

Aron Demetz

ELECTA 2008

At the outset the young Aron Demetz, like his teacher Willy Verginer and his cousin Gehard Demetz, might have seemed to be the culmination of a long tradition of handicraft, of the art of woodcarving, which in Val Gardena had found expression in a production of devotional sculptures verging on the kitsch. But Aron's works pointed instead to an unexpected regeneration of taste and an adaptation to modern habits, in dress and in the evocation of an uneasy and troubled psyche, of the far-fetched and timeless art that is expressed through the religious iconography of Madonnas and saints. Demetz had built on the craft tradition and, like André Chénier, had uncovered new thoughts in ancient gestures. Going to see him on impulse, entranced by some of his images, one winter's night at Selva di Val Gardena, revealed to me not just the constancy of the quality that was already recognizable in reproductions and in the rare examples I had occasionally come across, but also the disarming candor of a regular guy, nothing at all to do with the type of the rebellious and original artist who puts on airs to comply with the canons of genius and dissolution. Demetz might even appear too humble and decent. But his works spoke of a very strong self-belief, of an ideal attained and transferred into form. Some of his sculptures are already memorable and illustrate innocence tempted, when not confused, by a secret thought, by a mysterious concentration that unexpectedly animates the inert and dead forms of religious handicraft. And yet in his sculptures there is the yearning for a revelation, the nostalgia for a lost paradise, the continual allusion to innocence threatened by the anxieties of adolescence. It is no surprise that one of his sculptures, pure as they are, should have been censored in the context of the exhibition Art and Homosexuality, not for any presumed ambiguity but to save it, or redeem it, from a threatening and equivocal setting in which it might have been contaminated. Is there anything wrong with the fact that in a young boy, such as the Tadzio in *Death in Venice*, as evoked by Thomas Mann and represented by Luchino Visconti, there should be a hint of homosexuality? It is precisely this ambiguity that makes the works of Demetz's early period so poetic. But this element that characterizes so much sculpture of adolescence, from Francesco di Valdambrino to Donatello, Michelangelo and Fazzini, breaks down in his most recent production, heralded by a work on show in the tower of Milan's Archeological Museum. Here Demetz seems to want to explore new directions, seeking a way out of the naturalistic vocation that is congenial to him, however tempered by an intense spirituality. The result is a conceptual, deliberately anti-sentimental kind of sculpture, distanced by a coating of silver. Comprising works that present an archetype oscillating between the kouros and the Apollo of the Olympia Master, where the classicism becomes mental, conceptual. Up to this point I followed him. Now in the brightly lit rooms of the PAC, he is being followed with curiosity by Danilo Eccher. In this phase, we can say that we are watching him grow.