

Tre: The Resonances of a beautiful Lithic Harmony

First of all, Tre is the wonderful meeting of three men sharing the same mistress: stone. Rather than being rivals, they decided to become friends and even companions of creation. This trio should be considered as the fruit of an exchange between three ways of seeing, three different vocabularies nourished however by the culture of marble. It is composed of the late Cesare Riva (1943-2006), Michele Benedetto and Ray L. At the time of its first touring exhibition in 2003 to Luxembourg, Belgium and Italy, the trio's works enchanted a very large audience with spectacular achievements doused with deep emotions. This new opus, the first act of which is to open in Milan before stopping in Pietrasanta, Luxembourg and London, is a splendid opportunity to celebrate the memory of Cesare Riva, who will live on through his sculptures, his writings and his poems. Milan-born Riva travelled the world for his personal education and to feed his insatiable inspiration. He kept an eye on the avant-garde but also on archaistic expressions, influences which he will incorporate in perfect symbiosis in his works. Most remarkable of these influences is undoubtedly that of love, the love of life, the love of art, the love of words. If Riva joined Thanatos, Eros was always at his side in life.

Marble was his invaluable ally in order to give life to a repertory that was metaphorical and poetic, erotic sometimes, and always of a remarkable intensity. "Behind each great man, there is a woman". In the case of Cesare, there was Lina whom he sadly lost in 2004 after 34 years of an impassioned union. She was his muse. He dedicated this marvellous poem to her on the occasion of their 25th marriage anniversary: "Not posso misurare quanto you amo my tanto amo the amore E godo pensato has quanto Ho consumato E consumero idiot you di questo amato amore"

All is love in the art of Riva, happy or unhappy, consumed or platonic, although his works often

evoke the loneliness of man towards his destiny, the search for happiness. More narrative and evocative than those of his two accomplices, the sculptures of Cesare Riva are a tribute to the miracle of life, to the mysteries of the origins. An amazing force emanates from his works that are radiant with archaic light. The carved object almost becomes a totemic fetish erected for some mysterious divinities. Cesare Riva, who was a follower of direct cutting, knew how to animate the surface of matter with great science. His confident rough-hewing revealed the block's depths better than anyone else's, before finally giving birth to the form, the eternal and fleeting moment of a privileged discovery between stone and a creator. Faithful in Love as in friendship, Cesare Riva has left all who knew him imperishable memories, in particular his two friends who have decided to continue to associate him to the future projects of the collective "Tre" in spite of his disappearance.

"Tre" also was born thanks to Michele Benedetto. Established since 1973 in the sculpture stronghold of Pietrasanta, Michele Benedetto is one of these artists who is attracted to and fascinated by monumentality. He likes to give his works extraordinary soaring and verticality. His control of size, the choice of ambitious sizes but also the originality and the quality of his sculptures have made him famous very quickly throughout the world. Rhythm and contrast are the slogans of his production. Voids face solids, soft curves match sharp edges, inviting the light to play on surfaces, to slip away or be caught.

Michele Benedetto lets his sculptures invade space and interact with the external environment. For the artist, thinking about how to intervene in space comes down to wondering about the possibilities of working on matter. As a result, the shapes are simplified, purified, geometrized. They are far from rigorous and easily read.

When I was introduced to the third musketeer of the collective, Raymond Lohr (aka Ray L), at the 2001 Luxembourg Artistic Circle Exhibition, his sculptures stood out immediately

to me as a work of great boldness and at the same time of great spiritual depth.

In the eyes of Ray L, stone is indeed more than simple material. It is the quivering flesh of an internal life that the tool bites revive. Didn't François Rene de Chateaubriand write that "sculpture gives heart to marble"?

And if we could, like Ray L, converse with stone, listen to it, look at it from the moment of prospection for the block in the quarry, it would give itself over to us plainly, give its best to the sculptor. The relation which Ray L keeps with his favourite material is indeed carnal and sensual. He has the heart of a craftsman. Let us not forget that he intended to become a carpenter when he was young, so his first love was for wood, a very demanding material, but also terribly bewitching, just like stone.

If his work on marble sometimes approaches a physical union, the sculptor never seeks to block it, to choke its expressivity, or to impose on it effects unworthy of its nobility. Quite the contrary. After a long phase of reflexion and analysis of the block which faces him, Raymond Lohr develops a language of a rare elegance. The sculptor delights in this dual and bipolar approach of the matter, sometimes playing with a range of geometrized shapes looking like monoliths and steles with sharp edges and rough surfaces, sometimes playing with an organic repertoire of full, smooth sensual curves which invite our caress. What a pleasure for the eyes and the touch brought by the folds, ridges, and grooves that the tool draws in the marmoreal flesh when skilfully guided by the hand of Ray L!

What we see here is more a scriptural act than a sculptural one. The artist makes the stone speak, underlines a vein, a movement of force and so reinforces its intrinsic qualities. His discovery of the secular and well-named site of Pietrasanta had on him the effect of a quasi mystical revelation. That is how he became a sculptor of spirit, seeking only essence in the stone, being encumbered neither by decorative devices nor grandiloquence.

He exemplifies the humanistic artist, full of intensity, sensitive to the evolution of our society and our world, humble, curious and open-minded, just like those who strolled in the quarries of Pietrasanta in the Renaissance. Under the impulse of Cesare Riva, Michele Benedetto and Ray L, "Tre" became an epicentre of emulation, confrontation, and comparison. Temperaments of such a different nature and such wonderful hearts could only write in the marmoreal range the resonances of a beautiful lithic harmony.

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