

**Giulio Carlo Argan, *Arnaldo Pomodoro: il tempo e la memoria*, in 'Maestri contemporanei Arnaldo Pomodoro', Edizioni Vanessa, Milan, 1978, pp. 3-4**

The monument to Pietrarubbia and the project for the Urbino cemetery are to be counted among those works that, in an artist's full maturity, represent an overview and recapitulation of the whole of a past. Arnaldo Pomodoro comes from the Marches, from Pesaro; he lives in Milan, but has never severed the ties that connect him to his birthplace. He is carried back to it by nothing less than the central theme of his work as a sculptor: memory and time. Pietrarubbia is a village, now nearly uninhabited, in the Marches. Pomodoro has unearthed its ancient, modest historical events and made it the symbolic *topos* of his work. The monument is a great sculpture of which the various elements are movable, and it stands in its space like a time machine that grasps and preserves past experience, recording the invisible traces of the events which once occurred in that place. Those memories are translated into indecipherable signs, if only since Pomodoro has never attempted to illustrate or recount a story. He listened to the silent rhythm of time and expressed it in terms of space.

The project for the cemetery won the architectural competition which was organized by the City of Urbino. It is still not clear if it will ever be realized: in spite of its great respect for the surrounding environment, into which it harmoniously inserts itself, it has been obtusely obstructed by a few local notables who find it hard to swallow a transgression against the trite and usual typology of cemeteries, or to stomach feelings which are incontestably authentic, but not conformist. There are no architectural structures above the ground, but a sculpture within the landscape. A crevice—vaguely in the shape of a cross—opens in the gently curving hill, and within it are vaults for the dead. This is the profoundly Christian theme of death and resurrection: the earth is open to receive and accept the mortal spoils of human lives, but intends above all to preserve them, within the warmth of its own breast, in view of a return.

This is no question of "land art". It's a sculpture in the landscape, free of all megalomania. Its poetry counts as a Leopardian elegy on the theme of death and memory, nature and time.

The novelty lies in the idea of a cemetery as a crevice and furrow *en plein air*, and I have no hesitation to call it the most significant invention in the history of art since Canova's monument, in Vienna, to Marie Christine of Austria.

In retrospect, we are able now to recognize that the dominant theme of Pomodoro's sculpture is time, humanly and humanistically understood as memory. This explains how and why it comes about that a thoroughly advanced poetic should make use—in a period of general crisis in art's techniques—of a technology which is absolutely customary no less than up-to-date: the traditional techniques of casting bronze. For Pomodoro too, as for all modern artists, art is essentially a discourse on art, a process of research and analysis that examines its own structure. Sculpture found its origins and tradition as the art of the sepulcher: its permanence makes it the custodian of memory, the tangible image of history, and as such it stands on the threshold between the space of life and the limitless time of death. To analyze sculpture is to analyze the dimension of history which is intrinsically, structurally a part of it. [...]

Arnaldo Pomodoro's sculptural signs have also been said to resemble a cuneiform alphabet. They might rather be considered a code of which we have lost the key,

or that refers to an unknown language of which we're able only to reconstruct the rhythms, from the frequency and distribution of the signs in the epigraphs which time has seen fit to preserve. The pure visibility of the messages—even their tangibility—seems to complete their silence. These sculptural images, finally, are born from a region where space and time are indistinct, where their scansion and subdivision are superseded by their absolute continuity.

“Continuity,” moreover, is the name of the movement which Arnaldo Pomodoro, his brother Giò, and a number of other artists called into existence in 1961. Almost in opposition to Lucio Fontana's Spatialism, but implicitly reconnecting with it, continuity stood for temporality. *Arte informale*, or abstract expressionism, was then triumphant and seemed to mark a point that couldn't be passed beyond. At the antipodes from classic form and the no longer valid myth of the eternity of art, they turned attention to a new “beauty” that didn't reside in space and matter, or in the instantaneity or non-temporality of gesture. More than to the other members of the group (which, moreover, was highly heterogeneous) it was clear to Arnaldo Pomodoro that abstract expressionism was not at all a term *nec ultra* that could also become a new academy. It amounted to an historical position, of which the contradictions could be dialectically overcome. Matter continued, in fact, to present itself for aesthetic contemplation, and gesture continued to express a will to action. Abstract expressionism was the poetic of the fragment, and thus of laceration. An opposing poetic of non-laceration didn't lie in contrasting the fragment to the whole, but to a continuum.

But laceration is found all the same in Pomodoro's sculpture. Surfaces crack, just as with Fontana's paintings, indeed in a much more naturalistic way, since fissures take the form of a furrow or a crack in a shell.

Fontana's “spatial concepts” made no attempt to hide the deliberateness of the artist's gesture. With Pomodoro's sculptures—which likewise pursue a communication, between an interior and an exterior—the laceration results from the difference in tension between that inside and outside. It is therefore the only naturalistic element, and as such is empowered to discover the continuity of space and time. Finally, even, of life and death. The polished, luminous shell—spherical, cylindrical, or pyramidal—is a spatial symbol: its environmental counterpart is natural space, charged with light and the presences that swim in it; its plutonic counterpart is the cavity, the interior realm and the presences that inhabit its obscurity. The shell is space, or the present; the cavity is time, or the past. And the present is full of the past. The past is experience, the stuff of human life. [...]

Certain understandings of vital past experience can only be expressed, for Pomodoro, through sculpture. And this perhaps is the reason for which his work discovers its culmination, until today, in the project for Urbino. This sculpture in the landscape—this sculpture which finds its materials in nature, and which accepts and embraces the spirits of the dead—is the abode of human memory, and is therefore open to a whole community. The “monument” thus transforms itself into an act of collective devotion: a “voyager's column” on the scale of an urban community, in a place where at its start the urban community was truly a new Athens. Having completed their earthly journeys, voyagers reach this column, this goal, and there discover the history of the lives they have lived, written in cryptic characters of which they have left behind the key, in the world from which they have now departed. These groups of hermetic signs, repeated with slight variations, would be meaningless and charged with anguish if it weren't for the

hope (and the promise) of a possible return: the road just traveled can also be traveled in reverse, and anguish is dissolved by the consolations of the natural and celestial symbols construed by these containers with shining, luminous surfaces. This, we believe, is the eschatological message of Pomodoro's sculpture.

Pomodoro's spheres are reminiscent of the cenotaphs of Boullée and Ledoux. In that century of the Enlightenment, a people's civilization was judged on the basis of the solicitude with which its technology gave realization to the ideas of its philosophers, scientists and artists. Let's say exactly what we mean: Pomodoro's project for the new Urbino cemetery is one of the great ideas to have found formulation by an artist of our time. It is in harmony with the elegiac quality of the city's surrounding hills, and congenial to the Leopardian spirit that makes the Marches the holy land of the secular culture of our time.