

Achille Bonito Oliva, *Cagliostro, Speranza dell'Arte* in 'Sculture per San Leo e per Cagliostro', Skira editore, Milan, 1998, pp. 37-57

[...] Pomodoro's *Sphere* presents itself in all its considerable power: this three-dimensional sculptural form embodies terrestrial perfection, no less than the asperities of a landscape which has coalesced with historical events.

From an historical point of view, Cagliostro's century in fact set the superstitions that derived from its own limited knowledge to the task of judging his allusive and complex system of thought, and it thus condemned the breadth of his fertile and widely ranging speculations to the narrow space of the cell in the Fortress of San Leo. And yet Pomodoro's treatment of the floor of this cramped and tiny space into which the thinker was segregated now seems to equate the symbolic value and hermetic meaning of the Fortress of San Leo to those of the Cathedral of Siena, bringing to mind its mosaic tiling that dates from the 1480s. It was on this floor that Cagliostro experienced the torments of the final part of his life.

It was only in the course of the last of those years that the Catholic church, with its strange and maniacal perspicacity (Cagliostro was the prisoner of the church) arranged for the opening of an embrasure through which it was possible for the prisoner's eyes to catch a glimpse of a chapel: architecture was put to the service of a possible repentance.

But repentance for what? For his taste for the occult and the extraordinary; for his openness to wonder and fascination; for the pleasure of exercising the powers of mysterious gifts.

Pomodoro knows, by virtue of his inborn identity as an artist, the narcissistic side of such attitudes. He is well aware of the uses that art can make of the impostures of form, and as well of the verisimilitude of the language of sculpture; he knows how it's able to inhabit a world that shows no tolerance for innovational departures in the use of the image; how it's able to formulate ample projects that range beyond the narrow space in which they find their birth, be it the artist's atelier or the impostor's prison cell. So he descends into this place of imprisonment with both naturalness and apprehension (with a sense of identification) and sets his particular language to the revision of its architecture, both historic and existential.

Art disregards all personal tragedy and explores the spaces of human existence with a capacity for transfiguration that lies in the concreteness of a language which can both regenerate and absorb.

Pomodoro "absorbs" the straits of the place, the tragedy of the prisoner's segregation; his forms are a kind of diving bell that allows him to descend into the abysses of history. His language is an act of *pietas* with which to conceal the nudity of the space, starting from the floor which he covers with a mosaic in stone, lead, earth and glass, throughout the whole of the cell.

Pomodoro, who himself was raised in the Marches, intentionally regresses to his period of abstract expressionism; he's a special correspondent who ventures back into a history that requires the use, if he hopes to achieve its interpretation, of the entirety of the arsenal of his creative experience.

No matter how narrow and confining, an architectural space also consists of the brief distance from its floor to its ceiling.

This place must surely hold a record of Cagliostro's thoughts and dreams, of the vapors that surrounded an intelligence which even the Inquisition of the Apostolic Roman Catholic Church was unable to call to a halt. Cagliostro lay confined to his cot, yet his mind no doubt continued to fly into very great heights. Pomodoro here brings that bed of pain into formal visibility, in lead with a patina of whitish oxidations.

The lead speaks of the static position into which the thinker was confined; the oxidations correspond to the marks left behind by a body strapped into immobility by the violence of the inquisition, but all the while shaken by the illuminations of thought.

The flares of these illuminations rise up from the cot and flash out to beyond the ceiling, beyond the walls, into the outside world. Pomodoro shapes the path they follow into a thin and fragile constellation of transparent, aerial elements: a suspended, copper-red bird with a patina as dark as we can surely imagine the dreams of Cagliostro to have been.

The soul of the prisoner apparently takes flight on the back of the Kafkaesque insect/bird which thus gives visual form to the desire for escape, and as well to those metamorphoses of thought that hold the power to spring beyond all obstacles.

Pomodoro gives us a work that marks an escape from the condition of imprisonment, in stark contrast with the construction on the floor which can only be seen through the trap door: he gives us a concrete metaphor of the power of art as a force of emancipation that counters and annuls the constrictions imposed by existence. If the tools with which the social conventions of the past defended themselves from art and thought were a question of inquisition and confinement, those tools consist today of indifference and marginalization.

Just as Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnés* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art can only be seen, and to a limited extent, through a pair of peep holes, Arnaldo Pomodoro concludes his voyage of initiation to the Fortress of San Leo with the installation of a work of which one of the components can only be seen by peering down from above through the trap door of a prison cell. We thus experience a moment in which inquisitory surveillance and the contemplation of art are welded together into a single point of observation. Today's innocent spectator becomes the accomplice of the guards who were posted here in the past, and the culprits kept under surveillance are the adventurers of art and thought: Cagliostro and Pomodoro. But Pomodoro is able to invoke the terrible and ambiguous figure of an insect that turns into a bird that hatches its own metamorphosis from a Brancusian, cocoon-like form which is welded to the floor. This bird escapes through the window, and the prison cell turns into the laboratory of alchemical transformation. The Mediterranean insect/bird manages to take flight. Thanks to art, and to art's ambivalence. The bird's plumage is sharp and jagged, laden with the signs of Sumerian writings.

Karl Kraus reminds us that, "the artist is the person who is able to turn the solution into an enigma".

History offers ample proof of the acute obtuseness with which society, trapped in its own inability to achieve true understanding, has always attributed the status of reality to the metaphors of art and to the premonitions of the analytic spirit, thus licensing the persecution of their very intention to create new departures, convinced that any such novelties upset its system of values. In constant conflict with one another, creativity and the repression of creativity have afforded one another perverse and reciprocal recognition.

Here, finally, the sacrificial victims are reunited: the adventurer of forms with the adventurer of thought. Each is redeemed by the calling and destiny of his own creativity, which is projected into the distant future from out of the spaces into which it's confined by the present.

The three Dalmatian saints (Agatha, Leo and Marino) reached these shores in about the fifth century, on the search for a hermitage in which to pray; and they were later to be joined by Cagliostro and Pomodoro, the first in chains, the latter by his own free choice.

This counts as a demonstration of the existence of a circular path that unites religious contemplation with the spiritual contemplation of art, even while never canceling out the negative signs of imprisonment and incomprehension.

Arnaldo Pomodoro is a mild-mannered artist who belongs to the secular world, and it's precisely as such that he seems to repeat those last words of Giuseppe Balsamo, Count of Cagliostro: "Lend ear and show your love to a man who has come among you for the purpose of doing good, who patiently submits to attack, who defends himself with moderation."

Cagliostro, the hope of art.