

#05

SCOLPIRE IL TEMPO



ARTIST

GIORGIO ANDREOTTA CALÒ

DATE

NOVEMBER 2010





OSSERVATORIO  
2007  
WASTE MATERIAL, WOOD,  
WINDOWS, SOFA, 200 X 200 X 220 CM  
SLIDES AND WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS

The work of the artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò is characterised by elements that are complex and manifold, and although attempting to pigeonhole them in terms of artistic categories or by historical association might seem a daunting task, it is however feasible to identify two overriding themes - or rather, conceptual and visual guidelines - which may serve as suitable keys to unlock the essential elements of its understanding: the *processuality* (both of matter and experience) and the *dynamics of fluids* and their ongoing transformation over time.

While the former may have more direct allusions to the artist's way of working, by linking periods and contexts which may appear distant from each other and by which the use of the media and the materials for each occasion are chosen on the basis of the poetic meanings that singular artistic operations are intended to reflect and incorporate; the latter dynamic phenomenon of metamorphosis, in the sense of an ongoing process of changing state and the transformation of matter over time, is rendered tangible by the almost constant reference to water.

A theme of fundamental biographical importance for the artist: Water is also a kind of logical motif that animates the intrinsic change in Andreotta Calò's works - not only on a formal level, but also on that of their inner planning. Furthermore, water also allows us to identify a tendency towards the search for that 'vital' corporeal and temporal dimension in his approach, one which has long been riddled by the tragic colliding of things, and one which the artist captures and translates into a visual register full of gestures, actions, environmental sculptures and situations with the power to unsettle our common living experiences.

These elements may be found in almost all of Giorgio Andreotta Calò's production, yet they are perhaps more immediately recognisable in the works in which the relationship with the *fluvial* element is meant in the literal sense. This is the case for example in *Osservatorio*, a place of gathering built by the artist

in 2007 and which has since then remained in place, isolated in the middle of the Venetian lagoon, in order to allow for the meditation and observation of the rhythmic flow of transformation.

However it is in *Volver*, the final stage of a larger project, that - due to the action of water - such a truly inextricable and contextual sculptural relationship is woven between the object, the architectural space and the action that it renders any future replica of the work entirely impossible. The key element of the operation is the artist's own boat, withdrawn from its usual context to undertake its last Pindaric flight, the epilogue of which is to be found on the outer terrace of a building. And it is here that it is laid to rest, cut apart and put back together inside out, like a vaguely biomorphic sarcophagus, on a bed of rainwater. Enveloped in a suspended time and surrounded by the reflections of the night, as a whole this work may be seen as a kind of 'active residue', animated by its own life and in a constant state of metamorphosis even in its immobility and apparent fixedness.

A similar 'vibrant tension', another metaphor of water which the artist often exploits, is further developed in the artificial landscape *Dead Leaves*, created in his studio in Amsterdam in 2009, in which a layer of foliage moves, slowly rising and falling with a wave-like motion, like that of deep breathing, and which may be observed from the adjacent room through a large pane of glass. This work, the penumbra of which leads us to sense an air of unknown and disorienting solitude, is played out on the reversal/overlapping between external and internal space and the paradoxical impossibility to distinguish the natural from the artificial, or the reflection from the real. And if we may speak of poetical logic, then it is this self-same continuous overlapping of states that underpins Andreotta Calò's latest work, entitled *Scolpire il Tempo*: a direct homage to the essay of the same title written in 1970 by the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky.



DEAD LEAVES, STILL LIFE, STILL ALIVE 2009  
INSTALLATION WITH ELECTROMOTOR, FOIL,  
RADIO, NEON TUBE (THE SURFACE SLOWLY MOVES  
UP AND DOWN)

Featured for the first time at the Wilfried Lentz Gallery, in this work - which consists of an installation revolving around three clepsydra-shaped sculptures - the artist pushes himself once more towards the dimension of an authentically complex environment, i.e. not man-made or artificial, yet one generated by a sort of natural propensity towards the possibility of triggering a natural phenomenon through a gesture. The process deployed in this work is thus set off by two complementary forces - natural and human - which chase and contrast each other to the rhythm of a time cut into the very shape of the sculptures themselves, with a watery sense of continuity.

Each of the three clepsydras, which appear as an ensemble mirroring the same amorphous element, displays its own symmetric organic unity developed around a vertical axis, making its way into space through centripetal expansion, just as what occurs in the classical sculpting process. But the founding amorphous element, i.e. the basic module of each clepsydra, is not hand-sculpted; it is the result of a natural entropic process: no more nor less than what remains of a wooden pole stuck into the middle of a lake, and which the water - through the ebb and flow of the tides - has worn down to the point of detaching the uppermost edge.

