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The Ungraspable Form

Valente Cancogni Between Giacometti's Silence and Fontana's Matter

From the moment I began to study the artistic universe of Valente Cancogni, it was clear that I was not in the presence of a mere Tuscan sculptor or painter working, however magnificently, within the tradition of his native land, but of an artist who channels the energies and intuitions that marked the highest peaks of twentieth-century art.

In undertaking this critical reading of his work, I set out to move beyond the sterile notion of citation, in order to uncover a deep, almost subterranean yet unmistakable affinity linking Cancogni to two absolute giants of twentieth-century art: Alberto Giacometti and Lucio Fontana.

My attention turned first to matter itself — to flesh, or rather to its absence, in his sculpture — and from there it was inevitable that I should trace a direct line to Alberto Giacometti. Cancogni, I believe, shares with the Swiss master the same existential urgency: an almost obsessive need to strip the human figure of every ornament, every aesthetic or academic indulgence, until it reaches its most intimate, spiritual, skeletal structure. In his elongated, filiform figures, so dramatically attenuated, I recognise the same vertical tension found in Giacometti's work — the same attempt to resist the weight of the world by rising toward the sky.

What fascinates me most, however, and what I have sought to underscore throughout these reflections, is the texture of his material: tormented, rough-hewn surfaces furrowed by wounds that seem to capture and fracture light in a continuous play of shadow. There is no repose in that surface — only the narrative of the fragility of being, a precarious vital energy that vibrates with the same intensity as Giacometti's figures, though here reclothed in Cancogni's own, deeply personal poetics of form and thought.

Turning to his work in painting, and above all to his ceramics, I was struck by a different but equally powerful sensation — one that led me directly to Lucio Fontana: not the Fontana of the Spatial Concepts alone, but the Fontana of the extraordinary abstract, informal, powerfully material ceramic production, where his affinity with Cancogni becomes most intimate and most revealing.

In his ceramics, Fontana modelled clay with an explosive vehemence, producing clotted surfaces, craters, and iridescent glazes in which matter seems caught at the very moment of its genesis. Cancogni, in this respect, takes up that legacy. In his own ceramic work, the Tuscan artist does not pursue defined form or figurative constraint, but proceeds instead through extrusion, dense compounds of material, and deliberate fissures.

In both artists, matter ceases to be a static boundary and becomes instead a dynamic threshold. That abstraction — so tactile, so tormented — does not foreclose the meaning of the work but throws it open: free of any didactic handhold, the density of earth and colour leaves the viewer entirely free to wander. The spectator becomes a mental explorer, a wayfarer who loses and finds himself among the folds, the

voids, and the reliefs of the surface, undertaking an imaginative journey with no predetermined boundary.

In composing this critical trajectory, my aim has never been to present Cancogni as a belated imitator, but as an artist who has metabolised and internalised the languages of the avant-garde, fusing them with the artisanal knowledge and plastic manual skill native to his Tuscan origins. I regard his art as an extraordinary and balanced point of convergence: on one side, the solemn silence of Giacometti's figures; on the other, the material abstraction and boundless inner freedom of Fontana's ceramics. Valente Cancogni demonstrates that dialogue with the masters need not be a weight that crushes creativity, but can be a vital sap which, understood and reworked with authenticity, still gives form and voice today to the deepest, most elusive folds of the contemporary soul.

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