

After writing about Nina Carini's work I believe I can — without fear of contradiction — say that hers is linguistic research into the very meaning of art. Within this framework, the artist establishes a fascinating relationship with other areas.

Le cose in pericolo (A, B, C, D, E, ...) is a sound installation in the space before the basilica of San Celso¹. The work is dedicated to what is on the verge of becoming extinct in our world and five groups of primary school children read out lists in an unintelligible language that differs with each word. The words illustrate what is about to vanish: languages, tribes and geographical locations around the world. This work was inspired by a significant encounter between the artist and the poetry of Simona Menicocci, her poem *Glossopetrae*² in particular. As the name says, we are faced with tongue stones, unknown words. Faced with what we do not know despite all the means availed of and the unknown is hugely vaster than the known: “[...] *rumai, sahaptin, saisiyat, sak (Bangladesh), sake, sakurabiat, salas, sáliba, sām, samei, samosa [...]*”. It is like a mantra, a pitting of words.

Everything is precarious and vulnerable, as is our existence.

It is like hearing someone recite the passing of time.

Everything is in danger, nature, humans and words, and the artist understands the meaning of the demise, in all its distressing obviousness.

The result is cacophonous and disorienting. You do not know where the voices are coming from and there are delays in transmission. Those listening feel overwhelmed by meaningless words yet... although much of what is conveyed to us every day is incomprehensible we continue to go forward pretending to understand.

Today's human beings live in a time of words and images that tend to confuse us and do not help us disentangle ourselves. We are swamped by the folly of inane communication.

A specially created re-edition of *Venere Bugiarda* is set in the religious space. The original is outside a villa with swimming pool near Bergamo³. Like the early version, this one comprises nine alabaster orbs. Despite its intrinsic weight and thanks to a certain transparency, this material conveys a special weightlessness in which light plays a major role. Each orb bears an engraved letter, forming the adverb “FOREVER”. This is the total antithesis of what is outside the basilica where there is an aspiration for eternity. There, the ephemeral dimension is underscored. After all, art shifts from the eternal to the precarious. “The best proof of the Almighty's existence may lie in the fact that we never know when we will die. [...] The same applies to our sense of beauty, be it natural or artificial, since what is infinite can only be appreciated via the finite.”⁴

The Bergamo installation has a fibreglass sun whereas here a large circle has been created using 300 small blown-glass vases holding two flowers, one that will soon become dried and another that is regularly replaced. Life has a duration, it is time-limited unlike eternity.

I rarely use the expression “forever”. I get Venus to say it; Venus orbits in the Sun’s inner sphere and is traditionally associated with love. By revolving around the Sun, it is as if Venus is saying I will always revolve around you. However, this does not correspond to the truth because the Sun is expanding all the time as a result of the current climate emergency and one day, albeit in the distant future, it will swallow up the planets within its sphere⁵.

An important role is also played here by the light, which changes at different times of the day, allowing us to see the works through different eyes. “While conducting an investigation into painting and light, I became fascinated by a Caravaggio work, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, featuring a glass vase with a flower and the light reflected in it. I found what I was looking for in that detail in the right of the picture.”⁶

Mani come rami che toccano cielo is the work in the apse, created in bronze polished to a mirror finish with Fonderia Battaglia⁷.

Captivated by the two strips of missing bricks in that part of the basilica, the artist has tried to create a fissure. There are three windows in that zone and her work acts as if they were openings, mysterious narrow doors. There are two long arms reaching for the sky⁸, conjuring up certain Louise Bourgeois works in which the arms turn into long spider’s legs.

Those entering the basilica and raising their gaze to the left will see a fresco of the Virgin Mary before them. The artist decided to place a weeping column, *Occhi in lacrime*, before the small work, set approximately two metres above the floor. It was inspired by the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul, created for the Emperor Justinian in that still little-known period that is the history of the Eastern Roman Empire. It is an expansion of a structure conceived by Constantine⁹. Today the Cistern is a space filled with references where you feel a special energy, partly thanks to the water although much lower than the original level. The Cistern is populated by columns, including one covered with a decoration in teardrop form. It is said to belong to the early construction, that of Constantine. A chain hangs from the ceiling and crystal drops fall level with the Virgin’s eye¹⁰. This is not, however, a reference to the Madonna’s tears but to light. The drops are in movement¹¹. The movement is circular and relates to the memory of water¹².

The *Senza voce* sculpture has been placed inside a confessional. It

was inspired by a sketch drawn by the artist who, when focusing her gaze on it, thought of the path of the vibration created by the moving voice.

Stone does not produce a voice, seemingly. Or perhaps it is a voice that you must be able to hear, as theorised by the musicologist Marius Schneider. Nature certainly does but stone too has a sound, a rhythm, as applies to the capitals present in the basilica of San Celso with their fantastic, symbolic animals. Schneider had found a connection between those figures and the Gregorian hymns dedicated to the saints. Here, partly via Nina Carini's works, I seem to hear those sounds filled with mysticism and spirituality. There is a light behind the sculpture. It is an intimate work that reveals a silent cry, a tension towards the beyond just like the arms in the apse. This is an existential unease that struggles to speak in words.

Beside the work on the floor is a keepsake of time, fossils evoking the history of the world, of nature, that humans relentlessly destroy. Without any obvious social reference, Nina Carini looks at her surroundings and underscores their vulnerability. The society we live in makes us believe that we simply must be beautiful, high performing, almost immortal, sci-fi creatures, without realising that the meaning of life may lie in its very fragility, in its precariousness which, in the age-old sense of the word, makes us dramatically unique.

From the eternal to the precarious.
Notes on Nina Carini's recent works in the basilica of San Celso

Angela Madesani

¹ The installation consists in four invisible speakers.

² S. MENICOCCI, *Glossopetrae*, edited by Marco Giovenale, Rome 2016.

³ The villa is in the province of Bergamo and belongs to the collector Enzo Nembrini.

⁴ J. BRODSKY, *Fondamenta degli incurabili*, Milan 1991, p. 33 ff.

⁵ Conversation with the artist, January 2023.

⁶ Conversation with the artist, January 2023.

⁷ The artist was in residence in the Milan foundry for some months, from late 2022 to early 2023.

⁸ The artist says she photographed herself reaching towards the sky. The work is formed of my outstretched arm and hand. The branches are 3.70 m. long.

⁹ The cistern was supplied by an aqueduct that contained up to 80 million litres of water and served luxury mansions in the area.

¹⁰ The drops were previously on chandeliers.

¹¹ A motor rotates the column by 2.5 revs/min.

¹² Some scholars believe water can perceive images, sounds and tones.