

HYPERMAREMMA

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Giuseppe Ducrot
Fontanile

Living: in living there is no happiness. To live: to carry one's sorrowful self through the world. But to be, to be is happiness. To be: to transform oneself into a fountain, into a stone pool, into which the universe falls like a warm rain.
(Milan Kundera)

Throughout the region of Maremma, cattle breeding has been, and still is, of fundamental importance in the local rural economy. Where there were no spontaneous outflows of water, useful for watering livestock, alternative water reserves had to be built. This is why springs or resurgences have been built in the territory of lower Tuscany since the time of its reclamation.

It is on this architectural typology, located in "Terre di Sacra" in Capalbio, in the locality of Strada di Macchiatonda, that artist Giuseppe Ducrot (Rome 1966) decided to intervene, thinking of a remodelling of the fountain structure, covering it entirely with bas-reliefs and sculptures in yellow-coloured glazed ceramic.

Giuseppe Ducrot is a complex artist. He initially devoted himself to pastel drawing and painting and made portraits of fellow soldiers he had met during his military service. In the portraits, which have neutral backgrounds and no setting, the artist manages to capture not only similar somatic features but also a strong expressive and psychological charge. His interest in sculpture developed only later, in the plastic experimentation of some emperor and saint busts. The bust became almost an obsession for the sculptor, who continued his research by producing various works in the same genre, moving from the first versions – realistic and inspired by classical Greco-Roman art – to the more recent ones, in which the representation in a metaphorical and conceptual key rather recalls post-Baroque and 18th-century forms.

"...Certainly Ducrot crosses the 16th century, a time that manifests itself precisely in the revival of the classical model, where the Neo-Platonic imperative of matter to remove applies, but to establish his preference for the 18th century, in a place of transition from creative "furor" to industriousness. Thus it is that in the very material of his work, whether marble or gold, terracotta or bronze, the questioning elaboration of form resounds. A sensitive, but not emotional encounter, because it is woven by a vigilant combinatory system, virtue of completion and passion for detail..."

(Achille Bonito Oliva, Scultura imperatore, in Sculture 1992 - 1994, exhibition catalogue, Galleria Carlo Virgilio, Rome 1995).

Ducrot experimented with various materials - marble, clay, wax, bronze - demonstrating an extraordinary sensitivity and mastery of technique and obtaining critical acclaim and important commissions, both public and private,

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for fountains, churches, palaces, monuments. In the last few months, he has completed an important architectural-sculptural intervention for the Hotel Vermelho in Melides, Portugal.

The sculptures, specially the one designed for this occasion, were created with the collaboration of Faenza-based master ceramists from the Bottega Gatti. Due to the catastrophic flooding in mid-May, craftsmen and artist braved all adversities to complete the monumental sculpture group.

The work that Giuseppe Ducrot designed for the fountain is a contamination of styles and references to the 'classical', a term that mostly defines artists who refer to the Greek-Roman artistic culture, but in Ducrot's case it takes on a completely different meaning. In fact, for the artist, the reference to the classical defines one of the main constants of his art and poetic research, undertaking journeys into the past that retrace, analyse, and study the different artistic currents in a variety of historical periods. The artist takes into consideration their forms, modelling, details, and expressive peculiarities, and then re-proposes them in a completely new and innovative physiognomy that, while maintaining a lively relationship with the sources, highlights a strong, penetrating, and involving experimentation.

In this case, for the fountain, the artist sees and studies the 18th century, in particular the sculptural decorations adorning the fountains in the latifundia of the Latium nobility, an area bordering on the Maremma, at that time a marshy land of malaria.

The magnificent sculptural group that Ducrot elaborates has traits of delicacy, grace and luminosity; the aediculae, angular volutes, ornaments, tympanum crowning, pilasters, pendentives, and large vases are sculptures rich in contamination and suggestion. Motifs with sinuous lines, with a juxtaposition of widening and narrowing of the visual fields: that is, a profusion of stylistic details, and a whole series of techniques applied to amaze the observer.

Bruno Mantura, in his presentation of the exhibition Partito Preso, at the Galleria Nazionale D'Arte Moderna in Rome in 1995, explains the artist's technical skill as follows: *"... Ducrot is driven by an impelling curiosity and nurtures an extraordinary enthusiasm for the technical problems involved in creating an artistic work. In fact, he tells us that this undertaking of his as a sculptor consists above all in the pleasure of re-casting hyper-tested images - these are his words - such as those of imperial iconography, immersing himself within them and trying to remake an image in bronze or marble with his own hands ..."*

His are shapes modelled with elusive strokes and confident gestures. Signs that create a continuous dialogue with their surroundings. The underlying objective of this work is the objective recording of the light that strikes the modelled form,

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giving us an accentuation of the luminosity and its play of shadows that make us grasp the intimate essence of the shaped material, transformed into passion and energy. Ducrot offers us all the tension of which he is capable. The suggestions from antiquity create cross-references, implementing a strategy characterised here too by dialogue, comparison and contamination between different periods of art history.

Other very important elements for Giuseppe Ducrot are manual tradition and the plastic interaction that the material releases. He has a manual skill that manages to combine sensoriality and conceptualism in an exemplary manner, establishing a dialogue with contemporaneity.

Finally, the design of the fountain is an evocative narration of art as a tool to evoke and recognise inner worlds dominated by the imagination and set in an environment that is already magical in itself.

Massimo Mininni