

CLAUDIA GIOIA

Costruzioni del pensiero per vertigini di unicità = Constructions of thought in the vertigo of uniqueness.

There is always something mysterious in art that enchants us, taking us away, and leading us into other dimensions where we continue to hear the noises of the world though being overwhelmed by them. Thought takes shape, choosing the matter that best sustains it, occupying the space it needs, and taking the time required to reveal itself. It then plays with a whole range of combinatorial, formal and linguistic possibilities to break into the imagination and reach the world of experience where it can encounter other thoughts, provoking new questions, waiting on the sidelines, escaping death. The art of Pedro Cabrita Reis, reveals itself like this. A lot of work, endless silence, intelligence, little tumult, and a need for the absolute. A large portal, windows on the courtyard, the geometrical proportions of an axiom, a molecular chart, a pentagram, the elegance of essential lines, crossing, the interference of reflected light, and chromatic certainty; Cabrita Reis's sculpture goes for the infinitely simple, the constantly multipliable. It does not like being reduced to the architectural administration of physicality or being inserted in a historical context with no here and now. It has no fear of monumentality but redefines it as a grand journey of endless research in the world of anthropology and knowledge. In formal terms, it is a rough art, but conceptually it is highly cultured. Constructions of thought that choose the impetuosity of tough materials, but that then adopt the incisiveness of a whispered word, just like poetry, which teaches us to contemplate thoughts rather than imitate them. Through the use of words, it chooses to go towards silence and namelessness. A philosopher-art and a form of beauty that creates poetry through its focus on the inexpressible and on the necessity that might be space in painting or in music.

Every moment, One Moment after the other, the installation on show in MACRO Hall expresses a naked memory that – like many vestiges in Rome, though from other points of view – encourages us to look beyond, towards a universe of landmarks and references where we can reorganize our own cardinal points and once again find tranquillity, moderation and limitations. Nakedness reveals the finiteness of things, but in Cabrita Reis's work, we can already discern the harmony and serenity of lasting time. It is in the details, in the precision of the composition, and is an aesthetic discipline that never dwells on the superfluous but on the contrary, works through a process of subtraction until it reaches an insuperable limit. What

remains is all that is needed to perceive, think, and change. It is the beauty of thinking.

Claudia Gioia

Experiments, semantic, shifts, and perceptive squints identify and slope from which contemporary art is moving, but there is an extra element that contributes to and stimulates the debate: that of the transversal nature of formal languages. Even while maintaining their own recognisable identity, painting and sculpture, mix up their own grammar. Loosening their rigid distinctions and giving new names to space and dimensionality: sign turns into architecture and colour into matter. Your work too reveals this clear inclination to experiment the ephemerality of these borderlines, offering a new approach in which all the arts appear to come together. Where does your sculpture fits into this formal revolution?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

In Art, "form" is the way in which a concept becomes present in a likely initiatory encounter between the artist and the other. The transformation of form lets us discern a different concept. Which appears as a change of paradigm, achieved through an alteration of perception of the world as affected by the artist. Looking at my work over the years, it is possible to see a confluence, contamination or blend which is obtained by diluting the formal demarcation that only apparently isolate the various different disciplines.

This on the one hand makes it possible to expand the complexity of my work while, on the other, summing up its interpretational devices.

Claudia Gioia

In your earlier sculptures, the human figure was more explicit, while later its absence became the true metaphor of a presence that inhabits the world, makes its mark on the context, and modifying space through construction and action. Thinking of the new formulation of the language of sculpture, of which you have been one of the driving forces ever since the 1980s, what ever your most significant points of reference been and, especially, how have you worked out your relationship with the classicality of sculpture and its balance in relation to the discipline of structure?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

Eve though very marginally, the presence of the human figure is a constant aspect of my work. Paradoxically, it is revealed by a void, or rather by a "absence", which

lets us perceive its existence. This non-localisable "absent presence", is perceived only as a symptom of loss, a place that is still – or possibly of which always need to be remade and reordered. This need to re-establish a place for understanding though – which come from experience o the work, possibly and a probability, a step towards desire...- is represented by doors, windows, and walls that multiply both the directions and the senses.

Claudia Gioia

Ever since works like *D(oor) D(am)* (1980) or *A casa di Fonteinstraat* (1980), your work appears to strip away the surface in order to focus attention on the primeval structure of the work. This means the aesthetic study itself becomes a narration of the construction – a sort of imaginary DNA with all its infinite potential. An almost scientific exercise, that recalls architecture and combinatorial modularity. How important is architecture and the logic of construction in your work?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

In some analyses of my work, there is at times a tendency to suggest a relationship with architecture. As an artist, I'm interested in architecture solely as another political device for managing city spaces (might this be privilege of power?).

