

Roberto Lanaro and the creation of form

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When they see Roberto Lanaro's three-dimensional images for the first time, some people may be left rather perplexed, due to the frugality of means with which he achieves his ends.

The artist's preferred material is simple iron strips, which provide the basis from which he generates his three-dimensional images. In effect, Roberto Lanaro works with the simplest of all media available to a sculptor of metals.

In creating his surfaces, Lanaro does not aim for fine "calligraphic" touches; there is no attempt at a craft working of materials in order to produce attractive effects. One might, therefore, say that the artist makes his own job more difficult; he refuses to resort to the various ways in which he might facilitate contact with the observer.

In effect, Lanaro does not make things easy for those viewing his work; we are obliged to concentrate completely upon the discourse he is developing. And this extraordinary severity is all the more surprising when one realises that Roberto Lanaro trained and worked as a craftsman; his origins lies in a totally different way of using metal - one which aims to "work" the material in an interesting manner, to achieve rich surface effects. But perhaps it is precisely this radical change which reflects the differences between the aims of a craftsman and those of an artist. To avoid another misunderstanding about Lanaro's work, let me also state immediately: his forms do not strive to be "self-enclosed"

three-dimensional images. The idea of sculpture as a specific volume which serves as the bearer of artistic notions and ideas is true here only after a fashion: Lanaro's works, in fact, are more like drawings, drafts, signs, which are then independently translated into three dimensions. Both simplicity of materials and cleanness of form play a direct role in achieving this end, with the decisive curves in the compositions - nodes formed from perfectly interwoven bars of metal - generating the mass and tension of the whole.

The very positioning of each node is responsible for a change of direction - and such shifts are, once again, of essential importance in Lanaro's sculpture. However, the fact that each bar serves more as a track to direct the movement of the eye than as a specifically delimited form means that, visually, one is carried forward continually, without encountering any limit: the movement generated by this band of metal then overflows from, exceeds, the formal image itself.

One might, on the other hand, also claim the opposite, arguing that in such sculpture what becomes visible, comprehensible - effable - is movement itself; the abstract is made concrete. Such ideas obviously suggest a link between Lanaro and the Constructivists. Just as with the work of the latter, his own sculptures are not to be seen as depicting - though they do reflect - a natural phenomenon; they are creations unto themselves, taking on concrete form through the

laws of order, movement and dynamics. The polarities in the direction of movement and in the positioning of the nodes generate plastic renditions of space. Here, contrary to what one finds in other artists who might be said to share the same approach, one sees Lanaro achieving his ends through an extraordinary simplicity of means, limiting himself solely to what is strictly necessary. Yet, at the same time, one is also aware of the wealth - in effect, the infinite abundance - of artistic possibilities the sculptor discovers in such economy.

However, one other key point must be made with regard to Lanaro's sculptures: the relation in which they stand to architecture, once again a facet that distinguishes his work from that of the majority of artists working in the same direction. Usually, his metallic forms are not to be seen in isolation but rather in relation to some sort of structure. This generates a further effect of contrast: between the sense of infinite movement that radiates from the sculptural work and the compact, measurable form of an architectural structure which is enclosed within itself.

There is the highest degree of contrast between the malleable lines of the iron bar and the articulate mass of structural volume. Hence, movement, space and material interact to create an extraordinary sense of polarization. This has led Lanaro in his more recent work to attempt to bring these two components, which generally work in parallel to - or competition with - each other, into a closer, more intimate union. Sculpture and architecture no longer stand alongside or opposite each other. Instead, the architectural mass is penetrated and perforated by sculptural metal images, generating a new relation with open space, with the dimension of the "indefinite".

Stasis and movement, the static and the dynamic, are thus brought together in a way for which there is no previous parallel, suggesting new possibilities for the collaboration between architect and sculptor. The arts in modern Italy have, more so than those

in other nations, striven to achieve close union between architecture, painting and culture as a whole; sculpture, in particular, has appeared to be the field of activity that offers possible solutions to the problems posed by the fact that our living space has all too often become an amorphous city afflicted by chill architectural gigantism. Look, for example, at the ideas that Francesco Somaini advances in his *Urban Urgencies* and *Scultura e condizione urbana*, which have suggested multiple perspectives on the issue within Italy. From this point of view, however, Roberto Lanaro's work - for example, his *Rotaie nello spazio*, which interpenetrates, blends and unites with its architectural setting - perhaps represents a further step forward, offering architecture a higher level of animation, a new form of connection with space.

Roberto Lanaro, I would argue, sees his task in a very concrete sense. He is not striving to render the ultimate consequences of abstract order, harmony and regularity; instead, he remains within the world of the concrete. What we should explore and experiment with are the materials - the scale - of the world in which we actually live our lives. And it is through the forms created by Roberto Lanaro that this world becomes more articulate, both more beautiful and more ordinary.

(Vienna, 1978)