

*Per ogni lavoratore morto***Notes on the work of Giorgio Andreotta Calò**

Per ogni lavoratore morto is the result of a research project carried out by Giorgio Andreotta Calò through the streets of Carrara, the town of the marble workers, and the gorges of the surrounding quarries, transformed over the centuries into chasms so deep as to inspire uncontrollable fear. It is between these two elements of the Carraran setting that the artist has carried out a complex elaboration process, with a work developed not only in different times but also in places far from each other.

The forces drawn on by Andreotta Calò form an ensemble of interconnected relationships that may be seen in *via Carriona*, on the ancient route used for the transportation of blocks of marble, and where at number 33 stands the deconsecrated church of *Santa Maria delle Lacrime*, fallen into disuse and now derelict to the point of there no longer being anything sacred about its appearance. Over time, it has become a formless space, a metaphorical void, inaccessible and almost imperceptible as it no longer holds any value or interest and, for this very reason, is open to a potential reinvention. It was thus in this space that the artist decided to place the enormous piece of white marble, which he himself literally wrestled from the mountain by hand.

Unlike the use of the mechanical process, which proceeds by cutting, the block is detached by hand, based exclusively on the physical strength of the worker with the help of a hammer and a few iron wedges. The manual method is thus the only one that considers the intrinsic characteristics of the marble (the veining, the stone structure and its position) as the fundamental suppositions on which an equal relationship between the two forces – material and human – is based. The form of the piece of marble is thus an integral part of the extraction process and the direct result of a series of strokes which provoke a fracture in the continuity of the material, spreading to the point of becoming a complete split, due to the force of gravity. The piece of marble that we see is thus not the result of sculpting, in which the traces of the process and the medium disappear into the work, displaced by the form represented. Here it is presented differently: it is the result of a medium which is shown as such, in which the matter is not “elevated” to the status of representation, to the sculpted figure.

On various occasions, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has stated that we need to rethink our traditional concept of the expressive processes, which have dominated our concept of the work of art ever since German idealism, according to which it is supposed that the medium, once its task has been completed in the course of the creation process, should disappear entirely from the finished work. But the energies used by Andreotta Calò are not channelled into the completion of an object; on the contrary, they are presented as “pure medium and process”, in which the vision recreated in the setting, “is there to be seen in its own right instead of disappearing in what it expresses”. That which is shown is the very structure on which the action takes place, very clearly visible if we observe the marks of the wedges, the at times sinuous paths of the marble veins, and the formless angularity of the surface that all identify this presence as part of something else.

The quarry is far away, and yet the white marble, shining in the darkness, continues to reflect the place from which it has been detached. By climbing the side stairs of the church, we reach the organ pit. From here we may observe the entire work from an all-encompassing vantage point (that which was so dear to the director Andrei Tarkovsky and the Russian mystic Pavel Florensky), i.e. downwards from above. We are in a church, but it almost feels like we are in the quarry; the air all around us is stale, and it seems to pass right through our bodies. What we breathe is the breath of the place itself, a limbo of memory full of dust and cinders. What we look on manifests itself as the presence of a potency torn asunder, towering immanent and irreparable. In the frame above the main altar there is one last clue to be found: a tombstone in light grey marble, which bears the leaden epigraph “For every dead worker”. It is at this point that everything seems to take on its own weight, and even

its own silence; both of which are qualities essential to the image and the vision. The dim light that ripples on the marble and the darkness of the space trigger an almost vespertine chromatic dynamism, while the water of the river, which runs alongside the building down the *Valle delle Lacrime*, adds an element of vitality to the interplay between the various elements. That same vitality that accompanies a moment of grief and always manages to put the world back in motion when it comes to a standstill.

This is how Andreotta Calò's operation is explicitly presented as a homage to labour, to that which over the last two decades has been turned into an alienated and commoditised body, and to those who have lost their lives in the name of it. Yet perhaps it could also be a monument to the present, for it clearly also seems to invite reflections on the current social situation, firmly taking its place alongside that arsenal of silent – or unutterable – declarations (and for this reason ever more real), which through an act of painfully sweet commemoration, tacitly take their distances from that which they condemn. It is through a resolute everyday gesture, one which belongs both to the worker and the artist, that Andreotta Calò takes his distances from the commonplaces and traditional behaviour, trying to reconquer a horizontal hierarchical order between things, and an ethical relationship between people and matter. It is within this difference that this powerful image comes at work.

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