

Notes *

I detest any repetition, above all when it is intentional.

One needs to be really careful not to fall into one's own "mannerism", a sort of voluntary and intellectual remake of the little one has done, or of the nothing one has tried to do.

To reject the idea of counting only on acquired knowledge.

I need spontaneity in the same way as I need bread and air.

I would like to make my sculptures grow as if they were bushes, free from any aesthetic preconception. A bit today, a bit tomorrow, maybe for months or years until they find a self-completion, a settling in the visible world as close as possible to any natural phenomena.

My concept of sculpture was and possibly still is to be found in my recovery of a memory – I would like this process, this abandoning myself to the sleeping shadow of my past, to vanish so as to leave room for something more concrete, recognisable and tangible.

Something that can also be touched, in its three dimensions, not just something that has to be looked at by following the rhythm or light lines of the edges.

Sculpture needs to be seen in a more realistic way, as when we look at and consider any objects whatsoever.

Something that rejects the preconception that links sculpture to art. Something that only after it has been analysed becomes part of art.

I have never forsaken the human figure – it would be impossible for me. Sometimes I have betrayed it by camouflaging and hiding its real essence behind an improper shape.

At this point one should start all over again.

Where from? How can I establish where the beginning is, the real, essential, unequivocal one?

I will be able to escape from the malignant fascination of what has already been done by others and create something out of my own self.

Looking in man for something that is not simply a model, but something in which one can recognise oneself.

Therefore one should be able to happily and crazily work in search of that humanity which is within us as human beings.

We should be looking for a sculptural reality that coincides with our inner reality.

For a real artist the finished work almost never represents a certainty, but always a doubt.

Bodies are just the result of a multiplicity of forms tuned together in harmony.

The problem for us as sculptors is to be able to identify such single forms, to understand them in their structure, in order to be freely and naturally able to reach the whole, that sum of lines and volumes we call “the human body”.

A few pieces of paper of a workshop, some notes of an atelier or the small amount of printed paper written by strangers, lasting a day or a bit longer, will not be what bears true witness to the enormous effort of modern sculptors.

Our effort is destined to render the making of sculptures still believable and necessary.

One should look elsewhere, in other documents, for more reliable testimony. But such documents have never existed as such; they have crumbled over time, with the passing of hours, months, years, of entire working lives.

Solitary and insecure lives; few are serene, many are desperate, in which work was done without schools or teachers, moving with great difficulties along paths which were often inaccessible and deserted, living in society and times that are less and less in need of them.

Sculpture, no longer acknowledging and obeying stylistic schemes or imperatives, is TODAY one of the most unusual and liberating acts, a unique and incomparable action which belongs to the realm of the purest freedoms to which it is impossible to renounce but with death.

We should recreate, for our eyes, the images of things using the same freedom and fantasy as nature.

Sculptures should look as if they were generated by nature and not by man, as if they were born and found in nature and not artificially created by the contaminated hands of man.

Abolish the “hand” and make it a ductile imponderable virgin, a free and mysterious image, like thought, like fantasy.

Things which have been “done” but not “finished”, rendered noble and free by the hands of man, not disheartened.

Going back to the origins of things, not so much as speculative archaeologists but as modern men, who need to disclose their own roots in order to understand themselves.

Feel once more in your hands the material swarming with life and give it back to nature, even more mysterious because of the poetry of the human soul and spirit.

Eventually reach the supreme moment in which the material becomes life.

In any case, I believe that the pace of time through which we should measure sculptures is not made up of months or seasons, but of years if not of centuries or even millennia.

They are the sculptors themselves – and I join them – who take us out of the cities. Their sculptures don’t actually take us to museums or squares but to woods, meadows and fields, to plains, mountain slopes and plateaux where the sky seems to be even bigger.

Squares and streets are not open spaces because they do not have a horizon, and even if they happen to have one they are still close on the sides, and the only free space for them is the very high ceiling of the sky.

