

## **Antonella Zazzera: between form and eccentric abstraction**

*by Fabrizio D'Amico, 2008*

In an exhibition dating back to the 1980s, *Untitled*, re-proposed in the catalogue of the anthological arrangement in 1998 at the Villa delle Rose, in Bologna, Marisa Merz was an important presence. On the viewers' left, on the ground, next to a box of old cardboard, she placed coils of copper wire. At the foot of the wall where they were arranged, they formed a type of chessboard - innumerable small squares made from the same intertwined copper wire. (The ideation of a similar work goes back to similar squares, almost flying and pinned on walls of various colors at Athen's Bernier Gallery in 1979). In 1981, in another exhibition, (*A Moment of Copper*), next to a chair and a paraffin cone, a little ball of intertwined copper wire was suspended a short distance from the ground, so that much air could pass through it. Before and after those dates, and in other ways, Marisa Merz has frequently used copper wire (in 1978, Mario Merz also dedicated a text *Where Does Copper Comes From*, "Domus", No. 579). The use of copper is so prevalent that we must consider this material and the idea of weaving as privileged components of her work. In Antonella Zazzera's studio, it is difficult today not to think of Merz's precedent and her many years of work on copper and its intertwining. In Zazzera's studio one sees coils of copper wire, of very many shades and different thicknesses. These wires lie a little everywhere, innumerable and all neatly stacked. Her recent works come to mind, those born by the use of that thread.

However, the relationship, which is so textual at first appearance, is actually illusory. Merz's weaves are light and inconstant (almost indifferent, moreover, to merit naming the material which it employs. In this, once again, we take Marisa Merz away from that in Turin which spurred her artistic copper beginnings in the mid 1960s. Without that climate, we better understand her diverse intentions. There are repetitions in the space of the environment of the same tangles, of curling up and flexing upward on oneself, questioning and without project, of the same that inhabits her papers and paintings.

And the goal of its intertwining is, again, to encounter a form that ultimately occurs unpredictably, surrounded by expectation and mystery, and which, in the balance between surreality and abstraction, the boundaries will not be completely understood. Merz's images are born as an imagine in "a cave, a primordial cave, a womb generating forms, sensations, visual emotions", wrote Pier Giovanni Castagnoli. Those of Zazzera are, in my opinion, completely different.

The origin, which has been given some time ago, of Zazzera's sculptures that she has baptized since 2004 with the sole title *Armonico*, followed with a Roman numeration, is, at its beginning, entirely internal to formal motivations. It is an analysis, concentrated only on the material employed, carried out on the determinations that a centuries-old paradigmatic axis assigns to the plastic arts. Thus "lights, shadows, colors", according to the list which with the artist is in agreement, are the artifacts which are first woven. The materialization in them is that plastic change that Zazzera has identified since the beginning of her work, the pictorial context. It is a basic element which is essential and indispensable for Zazzera; she has named it the "Segnotraccia."

This cardinal element of the research first appears in the series of *Madri Matrici*, paintings realized on a light gauze, and destined to remain free on the wall, without the constriction of the frame. The canvas is covered with a dense layer of glues, tar, plaster and pigments, but the slow division of the surface space into minimal geometrical blocks subtracts those works from a neo-informal temperament. Moreover, it highlights the growth due to the methodic iteration of the sign. It looks for a rhythm of the image that almost seems to put itself in the trace of subterranean correspondences with the existential rhythm of their author.

Born soon after, from the *Madri Matrici*, the *Frammenti* are white and innocent. The *Frammenti* are small plaster casts that bear the marks that constitute the "figure" of the canvases. But - in their white purity - the *Frammenti* more openly

declare their non-involvement from an involved condition, emotional suffering. Beyond the fascination of canvases that the Madri Matrici have proposed for them, the Frammenti are probably Zazzera's first definitely mature works. In them, Zazzera pours some characteristics of making that profoundly belong to it. This will return in later years. The quality, first of all, of a rhabdomantic discovery of a secret and secluded truth that gushes underneath the construction of the work and which belongs together with the nature of the work itself and the creative pace of the faber. This identity is probably alluded to by Antonella, subscribing the phrase "the work of art is the artist" to some of her thoughts dating back to the passage of time between the two series Frammenti and Armonici.

Zazzera's overriding idea is the image of footprint impressed on the work by a part of one's being, a trace of one's own existence, or, better, one's own body. The contingency that this mental trigger gives in the young Todi artist through the medium of plaster, leaves open the hypothesis that a possible solicitation came to her from Paolo Icaro's work. If such, Antonella Zazzera has ultimately chosen to escape such a strong suggestion (or if, at least, it appears, set aside in the current work on the copper wire), it is due to the involvement of another and completely different medium, the photographic one. Through it - to be read as a preparatory transit to its final maturation and not as a self-sufficient and conclusive stage in itself - Zazzera has discovered, and embraced the heart of her research, the aegis of light.

Through the photographic shoot, in particular through the photograph of copper plates on which she traces "scratches, incisions and grooves", Zazzera places herself on the trace of that "mysterious and secret body that is only partially revealed". This indeed constitutes a part of the object of her research. At another time, Zazzera spoke of the "maternal womb", defining it as a place from whence her image flow. (Similarly, as we recall a "womb generator of forms" is, in the aforementioned words of Castagnoli, the "place" of Marisa Merz's imaginary). Zazzera's "maternal womb" attests to wanting to embrace that creativity, which is above all feminine, and followed from the late Surrealist ambient, crossed the ocean with the Bourgeois, continues with Eva Hesse and unravels in many European rivulets of that anti-form originally theorized by Robert Morris, by one of the fathers of Minimalism.

On one hand, the photographic practice is placed through the birth of the new "figure" that will govern the sculpture and attracts Zazzera to the context of what Lucy Lippard called eccentric abstraction. Additionally, some of its developments, according to opposite vocations, must be read in the current appearance of her sculpture. The idea of form, and of closed form, sinks its roots into that abstraction. Some words, above all, recur several times in Zazzera brief thoughts on her work: sign, light, and curve. And the frequency with which they return is enough to reveal how the formal determinations that they indicate have been essential in its long-lasting, and for a long time remote, laboratory.

The intended sign is a move from the auroral passage of the Madri Matrici, as a search for truth. It is its 'own' sign that can gather in its nature, in its coming into the world, the confession and one's unexchangeable imprint. In that way, the sign has indicated, before others, Guido Strazza. Light is a transit, surfacing, slow and inexorable, through a tight mesh up to the epiphany of the surface. It is as it was in Dorazio at the crest between the 1950s and 1960s, of Ghika and the Fire to the large tissue paintings. And there is the curve, in which all the "figures" of Zazzera's sculptures are flexed and abandoned, exhausted on the ground or climbing on the wall: opposing concave and convex, alternating wisely of momentum and arrest, while the skin of the sculpture, its braided copper, welcomes the vibrations and the reverberations of light. This has happened, for many decades, in aluminum and iron, and precisely in Carlo Lorenzetti's copper plate.