

## **Beauty is what remains**

### **the objects of marco gavigli calloni**

by Anna Piussi

Beauty is what remains when everything extraneous has been removed. Justification, frills, commentary, decoration and compromise all burned away to reveal a complete idea. A successful work explains itself, it is open to interpretation, appropriation, it has potential. This is the strength of a haiku, in five lines it encapsulates a season, or a sculpture that asks to be caressed and remains with you - they take over the artist who has created them, accumulating the emotions that he deposited.

The works of Marco G. Calloni came to me through the background rustle of many objects, and after that I didn't see anything else. What was an artist doing in a garden show? He calls them vase holders and they are in the same way that an antique capital can become a table: it's not so important that it hold something as its presence, its artistic value. Brightened by the rain, each of the cylindrical and rectangular metal forms emerges with its own strength, some are ribbed, others have ashlar type rustication, others covered with small facets make the surface appear almost soft. Something attracted me, much more than their function, something I hadn't felt in years, a sense of completeness, the basics that I found in Richard Serra's work, huge installations of sheets of metal that scan the space, relating to the architecture and dominating the human body. But here the scale is more intimate and the object is transportable. A totem, a capital, a fragment of something deeply beautiful, complete in itself.

The brownish patina of the iron and Corten recalls African art: Dogon statues eroded by time, reliquaries from Zaire covered with a sacrificial patina. The compact angular forms, recall the stools of the Buli Masters showing the same compressed strength. In European art they remind us of the masters Constantin Brancusi and Picasso who were inspired by Africa to bring them back to the essential forms and a return to the passion hidden beneath a strata of decoration and pretentiousness. Marco Calloni's vases have this same aura of animism, they are 'Art Brut', primitive, granting value to matter.

It's a eulogy to simplicity which makes us smile, because what seemed a mysterious weave from afar, is instead work in no-slip metal taken from an industrial context, for safety use, appreciated for what it is, the design and the play of light. Similarly, the apparently medieval rustication of other vases, is a composition of enormous bolts. Other vases refer to the poetry of the chemical elements table showing "Fe" on the material and testimony to the soul itself of an iron vase.

Strong as iron, hard as Corten, and for this impermanent. Like African statues or Roman columns traced with the ribbing of other vases, Marco Calloni's objects change with time. When iron is exposed to the elements it eventually rusts and corrodes. Even Corten, an alloy containing copper, chrome, nickel as well as iron and other metals changes and by the time two years have passed, a patina forms that stops the corrosion process. The metals that are cut and welded show their seams and in the details trace their origins. The black flame of the welding torch is a decorative motive and as it oxidizes continually changes color. They live, grow and mature, dialoging with the surrounding ambient in constant evolution. So as the deeply embossed surfaces catch the play of moving light, their slow oxidation reflects the changes in the plants they hold and that surround them.

Calloni's sculptures can be used as plant containers. The only thing to remember is that they are counter-vases so the plant remains isolated from the temperature changes in the

metal, thus the amount of earth within will be limited. Gramineous plants, abstract grass in continuous movement are an excellent contrast to these static volumes but they work well with all monocotyledons (including Restionaceae, Equisetum, Dianella and Phormium). They are fine complements for architectural forms stemming from fountains with a precise center and can be much higher than the clod of earth. Keeping the plant away from the metallic surface, they can hold large succulents like aloe or agave with the advantage that their weight can compensate the high center of gravity of mature plants as opposed to plastic or even clay pots with too narrow a base that can tip over in the wind with larger, heavier plants.

In our obsessive illusion of a low maintenance garden, from presumably eternal materials that fill all our waste dumps because they age badly, these vases work well for everyone. Do they stain the ground, rust, I've heard people ask. Marco responds honestly: even a treated Corten vase, exposed to salt air, will leave a mark and iron obviously rusts. Thus, people who run to every corner of the floor with a pressure cleaner to remove mould won't be happy. But actually, the dialog with time is what makes these objects natural. Is it really necessary that they hold plants?

As sculptures they are beautiful set along a border amongst the plants, a fixed spot for geometric plays of light, in contrast to the mobile play of stems and leaves. In a small garden with the typical poor exposure of small city courtyards they are a perfect solution. In small gardens it is often better to reduce plants to a minimum in order to have a few important ones and concentrate resources on paving, furniture, containers and illumination. With no light and often a small amount of earth, everything is a play of volumes, details and light and in small spaces. It's better to spend more for an excellent vase or original sculpture than to uselessly obsess over growing a collection of sad plants, green furnishing isn't obligatory. In this reduced scale, in a small open air art room, Calloni's objects are perfect. Empty or as containers for a single plant, they take on another dimension at night when illuminated like a totem by spots.

I think the category 'garden sculpture' is tautological, perhaps because the whole garden should be a form of art, a dialogue with form and space and not a compromise nibbled away by gardening. There are grand 'sculpture gardens' like the Parco Della Fondazione Celle, but for me they should be seen as grand gardens and nothing else just like Boboli or Tivoli. The presence of sculptures is a part of the matrix of the garden and not an added factor.

But, it is true, in a garden, sculptures have to have certain characteristics. The material must be able to weather time even if it changes, and it must settle well in the natural environment. There must be strong lines, forms to be read at a distance, simplicity, clarity of intent. A small object crammed with details disappears in the broader spaces of a garden when it has to compete with the sky. The most beautiful sculptures for gardens always have a sort of humility, they don't impose on the landscape but serve to describe it. Just like poetry or a painting, the strongest sculptures have to express a few ideas thoroughly without frills. Beauty emerges like iron from the fire, or a sculpture in the naked context of a garden in winter, the beauty is in what remains.