

François Ruegg: the fragility of the absolute

by Ricard Planas, Culture manager and arts criticist

A blank piece of paper is a blank work, too. Absolute? At first blush, sterile, minimalist, concrete and rational, geometric. Fertile in reflections, infinite. Beautiful, although beauty becomes the last veil that covers something monstrous. This way, the fragility of the absolute aroused our curiosity. The members of the jury I belonged to were swarming around the operations room where we had to bear a winner. A mystery was revealed to us -at least, this was what our contracted creasy faces seemed to express. Our physiognomies were mirroring the geographies of a piece of cartography. I realised that the first impression of that 'new' element was panic. Had we come across new paths? Avant-garde? At that very moment, the wrinkle started to seem delicious to me. Our imperfections adopted a relevant nature. In fact, they represented the background of that artistic artifact which had exploded right under our noses, with no previous introduction. We did not know whether it was ceramics, ceramics sculpture or ceramic design. What we did know, while observing the way some fertile bloodish red was staining the icy whiteness of that pure sea, was it conformed to art; art which materializes itself as it best pleases it, whenever it wants, and without asking for permission.

Designed animal

The brilliant French essayist Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) wrote an essay on the theory of foldings and their beauty. Nonetheless, 'aesthetic plastic surgery' - i.e. consumerist society - has disregarded the lyrics and poetry of these parameters. Daily life consists of skin extensions, just like the allegoric extensions taking place in Ruegg's sculptures; the ceramic work tensions (2004) operates with these coordinates. Thus, amidst such handful of plastic elasticities, the animal artist has often been able to handle the beast or the beast in human beings in order to create another skin by means of art design, which is no longer design once it has lost its 'utility'. For example, Christo - an ephemeral art sculptor - masks objects by covering them with large burkha-like cloths. With this aim, the author castrates and incites, making a new skin come to the surface. The result is double-faced: the subtle concealed form and the new epidermis transformed into the only reality. Ruegg has been working in this direction for almost six years. He does it persistently to search that other reality, the one of insinuations and pleats of form. Deliberately, he builds nearly perfect objects - some imperfection is necessary for the whole work to vibrate. Thus, the difference to Christo's imaginary consists mainly in that Christo starts from existing relieves, whereas Ruegg's works seem to be developed from primary 'original' shapes. Still, they have actually never existed (physically, it is impossible) or have undergone a radical change in their their origin, meaning and utility. Covered, masked creations: The mask is both the artistic truth and the material vacuum of pieces - emptied porcelains. It corresponds to the lie hidden in the process of creation. Masks like the shadows in the cave in Plato's Myth of the Cave, where people end up judging the shadows of the object projected as 'real'. The desire to empty the works may have raised the ambition of materializing the form of air, which has infinite faces and representations.

A surrealistic timeless symphony revolves around the imaginary of the Swiss artist. Tensions with the blue (2003) and Frutti di mare (1999) corroborate it. Ironic and playful touches of Surrealism, a wise manner of complementing and breaking the ice. Nature in the foreground, as the origin and generator of the first doubt: human beings, and their mechanisms of survival and relationships thanks to their power to create.

Natural mutations

Nature has played a fundamental role in the study and creation process carried out by numerous artists, including Gaudí and Jean Arp. They have (had) a deep knowledge of the capability to contort and mutate inherent in natural forms. Endless movement: nothing stops, everything oxidizes and deteriorates. This phenomenon also works within Ruegg's works, made of porcelain which has been cooked with oxidation fire at 1260 °C. His porcelain, with its fragile and subtle form, has gradually taken on great significance as reference material. A note: The winners of both last and current editions of Biennale del Vendrell employ this technique. Ruegg's Mutations is a scream in the silence. As if two magnets - like billiard balls - repelled each other; as if the result of such negative energy truncated the unity of a volume which turns dual. The blood of friction is the consequence. Perfection and imperfection. Drama and rest. Science and art. Similar molecules, divergent journeys. This form of 'macro existence' is symbolized on account of the natural hands of a human being.

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