

Marta Palmieri



LORENZO FIORUCCI

Marta Palmieri is part of a specific area of research in Italian art: sculpture in clay, continuing the work performed – not without some moments of difficulty – by many important artists over the course of the 20th century. After Arturo Martini and the arrival of new artistic languages, above all the Informale current after the Second World War, it seemed that this area could have lost its way. But in actual fact, it was due precisely to the Informale movement, with its vast, unrestricted possibilities of expressive and linguistic experimentation, that sculpture in clay was able to renew its identity. These remarkable works include, first and foremost, sculptures by Leoncillo from 1957, embodying the heritage of seventy years of history and relevant still today: he was the first to work on the issue of colour, avoiding the use of artificial glazes and pigments. Moving on to the 1960s and '70s, we find Nanni Valentini, Giuseppe Spagnulo and Amilcare Rambelli, while in the 1980s there are works by Nedda Guidi, Pompeo Pianezzola and Giancarlo Sciannella. More recently, from the 1990s and 2000s, we have sculptures by Armanda Verdirame, Luigi Mainolfi, Giuseppe Pirozzi and Massimo Luccioli. These are just some of the artists who have worked on the concept of clay sculpture, giving it a new vitality. Marta Palmieri takes her place in this area: she has been introducing elements of innovation into the realm of contemporary art for almost a decade, a period in which she has not only demonstrated her effective experimentation in technique, but also a capability of highlighting the areas of inquiry constantly explored by her sculptures, starting from the relational to the spatial context, right through to her latest developments in which she has returned to the theme of colour, reforging a link between her quest and that initiated by Leoncillo and later continued by Nedda Guidi towards the end of the 1970s. In fact, both of those artists worked on the creation of colour directly from clay by means of experimentation and firing techniques using oxides and other natural substances. Reviewing Marta Palmieri's oeuvre, we see that she is perhaps one of the very few contemporary sculptors considering space to be a central part of the work. She does this scientifically, by means of two separate approaches.

Archisculpture
by
Marta Palmieri

from
CLAY
to
COLOUR

top -
Froth 2, 2017, ceramic, glass
oxides, brass, 220 x 60 x 24 cm
Tsinghua University Art Museum
Collection, China (detail)



SCULPTURES, installation, 2012
Società della Pietra showroom, Senigallia (AN)



The first is purely artistic, and it comprises a space inside the work, based on the interaction between materials and volume, in which the artist skilfully calibrates the relationships, generating hybrid forms that swing between a return to primordial objects and new volumetric shapes, which at times take the form of similar but nonetheless unique units. This is the case for the 2008 installation *Trumpet*, inside the evocative Mole Vanvitelliana in Ancona, rediscovering the lessons of Fausto Melotti, a master of lightness. At the same time, the elemental forms, made using basic, unadorned clay, link Marta's work to a more primordial dimension with echoes from her cultural roots in the Marche region, expressing a subterranean, unfathomed marine context, as in the case of another installation, *Untitled*, presented in the Sala Magazzino hall of the same space: a series of voluminous suspended elements suggests a shoal of enormous terracotta marine cetaceans, expressing all the power and lightness of underwater life. Other works take the form of irregularly-shaped but perfectly harmonious volumes, that the artist again clads in a rough, archaic material that disorients the observer in a sequence of ambiguity, blending lightness and weight, oscillating between unreal,

CIRCUS 1A, stoneware, 2017
44 x 28 x 90 cm
Hostler Burrows gallery, New York



LA MOSSA, 2017, stoneware, 40 x 12 x 48 cm
Hostler Burrows gallery, New York

innovative forms and a material of sometimes geological naturality. This can be seen in a series of pieces named *Golem* made in 2015, for which a precursor could be identified in Lucio Fontana's famous works titled *Nature*. It was with these pieces that the artist took part in an important exhibition on Informale ceramic sculpture: *Terrae* (held in Città di Castello 2015), a historical review running from the 1950s to the most recent contemporary experiences, organized as a tribute to the centenary of two fundamental personalities in material-focused Informale art: Alberto Burri and Leoncillo. Marta Palmieri's ceramic sculptures therefore have the rare ability to combine archaic features with innovation, and also with different languages. She is capable of adopting the material obsession of the Informale style, combining it with unusual forms that sometimes rival nature itself. Observing these works, it is not difficult to imagine shells, eggs, or even stones, in part covered by living elements: hers is a retrenched material that evokes the ancient flavour of distant aeons, sometimes mirroring nature in a mimetic meeting or clash.