As a discipline, architecture is not actually at the centre of my work. The attention it elicits in me is very similar to what I feel for other disciplines – sociology or anthropology, for example – which provide me with what I need for meditation. What can be referred to, however, is my intellectual, aesthetic and, I might even add, political compromise with the act of construction. This is the earliest sign of the human being in the world, man's registration in permanent form – even though in a state of constant relational precariousness – the way we rethink (or possibly reconstruct? Our perception of what surrounds us. As sculpture, a table is a model that creates a fleeting vision of us and about us: it's something we project onto the universe. In this sense, one might say that poetry - more than architecture or my other discipline – is closer to my reflections as an artist.

Claudia Gioia

Let me go back to what I referred to as "stripping away" – an action which is inherent in your creative process – because I believe that another associated aspect is that of the search for a more basic art. Purification of the artistic language, a revival of the authentic value of each creative event, and its generation through the most simple materials , such as wood, glass, steel, neon, lighting, etc., make it possible to ensure a relationship with the most saying: the sea is water, a table is a

table, like is made of actions... Mario Merz and Arte Povera come to mind. How do you relate to all this?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

Throughout my career, and as a result of the transformations that have changed it from one moment to the next, I have always understood that the complexity involved in the meaning of every work should be taken to its own insuperable extremes. It is exactly this determination that becomes so much more perceptible as the discipline of exposure, which gives this research its formal substance, becomes stronger.

On looking back, however, I must admit that possibly I have not always succeeded. something as been interrupted, a sort of deficiency of gesture with regard to the demands of the spirit. Sometimes I think I've succeeded – and yet a gap, in which perfection is merely pursued, seems to open up between me and the destiny I want for the work. It may well be that this gap, which is an end in itself, is possibly the last place of what I consider to be the "purification of the language of art". Lastly, a table is a table, but it is also a bed.

Claudia Gioia

Every Moment, One moment after the Other – the work you created in MACRO Hall – plays with the museum space but, more than anything, it acts like a body that poses questions. It is a modular prototype or an unfinished creation? Donald Judd or Michaelangelo-style unfinished work? In any case, one has the clear sensation that this is a case of an artist who is never satisfied, one who accentuates the potential of sculpture with painterly forms of contamination such as light and colour. But also of one who accepts to measure himself against unity and its infinite potential for combinations. How did your work in Rome start out?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

In relation to the time that remains, in the end a work of Art is the last possible formal negotiation. In each work, and in every moment, of every work, the same old useless exercise crops again: that of the measuring time. To do this, everything is implicated. No limits, no objections will be taken into consideration – what we are lacking and what we are unwittingly looking for come upon us from all sides, even from places we shall never know.

It is as though, right from the beginning, every work were the last, and every fresh work starts anew, as though there had never been any other, continuing to suffer the state of being the latest yet again. Just when we think we have achieved a level

of clarity never attained before and we think, more than ever, that things are necessary – this is when the meaning of the work comes together.

All works arrive and are built up in this way, as though the form of intelligence came from us and anticipated us, and followed us to believe we can foresee what all things will be.

When I came to Rome, the work had already come long before.

Claudia Gioia

The compositional meticulousness of your structures, the cleanness of the lines and the absence of any decorative elements suggest a cold eye that is not much inclined towards any aesthetic digression that is not functional to the work itself. Even so, the cold but persistent glare of the neon lights in works like *Semina* (2000) and *I Dreamt Your House Was a Line* (2003), or the passion for colour and dense monochromes in works like *Double Monochrome Black* (2000) and the *Glass Paintings* series not only suggest a passion for the artistic studies of Dan Flavin and Bruce Nauman – or for the great names in monochromy, from Ad Reinhardt to Barnett Newman – but rather make one try to guess what your personal line of beauty really is. How important is beauty in your art?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

We look at the world and with every we rearrange it, only to realise that there can be no order – and yet, in spite of and because of this, we perceive the need for an unattainable perfection.

We unceasingly pursue that perfection (body without wounds), an encounter that never takes place between us and the world.

Sometimes, for an instant we see in the work that fleeting moment, that harmony between us and our perception of the world which offers us the thrill of belonging to a single whole, as though the all were but a single thing.

That moment is the precarious place where the work of art assumes the shape of beauty and becomes real: it is the supreme way of harmony. This creation takes place through an intelligence that could be referred to as pure, with no form of relativism.

In the end, beauty is the object of intelligence through art.

