetitive movements in a fitness centre. The association of video or photography to sculpture authorizes the artist to include or suggest the living body as a sculpture within the sculpture. Here in the environmental work of **Francesco Finizio**, the visitors lying down are waited for under yellow neon lights, on the carpets of red rooms, there to share the dreams that they can hear in the black tube that crosses the space. In our world of simulation, under the neon suns, aren't these dreams no longer ours, or does the ensemble invite us to take time, to share other people's dreams ?

Here the sound adds a temporal component, a slowing-down, an attention. The introduction of the dimension of sound into sculpture is an approach that is being exploited more and more. Of course this is also due to the easy accessibility to means of reproduction and amplification. But there is also a specific affinity between sound and sculpture, because it is often through our hearing that we locate ourselves in space. One of the uses of sound in sculpture is to render us conscious of the strangeness of this space and its materiality, of its secret molecular continuity. **Pascal Brocolicchi** thus builds very minimalistic forms which evoke atomic energy or astrophysics' laboratories. His works capture the very low frequencies of the built environment and then amplifies them: we have the sound of material just as John Cage wanted. From the very first radio broadcasts, the constructivists were very interested in the invisibility of transmissions, and in the space of waves. In evoking the turrets that guarded the borders of Eastern Germany, **Bettina Samson** recalls this constructivist sculpture and the unfortunate future of its aspirations. The artist has given his « turret » a system that can capture the frequencies of planes flying overhead, in other words, spying on them and transforming the sound transmissions into luminous codes. It is true that a radio transmitter can be used in a more amusing and more random manner when the frequency is tuned to that of a canary that may or may not be willing to play along with it. Yet more artists, such as **Antony Duchêne**, prefer to invent sorts of new and paradoxically silent models of « Joke / Trick » phones: others conduct orchestras that reveal the unexpected quality of the sound of our kitchen equipment – here in a pressure-cooker concert produced by **Patrice Carré**.

To close our tour of sculpture, I would like to draw attention to another increasingly important aspect that is stimulating this field of art today and which may well be of considerable importance historically, that is the increasing number of women producing work in this field of art. Women have produced sculpture for a long time now ; we only have to think of Camille Claudel, Barbara Hepworth, and Louise Bourgeois. More and more gradually moved into this area between 1960 and 1990, artists whose work was particularly recognized after 1990. But since then, this slow development of the number of women working in sculpture has quietly gathered momentum in a very determined manner as can be readily observed in this region. Between 1970 and 1990 sculpture produced by women was often related to the body or to daily life. It still is today but often in a more playful and ironic manner. **Frédérique Nalbandian**, for example, renders homage to Rebecca Horn and Eva Hesse, yet the culture linked to the intimate aspects of the human body is slowly disappearing, as is the soap from which these pillars are made. Here, the bucket and the sponge, as in wood carving (in MDF), place the artist's work approach within that of sculpture and representations of the Feminine, but it is obvious that this belongs to the past. I would say that one of the recurring characteristics of women's sculpture that I find the most dynamic – because it is also the most playful – is the aggressiveness. For example, as we can easily see, many of Anito Molinéro's sculptures are made from plastic dustbins and show the female body, and the dustbin as the body of a woman body is something quite violent. The artist also attacks the visible signs of virile aggressiveness materialized by a car, for example. Here's another example. When **Mijares** picks up on Tony Cragg, it's to show that she can drink like a man and that the rainbow of her nightmare is made up of hundreds of those little soldiers that are so much a part of male culture. Sylvie Renno unceasingly produces works that are twisted or are cutting instruments : perfect replicas of the virile panoply of objects constantly shown on television in criminal series and soap operas : fortunately they are all made from cardboard.

I will finish this tour with a couple and with reconciliation in mind. I would willingly take *the Black Block* of **Christophe Berdaguer and Marie Péjus** and their *Desire Tree* as forms of metaphor of the impact that sculpture can have on the visitor. The Black Blocks represented here on an environmental scale and transposed into a sort of dreamt landscape are in fact rocks, or at least let us say that they represent rocks, in a way like those in a Zen garden, but these rocks would continually transpire a liquid saturated with components leading to anxiety. As for the *Desire Tree*, it exudes pheromones, that is to say those infinitely small substances that are so important in sexual attraction, or in repulsion one must also say. It seems to me that sculpture is like that, a very material and terrestrial substance (like stone and wood) which confronts the body, through its weight, mass and resistance to gravity, and at the same time it is something much more subtle, almost impalpable although quite real, something that attracts and provokes the spectator's emotional reaction, that seduces him sensually if not (quite) sexually and fills him with anguish, yet out of this seduction and anguish makes him conscious of realities he would not otherwise perceive.