Her forms, often monumental and apparently sol-

PISTILLI, 2012, installation, fireclay
400 x 200 x 500 cm
Società della Pietra showroom, Senigallia (AN)





GOLEM, 2015, fireclay, iron oxide, 70 x 100 x 50 cm
work exhibited at the Terrae exhibition, Città di Castello (PG)

FOBOS, 2014, fireclay, 55 x 80 x 50, work selected at the 59th Faenza Prize



id, but in actual fact very light, suggest a structural complexity that addresses the second spatial dimension on which she works. In this wholly architectural sphere, the artist has to consider the way in which her art is exhibited, and its setting, and she reaches exceptional results through her meticulous care for detail, from the supporting structures right through to the perfectly-calibrated lighting, considering these elements as part of a stage set. This is eloquently demonstrated by nearly all her installations, in which observers are enchanted, projected into an atemporal, aesthetically impeccable dimension. Devised as an interaction with space, including its monumental and environmental valences, Marta Palmieri's installations effortlessly interact with the contexts in which they are placed, even outdoors, enhancing pre-existing architectural elements and generating dialogues of powerful aesthetic and emotional intensity through a small number of simple elements.

The other issue on which the artist has been working more recently is the return of colour in her clay sculptures. She has done this in a series of works that investigate the nature of time through the sedimentation of material elements. In this cycle named the *Froth* series, exhibited in 2018 at the Keramikos Biennial in Viterbo, Marta Palmieri described the creative process and the quest for meaning, with a poetic phrase in the Biennial show's catalogue: "Slowly, clay, oxides and vitreous slips are sedimented, and through successive stratifications, create a new material that bears the traces of time. After firing, the shapes are born like flowers freed from clay shells which, fractured, reveal the porosity, flaking and growth of an almost rock-like material. Moments in which substance is constricted and contained alternate with moments of untrammelled expansion". The artist's words in reference to flowers freed from shells evoke new, iridescent colours that bear witness to a changing perspective in her research, no longer volumes or architectural sculptures, but new, almost naturalistic expressive necessities in which the physicality of the materials is the real subject of inquiry. The results of these experimental works are surprising: one just has to observe a piece such as *Froth n° 2*, recently exhibited at the Duca di Martina National Museum of Ceramics in Naples, to understand the quality attained in the subtle chromatic variations of the successive layers of material, which give tangible form to what does not normally exist in nature, like foaming waves on the sea. A piece that freezes time at the moment in which it takes shape and opens a new scenario of research, extending to that of language, for this discerning sculptress, whose work has already attracted considerable attention abroad, particularly in China, where she has recently won a number of important awards. The dimension of her work surpasses the basic concept of ceramics, an art which becomes a privileged medium for attaining an effective interaction between architecture and sculpture, with a horizon that now extends to the exploration of pure matter, rivalling the inscrutable world of nature.

Biography

MARTA PALMIERI was born on 29 March 1973 in Ancona, where she currently lives and works. After having attained a diploma at the Ancona State Art School in 1991, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Urbino and graduated in Sculpture in 1997. During her studies she experimented with various materials: plaster, wood, iron, concrete, plastics and yarns. In those years she won the "Edgardo Mannucci" Sculpture Prize. The years following her studies at the Academy were entirely dedicated to ceramics.

In 2009, at the Pesaro Contemporary Ceramic Art Competition, she won second prize and met Gian Carlo Bojani. In the following years she worked on a number of projects with him: in Fano for the Sangallo Fortress, and in Vilnius. Giancarlo Bojani would also curate some of her solo shows. Finalist in the Faenza prize on many occasions, from 2017 until today her work has won considerable recognition, as finalist at the biennial shows in Manises (Spain) and Aveiro (Portugal), and in the competitions of Westerwald (Germany) and Saint Quentin de Poterie (France), Beijing and Jingdezhen (China). She has taken part in group shows linked to the world of design, both in Italy (International Furniture Show, Milan) and abroad (Showroom 304 Hudson in New York). In the latter city, her works are exhibited by the Hostler Burrows Gallery. Her pieces are also shown at the Permanent Museum Collection at the Quanzhou Porcelain Road Art Development Center, Beijing, the permanent collection at the Tsinghua University Museum, and the permanent collection of the Ceramics Industrial Heritage Museum, Jingdezhen, China. In Italy, her work is shown at the Castello Episcopio Ceramics Museum in Grottaglie, at the Civic Museums of Pesaro, and at the Fondazione Accademia in Este. They are also part of the Bojani Collection founded in 2015 at Palazzo Brunori Corinaldo.

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