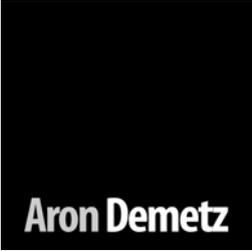


Aron Demetz

ARON DEMETZ

As a sculptor you have to love loneliness. You can live in a remote place where the news only get through occasionally and you never know whether they are true or whether they are only figments of the imagination, nightmares or dreams. This is how the sculptor lives between his home and his studio, where he realizes his desire out of wood. More than a painter's work, which exceeds in the number of appearance, the sculptor's work creates astonishment, it evokes revealing. Stone, earth and wood contain shape as well as life. Living in a place surrounded by mountains and woods, Aron Demetz enlarges the world of his emotional life. They are young people, children, friends. Demetz has seen them, spoken with them. They are the people he meets everyday, they are the daughters and sons of the neighbours who share the same air, the same hours, the same rhythm of existence. Demetz remains in the tradition. In Val Gardena shapes have always arisen from wood and Demetz feels that there is a soul hidden in the wood: this is why he tempts it, he searches and extracts it with a sensitivity that others have thought to find in pious works, in figures of Christ and the saints, dictated by an iconography that is proven and worn out. In a wondrous way, Demetz finds souls in the wood, frightened and intrepid souls that are fully aware of their beauty and integrity.

They look at us..., unmoved, without agitation, without concern and uncertainty. The faces are supple and their shape just crimps on the head to give the short hair back its volume (Black and White). Demetz accompanies the grain of the wood with a light opalescent colouring, but then, suddenly, he returns to the adolescence its flush and at the same time its integrity. The head arises in perfect proportion on a black bust with a graceful sculpted neck. The invention is perfect with the folded arms that bar the closed figure even more. It is a picture that has been regained after many fragmentations and a laborious research of shapes and it finally reconfirms the simple measure of the body. Demetz rids himself of a hindering past, of every situation of doubt and thus arises to a picture that cannot be brought back to any former one. He does not know the restlessness of a Vangi. This virginity of the regard has recently been taken up in Giuseppe Bergomi's painted terracotta or in his bronze works, whereas, far away from Italy, the Japanese Funakoshi, a far and direct teacher for Demetz, has elaborated polychrome works in wood. Demetz's lesson is perceptible in the two nudes with shoes (Red shoes), which are put on a large plinth that creates an expressive counterbalance. But when he does not experiment with nudes, as in the beautiful and virginal girl that holds a sparrow in her hands (Dead bird), Demetz insists on wide, almost abstract and barred shapes in perfect coherence with the plastic structure of the faces, sculpted and polished, maybe only animated by the movement of the hair. Out of this doctrine derives the couple of father and son (Father and son) that looks askance at each other in a contrast between the sharpness of their heads and the compactness of their bodies, but also the girl with the parrot on the head (Telling stories of nonsense) with the pullover in a beautiful red or the credulous postman (Why doesn't the post arrive?) with the shoulder strap bag. The most accomplished work of this series is the woman in black (Oblivion), that has been made in more executions, a very successful invention both in its proportions with the lengthened body and in the strong opposition between head and body, to finally culminate in the definition of an austere picture of strictness and isolation from the world. Defence and resistance are recalled by the dress that is similar to a uniform and which represents a further development of the young girl's tight dress... Emily Dickinson's verses could match this picture very well: "The soul selects her own society, / then shuts the door; / on her divine majority / obtrude no more. // Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing / at her low gate. // Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling / upon her mat. / I've known her from an ample nation / choose one: / then close the valves of her attention / like stone." Demetz is never illustrative, never pleasing; he never makes a concession to ornaments. He always looks for the essential, his sculptures are sculptures of the soul, intrinsically lyrical; their natural condition is loneliness, even when they are in a group, even when Demetz approaches the theme of the family and represents a father, a mother and a son on the divan (Divan) in front of their television, each one concentrated on his own viewing. Demetz searches for the melancholia in the eyes, as for example in those of the boy stripped to the waist and the hands in his trouser pockets (My father wanted a son). He is one of the young people that vacillate between melancholia and purity. Purity, integrity, melancholia and astonishment are the psychological conditions that he analyses. In the look of the young girl with the white shirt there is



