

Antonella Zazzera. The Origins of Thinking

by Federico Sardella, 2014

Antonella Zazzera was born in Todi. She works in the big house she grew up in.

She lives with Marco, near her parents and grandfather. Her studies inflated year after year, along with her personal growth, and the manner and evolution of her work. Studies and life intertwine, overlap, and the storehouse that once held harvest are now full of frameworks, reels, and various materials.

Antonella works every day. Not a moment passes in which her procedure isn't driven by her work needs, whichever they may be. Naturally, the flow of her work is determined by the seasons. Because of their size, the large copper Armonici must be finished outside, thus in fair weather. While the frameworks and their copper bases are assembled in winter or spring, the Carte/Scultura are finished in summer, to allow the cellulose pulp that reinforces them to dry as best as possible. In the shade of a linden tree when the sun is shining or by the fireplace when it's cold, every day Antonella carries out what is needed according to her method. Actions that are renewed with every repetition, controlled to the point where, as she declares in a 2010 interview: "I calculate everything. It's hard at the beginning, but as soon as I gain confidence and fluency, as soon as I'm in the system, I am able to determine the flow and make the rules... In the beginning everything is casual, but I attempt to master the artistic material. I want to be completely aware of what I'm doing. That's also why I record everything in my notebooks: to have complete control over my actions; past, future, and present..."

A profound awareness of her work arises from these words, and a capacity of listening to the being's most pristine side, conscience of one's dimension, of our origins and our becoming, of the importance of actions and materials: body and gesture of ideas; harmony between reason and instinct, generated from the dimensions and the mannerism of the artist. "My works and I are one and the same", Antonella explains. The art is the artist, and, through Segnotraccia, they form a tight bond. "What I feel, what I am, and what I live through all reflect completely in my works, on their surface and deeper, in their entire being".

The creating process of a piece, slow and meticulous, contemplates contrasting and alternate phases. There is a primordial, mental aspect, of conceiving the piece, which can be verified in notes and sketches scattered throughout her notebooks that collect thought that would otherwise have been lost. There is a gesture, a gradual growth and development of the piece, which gains weight naturally through a process of sedimentation of the material in time and space. This starts from a single thread of copper that doesn't get tangled - a practice that takes place during the weaving phase and doesn't concern Antonella's work - but instead is overlapped, thus determining the evolution and shape of the final piece. In the end, is the moment of conception that corresponds with a sort of separation from her work which, freed from the framework that constricted it takes on its final form and is "born". Both the Armonici and the Carte/Scultura require a structure to support them while they're being built. In other words, a vehicle designed to compress moments of stillness and tension into the material, that are the same and that will continue to rule Antonella Zazzera's vibrant surface over time, making them live independently and autonomously.

Once they've been "given to the light" (strictly meaning: "having been born", but also "having been placed in the light..."), once they've been rendered autonomous creatures, time and space, fullness and emptiness, shade and light are added to these sculptures, which live off of the material from which they were fashioned. These non-physical substances present themselves as such, and allow the sculptures to fully live as lyrical and unforgettable beings.

Between construction and intuition, at the basis of Antonella's work there lies the necessity to shape the material, to order and organize it, to transform it into pure energy. "The energetic potential of the continuous motions of the being in

nature is shaped by the curve, the highest expression of cosmic harmony and the only possible reality: "Man in harmony", the artist specifies in a text from 1999/2000. Again, she adds: "The continuous succession of a code is the only principle of affirmation of new rhythms of life in constant progression, the source of a new development is evident in its curved nature: the size of the new all-encompassing way of the artist". The tenacious search for this "harmonic dimension," the only possibility, takes the artist back to the centre of the piece, reaffirming his or her fundamental role of demiurge, or alchemist, and implies a total fusion between art and life which I believe to be at the basis of Antonella's work. To visit her home and her studio, as I have done regularly for about ten years, is an unusual experience. Unlike paying a visit to an artist with a "usual" studio, or in a big city, to pass a few days with Antonella means having to deal with her way and her world, all-encompassing and limitless, whose clutches reach the remotest parts of our being, and permanently modify our thoughts and behavior, leading us and teaching us an insight of sorts, into the balance between awareness and enjoyment of one's work, including travel and rapture, between a superficial perception of the object and deep understanding of the logic that determines the secret intelligence of its presence.

In this workshop, where the eyes have no rest and become restless and alert, urged by details, fascinating by the big picture. Time expands, so as to be devoted to work first and foremost, using every hour of the day. Pietro Dorazio, whose textures – improperly called patterns and that he himself described as "sedimentation" – may be happily matched to Antonella's, focalize on his life in Umbria. In a 1993 text he asks himself: "how have I worked for so many years without realizing how much time had gone by? To whom do I owe this miracle? [...]" Here the notion of time I clear; it is defined by the passing season, the direction of the winds, the clouds chasing each other, the frequency and amount of rainfall, snow or hail. Here, even the most accurate watch can be thrown away. Just like in ancient times, we observe the sky clearly in the morning, follow the flight of birds, and are able to guess almost the exact time. [...] But what do intellectuals and artist see here? Clearly, like me, something they have always been looking for. Maybe it's that balance between living, doing, and meditating that I describe earlier, an inalienable right that our civilization seems to have forgotten.

A forgotten good, put aside by the frenzy of modern life, neglected in favor of frivolous achievements, empty shapes, spectacular and devoid of content. This balance that Dorazio hints at is the same one which Antonella Zazzera lives off. In her strewn notes, the physical expression of the mental side of her universe, specific keywords reoccur: Incessant movement... Active generator... Motion of the being. Again and again, the curve is used, the highest expression of cosmic harmony and the only possible reality: man in harmony.

The curve, its deepest meaning and many of its possible declinations, characterize all of Antonella's decisions and sculptures, all of the textures and gestures which she leaves. The curve for Antonella – sensual and mysterious, blinding and invincible – is lush and abundant, just as with Paleolithic Venuses. It's multiple and complex, like the Baroque façades and Bernini's sculptures, it's clear and fleeting as in Merardo Rosso. And then, by looking closely, carefully observing Antonella's beloved possessions, which she surrounds herself with (a strip of tree bark, a frayed log, a birds nest intertwined with copper thread, some old construction tool, a rock, a skein, a stick...), and which may be seen in this book, photographed by Melina Mulas – a sort of inventory of the ordinary, a collection of thresholds that reveal the origin of Antonella's work – in them, we may find the same trends and parables, the non-straightness and natural roundness.

And then, back bent on making changes, its motion as a function of relentless diligence, all aimed at fixing light on matter, impressing within it the meaning of life, of being a universal becoming, curved and harmonious.

And then, exiting the studio and facing the endless countryside, interrupted occasionally by man's traces, more curves: ancient ones of the soft, consumed landscape, like cables whose tension has been reduced in the years, the precarious ones, destined to be modified, left in the ground by a tractor, the ones that in one continuous motion ripple over the surface of water, the ones in sunflowers, destined to renew and repeat themselves, fruits and filamentous branches.