

**THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE OF
SCULPTURE IN THE WORK OF JEAN-PAUL RETI.**

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN THAT THE EARTH IS ROUND, BUT IT IS ONLY NOW IN THE SPACE AGE THAT IT IS REALLY SEEN TO BE SO. THE STUNNING PICTURES OF THE BLUE PLANET FLOATING IN BLANK SPACE, WHICH SO CLEARLY PUT IN PERSPECTIVE HUMANITY'S RELATIVE IMPORTANCE IN THE UNIVERSE, BROUGHT THAT UNDERSTANDING HOME TO EVERYONE WITH SUDDEN POWER.

JEAN PAUL RETI STRIVES TO BRING ABOUT A SIMILAR SHIFT IN OUR PERCEPTION OF THE WAY THINGS ARE. OR RATHER, HE MAKES US FEEL IT VISCERALLY. HE BREAKS WITH THE PRINCIPLE UNDERLYING MOST FIGURATIVE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE ACCORDING TO WHICH WE THE VIEWERS ARE PLACED ON A PERFECTLY LEVEL PLANE FACING THE LINE OF HORIZON. WE TACITLY ACCEPT THIS FIXED FRAME OF REFERENCE AS THE MATRIX OF REALITY... IN FACT, THIS VERSION OF REALITY IS BUT A CONVENTION, AN ILLUSION - OUR IMAGINARY VERTICALITY ON A SUPPOSEDLY FLAT SURFACE. THE EARTH HAS NO TOP OR BOTTOM. OUR FEET ARE STUCK TO THE GROUND, BUT OUR HEADS CAN FLOAT FREE IN THE UNIVERSE.

TO RENDER THIS IDEA BOTH VISIBLE AND PALPABLE, JEAN PAUL RETI SCULPTS SURFACES

WITH LANDSCAPES OR HUMAN FIGURES THAT HANGS ON THE WALL, HANGING IN FRONT OF US. THOUGH WE THINK WE ARE STANDING UP LOOKING STRAIGHT AHEAD AS USUAL, WE ARE ACTUALLY GAZING DOWN INTO THE SCULPTURE, OVER FLYING IT OR HOVERING ABOVE IT. THIS RADICAL DISLOCATION MAKES US CONSCIOUS OF OTHER SETS OF SPACE RELATIONS, OF OUR OWN INHERENT IMMEDIATE “SPATIALITY”.

WHILE HIS PREDILECTION FOR STEEL AND BRONZE EVINCES A CERTAIN ATTACHMENT TO THE “CLASSICAL” APPROACH, THE CONSTRUCTION OF HIS SCULPTURES HAS A KINSHIP WITH COMPUTER GRAPHICS. IN HIS THINKING AND WORK, THERE IS A CONSTANT INTERPLAY BETWEEN SENSES AND SCIENCE, BETWEEN THE PERCEPTIBLE AND THE INTELLIGIBLE. THE WORLD OF TOUCH AND THE WORLD OF MIND OVERLAP. LIKE THOSE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH YOU CAN MOVE IN ANY DIRECTION, RETI’S SCULPTURES PLUNGE THE ONLOOKER INTO A WORLD WHERE VERTICALITY BECOMES UNSTUCK, WHERE IS NO LONGER MATTERS.

(BY RESTRUCTURING OUR PERCEPTION OF SPACE, JEAN PAUL RETI REMINDS OF US ALL THE OTHER ARTIFICIAL BARRIERS THAT CONDITION OUR CONCEPTION OF REALITY AND PREVENT US FROM MOVING ON THE NEW OUTLOOKS).

AS CONSTANTIN TSIOLKOVSKI PUT IT:

“THE EARTH IS THE CRADLE OF MANKIND, BUT MAN, DOESN’T REMAIN IN HIS CRADLE FOREVER.”

**(TRANSLATION BY ALBERTO MACHADO DI ROSA,
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