

## A LINE PRECEDING ANOTHER LINE

Manlio Brusatin

It is well known that sculpture needs support. The pedestal is the negative part of the sculpture which stems from it and constructs its natural suspension, its existence. Whether small or large, a vase stands in place of the earth and with its volume and structure is the support on which any plant, whether branching out or spiralling, fleshy or skeletal, geometric or sinuous, is. I am referring to the normal reaction of an observer to sculpture confronted with its becoming "sky", its becoming "earth", and to what sculpture is in relation to these: the original alphabet and verb of sculpture. The base or pedestal is a fundamental condition of the architecture's being, or positing itself, so much so that James Joyce in the only comedy he ever wrote, *Exiles*, spoke of that *genre* of sculpture-monument which had invaded squares and cemeteries and where every human figure, frozen in its more or less illustrious statuariness, denounced an insoluble conflict with its own pedestal. If the statues could speak, this way of "standing" on the part of statues and personages could be summed up in two phrases: "Please let me come down from my pedestal," or "In my time the gaze arrived up to here, to the level of the pedestal." For the statues and for those who looked at them this was the most cruel punishment.

And here, with knowing irony, Antonio Catelani displays a special attention to that dividing line within which a plastic structure is placed. Some lines and end points are drawn like a theorem in the heart and veins of marble and stone. But this originally sculptural creation "looks for" and adheres to an architectural wall, drawn like an end point, a perspective background, a vertical or inclined pedestal.

His universe of lines, conceived and traced according to symbolic directions, composes an architectural wall where doors and windows have been walled in, making visible the outline of the inner arch, of the door jambs and thresholds. The result is a space that is real although it cannot be trespassed, where it makes sense to arrange a cosmos of lines or tray-like, frame-like, mirror-like surfaces in which Catelani loves to seal and chain that arabesque, a marvellous, motionless abyss, a mirror eroded by the images that have fallen within: of that picture of stone that one perceives in the "Sienna yellow" marble, which gives a unique and primeval form to a still life, stratified within not less than some ten million years.

These "pictures" assembled and cut like set gems are lined-up by Catelani against a wall prearranged in natural architectural structures: a "hall of wonders" where completely artificial things are suspended as altogether natural, and natural ones that seem artificial with the mirrorings and resemblances of an art that apes nature and a nature that follows the laws of art also in order to seem more natural. Listen to the titles: *Opera Incerta* (Uncertain Work), *Canone Variabile* (Variable Canon), *Tipologia* (Typology), *Pendant...*

To create the space that is behind, as well as the soul of that which is hung and suspended in front, Catelani pays attention to those cutting lines which separate bodies but give them their instantaneous definition: just like cutting a sheet in order to outline a ghost, or shaping and folding it within a cage in the form of a grid of empty spaces hosting flexible materials.

Furthermore, in order to pursue the shape of a mirror and after repainting it in the mirroring material so as to plunge it again into the opaque-transparent substance of the surface of the painting, Catelani cuts along the line of a hypothetical frame the form of a panoply or of an emblem that has been etched and carved in an unrecognizable coat-of-arms at the imaginary borderline of its ancient history. In fact, we stop and interrogate these emblems placed over the doors when we notice their utter destitution, when they have been abandoned by the eagles and the stars that held them high in the history of the family that upheld them. Now everything rests within the eroded confine of a shield that has taken on the appearance of an obliging devil. The carved stone has slowly ceded to the labyrinthian path of the hygroscopic termite trained by that artist that time is said to be. Antonio is aware of this deterioration and decay of time which he recomposes and salvages with the firm outline of a meridian, of a frame or ornament which has been covered up by the proverbial seven-times-by-seven-layers of whitewash like the skin that a room's interior preserves for the living who happen to pass through it.

His *Pendant*, authentic clippings of small and large lost universes recomposed in the contours of an arabesque, could, like linear tiles, cover the roof of this large house of life revisited, with doors and windows immaculately walled in. Thus the *Golem's* house, the serviceable automaton of which Gustav Meyrink speaks, came to life very much like a human being taking on the form of an old overcoat made of dust and soot, born once upon a time from the clay debris left by God at the end of His creation.

Antonio just loves this story which precedes history; like that image that precedes the image and that line that he wants to trace stretches like the string of a bow: the arrow that precedes the arrow.