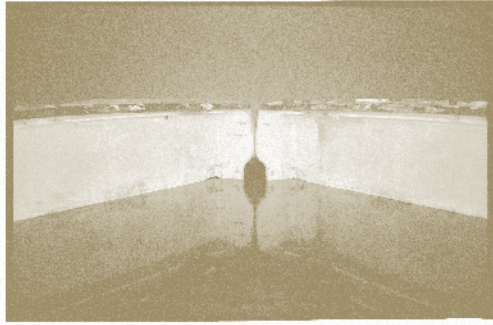
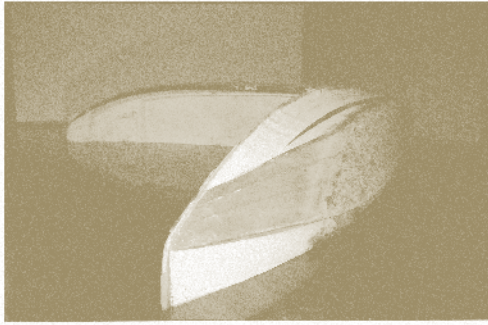
Returned by the artist to a new material and temporal flow, that of the liquefying and fusion of wax and bronze, the three clepsydras are at last shown for what they are: "manifestations of rhythm", objects exposed to the continuous sculpting of time. And perhaps it is to accompany the development of this, their internal logic, that the artist places the bronze sculptures - however firmly structured and materially permanent - in contact with water, the only element capable of reactivating their transformation process both "in visual terms, because it is through water and its evaporation that the mirrored image appears and disappears, and in material ones sparked off by a new process of corrosion".

In *Scolpire il Tempo* we are thus presented with three

clepsydras standing on a floor covered in water and a layer of purplish wax, the same used for bronze fusion, as if it were "a still life, drawing on its own life-blood". And given the reflections that multiply the figures as well as the viewpoints, the surface may look to the onlooker like a sort of natural continuation, literally running off the sculptures, which prevents there from being a final resolution in single, unique objects.

If we want to link Andreotta Calò's work to the tradition of processual and conceptual practices, we might find a strong consonance with the field of study investigated by the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone, the single representative of Italian *Arte Povera*, who through his works entitled *Essere Fiume* in 1981, demonstrated that the natural and the sculptural work are indistinguishable polarities insofar as there really is no difference: man is nature. And neither is there any difference in the continuous changes of state that make up the works of Giorgio Andreotta Calò, in which it is always the figure of life itself, in its continuous and uninterrupted flow, as in an alchemical process of material transformation, that emerges from these manifestations of nature, and which is therefore wholly realistic.

Fundamentally realistic, like every clepsydra which, even if used as an hourglass, may always be shattered to pieces, just like every lasting or ephemeral operation may be a body destined to the alternation or the cruelty of time, but which in the end may become the reason behind a possible beginning, a restart meant as a new commitment, in both poetic and ethical terms, to life. And as the work of art is not something fixed or definitive, but something in movement, we should always remember that its "immanent temporality" is communicated to the parts and to the whole, in the sense that their relationship extends over time, and that only they may interrupt it.

VOLVER

2008

SCULPTURE OF SITE SPECIFIC  
INTERVENTION, IN THE GALLERYSPACE OF ZERO,  
MILAN

1 CF. ANDREI TARKOVSKY, *SCULPTING IN TIME*,  
LONDON, THE BODLEY HEAD, 1986.

2 THE ITALIAN WORD *CLESSIDRA* (CLEPSIDRA,  
CLEPSYDRA OR KLEPSYDRA), IS DERIVED FROM  
GREEK AND LITERALLY MEANS "STEALS WATER".  
IN ITALIAN IT REFERS TO INSTRUMENTS THAT  
WORK USING EITHER WATER OR SAND, WHILE IN  
OTHER LANGUAGES THIS IS NOT THE CASE. THE  
WORD *CLEPSYDRE/CLEPSYDRA* IS USED IN FRENCH  
AND ENGLISH TO REFER ONLY TO THE WATER-BASED  
INSTRUMENT (WHICH LOOKS LIKE A FUNNEL) AND  
NOT TO THAT BASED ON SAND, THE SHAPE OF  
WHICH IS VERY MUCH LIKE THE NUMBER EIGHT,  
THUS ALLUDING TO THE SYMBOL OF INFINITY.

3 GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *L'UOMO SENZA CONTENUTO*,  
MACERATA, QUODLIBET, 1984, P. 143. FOR  
THE ENGLISH VERSION, SEE *THE MAN WITHOUT  
CONTENT*, STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, CALIF.,  
1999.

4 GIORGIO ANDREOTTA CALÒ, PROJECT NOTES,  
UNPUBLISHED, 2010.

#5 Scolpire il Tempo is the fifth issue of a new series  
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TEXTS

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