Aron Demetz

innocence (Otherwise I'll kiss you). In the little Maren (Good morning uncle Willy) one can observe the transition from the child to the woman; the body slightly alludes to the curves of the breasts whereas the hands try to protect the nakedness. But the head with the blue eyes speaks of an everlasting sadness, of a melancholic character, of a predisposition to sadness. Demetz doesn't need much to track down without emphasis and insistence the mental states of masters like Soutine, denying every declination of expressionism. This is even more surprising because Demetz's deep and prevailing nature is apollonian. This is why he tracks down without rhetoric the purity and the gentleness in the nude of the young girl who is holding a wounded bird in her hands. She appears to be the ideal partner for the naked boy with the rag doll (Company), both signal a sudden interruption of the games, a resumption of attention, a recall of conscience. All these youngsters are restless or light-hearted, very pensive or sometimes intangibly distressed, as for example the one that in a three-quarter bust bows his head, almost as in prayer (Memory of the mother). The spirit of the figures seems to be a direct consequence of their innocence and not a consequence of a vocation or a choice, as shown in the priest (Sin collector) with the purple stole, that takes on a rather helpless attitude in an inclined position, like an examiner of conscience. Demetz uses a different code to represent restlessness or sin, the transition from a girl to a woman. Next to the strict woman in black (Black and White), Demetz also matches himself against the curious woman with the parrot on her head (Girl with parrot), peculiar idea in which there is an opposition between the simplicity of the figure and both the fall of the folds and the most natural pose of the feet. When Demetz exaggerates, this only happens because he is afraid of the simplicity in which he outstands, a capacity of feelings and shapes. This finds its realisation in the successful invention of the woman (Chiara) whose hair partly covers the face, cutting her eyes. The lost innocence seems to give way to cunning and sin. Or, maybe even to remorse. Sure, a painful wrinkle emerges from the smooth traits of her face. This intuition goes back to the source of the elevated and at the same time very human classicism by Francesco Laurana. To translate these sublime forms to a bourgeois language is at the same time inevitable and frustrating, and it represents the disquiet of sculptors like Francesco Messina, Ernesto Ornati, Giuliano Vangi. Demetz looks up to them, attempting to achieve a linguistic simplification and a difficult research of the essential. In this sense and even in the most halting choice of topics he has a forerunner in the lonely and still underestimated sculptor Bruno Innocenti, whose works of art are also partly in wood, which is not often the case in the Italian tradition. But Demetz's strength lies in the untarnished look, in the exclusion of every direct reference, in the denial of all imitation and the research of a pure form that is not only pure in itself, but also free of history and tradition. Thus, he seems to reach his absolute boldness with the most recent girl on the divan (Divan 2). It is such a current picture that it verges on pop art aesthetics. But the huge divan, on which the small girl appears to be even lonelier, is not an ironic element like those of a Gnoli, but it is a naturalistic reference meant to underline the girl's forlornness. The girl's feet don't touch the floor and her hands lightly rest on the sofa as equivalents to her inner gentleness. The girl's measuredness, her immovability and the stiffness of the lost gaze (probably in front of a TV) make this absolutely common picture spiritual. There is a disarming purity in it that has been achieved by a research of feelings and of the uprightness of everyday life. In this girl there is a frail and exposed humanity, a principle of restlessness that is moderated by an unconsciousness and a seriousness that only children can have. The archetype of this picture is still in the great tradition of the fifteenth century, in Piero della Francesca, in "a tradition that is 'not eloquent' and that has lasted up to us, at last through the school of metaphysics" that exactly Domenico Gnoli speaks about in his works. This is how Aron Demetz's research matures, modest and ambitious, simple and determined, sure about the fact that the only truths that one should search for, are the truths of the heart.

Vittorio Sgarbi