

Carte Scultura. The moment of free sign. A conversation with Antonella Zazzera

by Federico Sardella, 2010

AZ You see, Federico... how I behave now. For every paper I make, I keep notes, of its characteristics, the day I started working on it, the thickness and colour of the copper wire I use... I make a sketch of the structures and I take a photo. In the specific case of the work I'm showing you, I noted that it was made using two passages of wire, and thanks to these notes I know how many times I made vertical and horizontal passages, how much copper wire I used, in short... for me it's important to write down these things and keep track of how my work evolves.

FS Speaking of an image, on this side I see: a sedimentary weave of copper wires on which a sheet of paper is constructed. So tell me, when did you begin this new series of works?

AZ The initial project for these works began in 2006, and the works began to take shape during the month of August 2009. We drove around together in the car looking for a large container for the cellulose, in which we could immerse the looms... remember?

FS I remember perfectly, it was the days just before the August 15 holiday. Not many people were working, except us...and you wanted to give shape to what you had been slowly working on inside yourself, and you'd just experimented with making small pieces, to introduce some larger ones at the exhibition at the National Academy of St. Luke in Rome. From the moment you had the initial intuition of this possible turning point, until it really took off, more than three years passed. In those sultry days, driving around in the car, looking for a container for the cellulose, I felt your urgency and your irrepressible desire to express what had slowly matured.

AZ The results (the works) are recent. I waited a long time to make these Carte Scultura. I let the ideas that generated these new forms settle, and take shape naturally, without trying to hurry them along. Look, in this other sketchbook, I want to show you the drawings I had in my head. I did projects, and made a thousand sketches, I don't even remember on what occasion... the desire to do, and to experiment, drove me to continue, to look for other possible solutions. I'm showing you all this to let you understand what I put into it, to give shape to my intuition, and to work out a structure that would convey an idea in a satisfactory way. In the case of the Carte Scultura, it's an idea of breathing: a choice of breath.

FS I really like the word breath... and I think it applies, and distinguishes these sculptures you're working on. In spite of their obvious fragility, I think they have an autonomous quality and a robustness that your previous work, perhaps, didn't have... Yes, I think they're very autonomous and detached... suspended.

AZ Recently, I've been moving continuously from the constraints of form to its most unprejudiced freedom. This is a kind of dualism that's typical of me. I do something, and as a result I do its opposite, to free myself from something that enslaves me: to free myself from the constraints of form and technique.

FS The aspects of form and execution of the Carte Scultura are very interesting. In fact, it's a natural, deliberate evolution, which has led you to work within the same sphere, reiterating your forms and your feelings, always using copper wires. But it seems to be marked by a process of calcification... looking at them carefully, I know it may not be relevant, but the cellulose lining of the copper wire makes me think of the sublime works of Pier Paolo Calzolari, covered with ice, or rather, with frost, with the intention of using a material, in a manner of speaking, which though it's anonymous, absorbs light and space, and by depositing itself on a feather, for example, makes it become sculpture...

AZ I call these works papers, but in reality they are also sculptures. The title I've given each one is C/S, followed by some identifying numbers. The titles are very simple, but they indicate the possibility that these works have for sculptural evolution.

FS These works have allowed you to achieve one of your objectives, which is not to sew with sedimented wire... in this case, what holds it together is no longer the stitches, but the paper pulp, which supports the wires, stuck one to the other.

AZ The line is no longer interrupted... it's a continuous stroke. The point of suture interrupted the natural flow of the wire and the way it appeared to the eye. The path I'm following at the moment is design. In these works, the design is fundamental. In fact, it's about DE – SIGN... linked to the discussion of tracing Signs, something basic, archaic, not sculptural.

FS You're saying the "sign" you're interested in has nothing to do with sculpture... and I wonder: could this have to do with architecture? I don't know, but these Carte Scultura seem to me like architecture. They're also free-standing. The ultimate of architecture, then...

I want to go back a bit. I want you to talk about the sculpture you told me was the connection between the Armonici and the Carte Scultura... A work that belongs to the Armonici series, made exclusively with copper wires, in the classic vein in which you're accustomed to working.

AZ They are only two others, of type of sculpture in construction. They're pieces that need no further investigation or repetition. There's no need, as with Armonici, to delve into form, design or colour variation. These works mark a turning point.

FS What led you to work with something other than copper, using something more... In this case, cellulose pulp? Was it the forms you chose to show that suggested you use paper together with copper wires, or did some other factor influence this unusual choice?

AZ Liberation from form...

FS You say this sculpture was the starting point for what we're talking about, but it seems to me one of the most constrained and defined works you've done, even though it has very free and frayed edges...

AZ It's true, and that's why I looked for other solutions, trying to get away from weave and design... in any case, inevitably returning to design. It's no longer there in the Carte Scultura, the way it is in the Armonici, that vibration that comes from the obstinate intersection of the wire. Now I'm emphasising the horizontal and the vertical. The division is clear. The de-sign is clear...

FS Was the choice to use white paper pulp dictated by the need to do away with the clamour and glare of the copper, its luminescence and its precious quality?

AZ No, now more than ever I try to make the sign evident. I try to bring it out as much as possible. It's always a sign of light, but I play with light differently, it's quieter and sublatter. I want you to see what comes from the sign, and the texture of the paper, which only serves to reduce the shininess of the copper. But the trace of light remains... I downplay the glare of the copper, but at the same time I heighten it, in an attempt to achieve a natural light, without vibration, with movement generated by lines and gestures.

FS Now I'll tell you what I think when I look at these structures... some seems, absurdly, generated by brushstrokes, by the gesture a paint brush presumably makes. The different directions of the brushstrokes find a point of focus, where the lines are superimposed...

AZ The brushstroke is the sentiment that inspires many of my works...

FS And where will this choice lead you?

AZ I don't know where it will lead me now. I can only tell you that I feel a strong need to work in this direction as well, and to cultivate this possibility of breath that I've given myself.

FS In a way, it seems that though you always work in the sphere of sedimentation, you've moved away from mass, from thickness, from the tangible, in favour of a corporeal presence, but which is not spectral...

AZ I'm looking for pure sign, a presence not dictated by matter, but by sign.

I intend to continue my research, linked to Armonici, to their natural development, which involves me and stimulates me to produce them always different. But I also want to continue working more and more with Carte Scultura... Now, for me, this is the moment of de-sign.

FS Tell me about the shadow the Carte Scultura inevitably cast on the wall. Are you looking for it? Does it interest you? How much does interest you?

AZ The shadow is an extension of the work, which determines a time change. As I must have told you in the past, every one of my works – we mentioned it in our first interview – is like a time machine. The shadow determines the work, it modifies and characterises it. I'm interested in the sign, the trace and the light. And, in dealing with light, I can't help but be interested in shadow. I manage the shadow, I govern it, and by illuminating the works in a reasoned way it becomes part of the sculpture.

FS Not even the shadow cast by the Carte Scultura is left to chance, then... Is the casual element (amazement at what is achieved) part of this series of works, or is it all calculated?

AZ I calculate everything. It's difficult in the beginning, but once I've gained confidence or mastery of the technique, once I've got into a system, I determine the flow of the current and I dictate the rules... in the beginning it's casual, but I try to develop mastery of the artistic material, I try to be fully aware of the effect I create. That's also why I put everything in my sketchbooks: to have control of my gestures, past, present and future...