

## The hands and thoughts of Antonella Zazzera

by Fabrizio D'Amico, 2010

For Antonella Zazzera, light is "the fundamental event within the work". Light, more than other feature (more than colour, though she now proudly claims to have obtained varied and multiple colours, through the different timbre of the copper spools she uses; more than matter, which was diaphanous and transparent, has now grown in her hands into a substantial body and volume), makes up the core and heart of her image. That light has a long history, expanding into the distant past of Zazzera's dense visual memory; she is perfectly aware of its paradigm axis proudly handed down over centuries: "when I work, I have divisionist painting in mind, the large canvases by Segantini and Previati, futurist painting, the light studies of Balla and Dorazio", she says; and she confesses her fascination when admiring a Caravaggio. Finally, she states: "In effect, I think of painting when I'm making sculpture". It's full, hearty light, sometimes pervaded with sunlight; sometimes it is tremulous and streamy: sometimes it is almost hidden, in the shadow of a fold, from which it is – one might say – waiting to leap out, startling the viewer.

She works with her thoughts, she works on the memory of her experiences; but Antonella Zazzera also works with her hands; and through that work, she seeks an emotion. This is the starting point of her image, which I believe must first seduce. Even before choosing a language, Zazzera chose to remain faithful to the febrile component in her method, which remains a crucial step for her, an unchangeable rite of passage: just watch her, or image her, bent over her looms to "weave" the copper thread, searching – patiently, almost blindly – with the large metal needle for the hole through which the thread will pass again, to tie another knot. It's this febrile choice that draws the work toward an abstraction similar to what could be called the "classic" dictates of sculpture; beginning in the late 1950s, with Burri's Irons, it proceeds intact, at least, to Carlo Lorenzetti. It is a choice, therefore, in a certain sense out of step with today's, very standardised panorama of sculpture, and its altogether foolish aspirations to storytelling and narrative hyperbole; a choice in an opposite direction, which still takes into account canons of form and those characteristics that define and qualify it – in Zazzera's case, mainly opposition, a generator of movement, of the concave and the convex, which she calls "curvature" and which sinuously moulds the material she uses, once it is freed from the rigid support of the frame and takes flight in space – establishing and qualifying it.

Aside from this approach to form and its intangibility, her sculpture reveals something quite different: deeply different, but without allowing the conceptual perplexity that derives from this diversity to affect the homogeneous way the image manifests itself. Besides the aegis of form, Zazzera's work reveals the intent to give shape to what she herself has called "the mysterious body and secret which is revealed only in part", a body enveloped in dreams and distance, as though born of – she adds – "a maternal womb". Thus Antonella declares her desire to adhere to that mode of creativity, feminine above all, which began with late-surrealism, was carried abroad by Louise Bourgeois, continued with Eva Hesse and returned to Europe in many variants of anti-form. This was originally theorized by Robert Morris, one of the fathers of minimalism, and includes some of the attitudes of poor art.

It's true that she has never attempted to imitate the sculpture of her predecessors: it would be a mistake to view Morris's work as the inspiration for Zazzera's Armonici; rather, it is her proximity to life, the connection she has with existence, that brings her close to the anti-rigorous poetics of eccentric abstraction. This temptation also applies to the big, compact surfaces of the largest Armonici: in any case, thinking of them in the open, extended on a meadow or vertically displayed on a tree, she admits to being amazed to see a blade of grass climbing toward the taut fabric of copper, bringing a breath of surrounding nature to the tetragonal perfection of the sculpture's form. But I feel a better verification in the series, of that anti-formal seduction, that dreams of enveloping its image with life – equally important though given in a more contained measure – is to be found in the works we might say are inspired by the idea of a nest, of a womb: works, which have an equally long history in Zazzera's imagination, and reveal a meaningful aspect of her creative intent.

Looking closely, those "nests" (which are also called Armonici, and which alternate in time with the larger works, interposing naturally, as though they sprang from a single idea) appear immediately alongside the others, and are perhaps their chronological

precedents. In the "nests", however, the weave is loose, extended, dispersed, as opposed to the dense, compact Armonici: and the movement generated is interflexed, condensed, almost a revelation of a thought turned in on itself. The space they generate thus becomes a secret place, a cocoon to be caressed gently, a little cavern containing the treasures of a sign, which in its isolation seems more inclined to capture dispersed filaments of light, rather than conveying it, as happens elsewhere in Zazzera's work, in ample sub-movements, in clearly identified bursts and lines. Gusts, rather, gorges arise from that fateful, almost reticent sign, which flies freely into the void (with the same knowing, nonchalant levity recognizable in the recent, resonant Sketches, faint charcoal on paper), errant, heretical, erotic.