So I follow, in my fantasy, like nymphs who seduce me, sculpture after sculpture of Maillol, of Laurens, of Brancusi, which bid me elsewhere, a place where there are the dreams of universal modern sculpture linked, as always, to the roots of nature. In the middle of a glade, a “bird in space” by Brancusi will certainly appear to be like a real, natural miracle. It actually is a miracle.

We should not constantly run after poetry. If it is within us, soon or later it will become part of our works.

For nearly the entire course of my life, I have been in search of something.

In the end, after going in different directions, I will only go back to where I actually started my journey.

Then, that place will look totally unfamiliar to me, because I will have learnt to look at it through my memories.

When I was young, amazingly enough, I convinced myself that I was “physically” immune to death.

I thought of living as an eternal “present”.

I thought that sometimes it could happen, to someone, to one out of billions and billions, just by chance, for no other reasons, to not have to meet a physical end.

Was it in those years, maybe, that my desire to be a sculptor grew within me, because I unconsciously felt that sculpture, like any other art, was the closest thing to “non-death”?

I believe, because only faith, like art, speaks to the spirit.

Life without mystery is like a desert without sand and sky.

Organise an exhibition not as a “display” but rather as a “room” for sculptures.

Specific souls and eyes are needed, to stop and contemplate a statue at length.

The need to live by their work, thus separating themselves from it, prevents modern sculptors from seeing their creations along their entire trajectory, from beginning to end, not gathered together for an exhibition, but rather as a whole, filling in the gaps, bearing witness to the times, hopes and crises of the artist’s existence.

Scattered pages, detached one by one which have often gone for next to nothing and which it will be improbable if not impossible to gather together again. As if a writer were to scatter or to sell, one by one, the individual pages or chapters of his novel, without ever being able to see them all together despite the fact that that was the goal of his work: an entire work and not a diaspora of fragments.

Even when he rests he works, when he eats he works, when he walks he works, when he thinks he works, because every single thought of his is there and focuses on his creations.

Obsessed by its shape, its structure, his every act of is applied where the creative strength intervenes in the attempt to identify and develop that blurred image which is at the beginning of it all.

This belonging to and this way of being possessed by a single idea, serving it alone, abolishes any temporal sensation in the sculptor; almost as if an arcane law were trying to

offer him a preview in life, a sample of that sort of limbo of time in which his sculptures are destined to exist. A quiet, immutable life where day by day each hour of work, anxiety, hope, pain has been crystallised.

Sculpture, therefore, becomes a sort of utopia. The sculptor is pushed to make “something” that has never existed before and perhaps never will exist. He knows not where it is, nor what it is, but nevertheless he will never stop looking for it.

Sculpture has a timeless dimension.

Going back along the silence and solitude of time, looking for what has been and what will be, for what is still alive despite that fact that it has never lived, for what has not remained still despite the fact that it is motionless. There, where time and place are without measure and memory, where past and future will merge into each other, there it will appear in front of us, to the extreme limits of our possibility to see into the past, like one of the first truths revealed to art: the small, majestic Venus of Lespugne.

Art has only one social obligation: that of being art.

In the silence and dim light of cathedrals rather than in museums, sculptures experience their true life, engrossed witnesses of our vicissitudes, of people passing by or of those who stop to wait for others to pass by.

Time, for statues, is not like ours. The spirit of their maker is reborn in us, when we recognise them as being alive.

That bitter dream that is shattered each time, never owned, possibly unreachable, of reinventing the human figure with new forms. Down the path of our ancestors, using their tools, we must go on, beyond the end of their journey, starting from where they interrupted it.

It is only in so doing that we shall be able to indicate a new and right way to our children, so that they will be spared the snares and deceptions of the conformists.

I have progressed with my generation, I have never “updated” or “deferred” myself, wearing the garb or manners that belong to others, of generations younger or older. Nevertheless, as an artist I do not belong to a generation. I am an anomalous cell.