Claudia Gioia

There's a sort of recurrent obsession: the city, the house, doors, windows and stairs – elements of housing units that, when taken out of context, become the mental forms of an affiliation with a private and social dimension that needs

recognisable places and symbols in order to be experienced. A window or a door can open un onto the world, but they can also let anything happen – without compromise – outside. A home can be the most intimate place for living together but also a prison for feelings. A city may be the ideal place for a community, but also for isolation and separation. In all legends and ancient fables, there is always at least one door or window that becomes a fundamental junction in the story and in the trains of the events. What is the story that you wish to tell?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

In my works, there is no room for stories. If they appear around my work, they are brought in by the eyes of the other and the little wounds of the narrative are entirely his responsibility. If anything, I would like to believe that, rather than stories, my work brings with it anxieties that expand intelligence. Looking at a window suspended on the wall of a museum, seeing that world again in the window hanging on the wall of the museum...

That is the story I would like to tell.

Claudia Gioia

Your works also live on silence. Works like *Cathedral* (1999), for example, produce a shift in the time of memory. Like when facing a ruin, the view induces to nostalgia and one tries to guess what it might have been. Or like the installation at MACRO, which also manages to alternate memory with the provocation of a forward-looking view of what it might become. In any case, exercising the eye requires silence and concentration in order to delve into the present, into memory or into a projection of the future in order to find an image to compare in with, what is your concept of time?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

Time is the multiplication of all times, as they intersect in permanent synchrony, diachrony, anachrony and even in oblivion. We cannot talk of a single Time. Any work is now. In any work all, the multiples are not broken off by the expanding variables that are introduced by the eyes of the other, for they gather the meaning of the work. But this "now" is in a dramatic and permanent state of disappearance: it's a mixture of things that are known without ever having been seen and of others, we believe we can reproduce exactly, but whose names we no longer remember.

All this is the substance of the silence that the work "embodies." Just by looking at it, we introduce a pressing need to give meaning, to perceive all the different moments in a single instant... even, one might say, a foretaste of eternity.

Claudia Gioia

There is also a demand for intelligence in your work. Naked intelligence, capable of being surprised when faced with changes in destination... it may seem cold but it is poetry.

Pedro Cabrita Reis

Just as silence is an incitement to the revelation of beauty in art, words delineate in poetry the precision of a sublime form of thought. In both cases the work takes the shape of pure intelligence in which, in condensation of its method, in the precision of its meaning, and in the nudity of its form, a desire – which is always renewed (and attainable?) – takes shape to avert death. From Caravaggio to Barnett Newman, Dante to Pessoa... this is what we are talking about: an appeal to intelligence to combat the end.

Claudia Gioia

In your studies drawing also plays a leading role. I'm not just thinking of works that involve lines of graphite, using paper as a support, but also of the preparatory studies for your sculptures and installations which, through the power of their signs and chromatic violence, become almost immediately detached from acquire their own expressive autonomy in terms of intensity and vibrant dynamism. How do you explain this compositional leap and this play of forces within your work?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

In a certain sense drawing provides a matrix for all gestures. But this does not mean that in my work there is a hierarchy of proportional actions, nor a method that strives towards the work as a final result. The drawing often appears after the work – which, in the meantime, is being developed in the mind before finding a form that offers itself to contemplation. In what I do and in what I am. Everything has the same value: it is the object itself.

Claudia Gioia

Like all the artists in your generation now live in a totally international dimension and you exhibit throughout the world. And yet you've chosen to remain in Portugal

and have your home in Lisbon. Is this a need to have a place all for you own, or is it another form of belonging – not just intimate but also historical?

Pedro Cabrita Reis

More than to some unlikely geography, I belong to where I feel at ease. Sometimes I belong more to certain paintings I've seen in distant places than to cities I've travelled to for work. We are never in a single place. Just as time can only be imagined in the diversity of all times, so too space becomes reality through thought in the relativity of all the places we have known or imagined.

I live in a city which, like any other, is also my own, In some mysterious way, I take from it the things I do, either from within me (without perception) or as discoveries from what I see around me.

I've decided to remain in this city for some time more. Some of the reasons are unfathomable but others are not entirely so.

- *Costruzioni del pensiero per vertigini di unicità = Constructions of thought in the vertigo of uniqueness.* Interview conducted by Claudia Gioia. In: GIOIA, Claudia; TIERI, Virginia; GORETTI, Barbara [et al.] - **Pedro Cabrita Reis: Macro/Hall.** Roma: Macro; Electa, 2007. p. 8-25. ISBN 978-88-370-4975-1. (italian-english)