My only travelling companions are myself and my solitude, work and my ideal masters, ancient and modern, which I have chosen, as well as the good and honest artisans from whom I have learnt the craft.

Even for our artworks there is a “womb” that protects them while they are still within us. It is the place where they were born and have been raised which preserves them, sheltering them still.

Once out of that protective place, if they do not manage to become autonomous, to live a life of their own, they die like flowers without water.

Only a few artists are able to measure and judge their own strength. One must forgive them because of the huge difficulty and demanding task they have burdened themselves with.

All of them, even the weakest and incapable, have redeemed themselves thanks to their devotion to art. So do not judge the failures of others if you have not thought about your own.

Sculptures are autonomous creatures, independent from their makers, much more than one might imagine.

Will stones ever die? What will they die of? Sculptors have relied too much on deceptive hopes, because of their eagerness to survive. Wherever there is intense cold and intense heat, whether in the dunes, in the deserts or in tablelands, even stones become mortal.

Vague preludes of sand, they dry up in the sun and when the cold freezes them, they crack. It is then that the guarantee of survival sculptors ask of them vanishes. The hope placed in them turns out to be precarious, and breaks up like any earthly thing.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, seems to be able to survive over time.

Sculptures of stars, time and space will outlive you. Oh Crystals, deprived of your regal geometry, even you will be nothing but dust.

I would like to be able to put a sculpture to memory, as a whole, in all its details, like a poem.

If the identity of sculpture lies in the fact that one can recognise oneself in it, then I wonder who that person can ever be, given that sculptures have always looked at the dead, at the never seen, actually at those who have never existed.

Maybe more than Eros it is the instinct of conservation that generates sculpture.

Who still has the illusionary pretence to engrave their name in stone? Today, only sand has been left to sculptors.

Granting rest to the material does not mean that one has to create amorphous zones.

How painful are the days spent in the void without achieving results, days we strew in our wake, in the anguish of seeing their useless passage... while the faithful days, those spent in the calmness, order and decency, are the ones that make us go on with joy – if only for a short step forward – along our path of life and work, since everything still needs to be made.

We should also perceive sculpture as a stopping or a piling up of time.

Having seen, as I too often see in foundries and marble workshops, a great quantity of artefacts, has given me a sense of nausea in the face of too much “useless” doing, and the desire to create as little as possible, the indispensable, the unavoidable, so as not to feel like part of this futile, backward massacre.

I have been a sculptor in order to live my life, every day, with a certain tension and a lot of freedom.

A sculptor is like a person who asks to find an image of himself in the reflection of shapes. He hardly ever finds it. Which are the sculptors who can honestly show their works and say: there it is, this is the shadow of what I was looking for?

Every stone, even the most insignificant, is seen by a sculptor as a great treasure. Such is the beautiful golden trachite of Grosseto; when it has just been taken from the ground, it is still full of its scent, like a piece of fruit, still bathed by sunlight.

I watch veering flight of sparrows, as if they wanted from time to time to catch their breath. I believe I have something in common with that. Though what I dreamt was the flight of falcons, a few flaps of the wings and then a long, smooth, sure glide to the destination.

Sculpture is like Atlantis, a submerged universe. From time to time people go in search for it, and some of them never return. How, I ask myself, could one return from the eternity of something that has perhaps never existed?

The most effective sculptures are those which I have never made, but which I have only made and undone within myself, developed in the mind using fantasy and imagination. Now, submerged and indiscernible in time, they are no longer present even in my memory.

Material can't escape from nothingness except through a motion towards a form.

The physical distance between us and a beloved work of art does not separate us from it. On the contrary, it binds us to it more and more, because it is only by imagining it that we actually love it.

Those who have no flowers for their memories will not be able to live of their own mere present.

Time is unstoppable. Only those spacious days in which the entire arc of our daily production can be stretched out are happy ones.

* M. Negri, Note di studio, in Mario Negri (catalogue), De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, Roma 1989, pp. 15-22.