

Beyond the garden. The Nature in the artworks of Francesco Somaini

A paper forest. The first room displays some *Olive Tree Studies*, created by the artist *d'après nature* during his stays in Chianciano (Siena) in the early 1950s, which constitute an important phase in the acquisition of phytomorphic motifs. These are ink drawings that on the one hand document the search for a cubist synthesis (1953), and on the other testify to the author's desire to achieve the maximum formal simplification of the elements in space, conducted in an abstract logic (1954-55). The work on paper is surrounded by some small gold-plated sculptures from 1956-57, which certify his entry into the current of European Concrete Art, following his membership in 1955 in the MAC-ESPACE. This room also features two bronze sculptures from the first half of the 1960s, *Primavera d'altoforno* and *Piccolo racconto attorto*, which attest to the sculptor's continued interest in tree forms even during the informal period. From the "ulivi smarciati" of his formative years to the rows of pollarded trees and the "riot trees" of the 1980s and 1990s, washed-out inks and an engraving that document the persistence of his reflections on this theme.

The landscape. The second room documents the creative activity of the sculptor who in the 1970s and 1980s reflected on the relationship between sculpture, architecture and the urban context, laying the foundations of an original poetics defined in a programmatic text from 1970-71 and in a series of project drawings published in *Urgenza nella città* (1972), in which the idea of Nature, the management of the territory and the original environment play a non-secondary role. Here are exhibited some sculptures (*Per un paesaggio urbano* and *Paesaggio insidiato* from 1971-73), and a series of photomontages made in 1976 on the occasion of *Operazione Arcevia*, in which the artist began a new typology of plastic interventions, consisting of complex installations, flanked by actions in the landscape, which take shape from the rolling of a sculpture-matrix on a ductile material, such as earth. On display is *Piccola Antropoammonite XV. Rugosa or Mediterranean* with its vertical trace (1977), and other photomontages from 1979 (including the *Magic Mountain*), which address the themes of the morphological development of the Earth and the future of the forest, a "good original place" to be preserved. The itinerary is completed by some small sculptures made of marble and bronze from the mid-1980s: *Matrice per un paesaggio eroso*, *Colonne paesaggio* e *Massi erratici*.

Man and Tree. In the last season Somaini returned to consider the human figure and to reflect on myth, in complex plastic works, composed of anamorphic matrices and their traces (see for example *Le Baccanti nella foresta*, a monumental bas-relief in resin, 1988) and other reliefs executed in positive and negative, formed by two bronze panels that open like a book (*La tempesta*, 1991). The myth is also a source of inspiration for small bronze sculptures, such as the *Albero della vita* (1992), which refers to figures from Greek mythology, the Dryads and the Hamadriads, nymphs of trees and woods. The journey ends emblematically with a series of drawings that address the theme of the duration of man's life, such as the washed inks entitled *Attesa* (1997), and even the end of the world, with the sheets made in 2005, the year of the artist's death, forming part of the *Earth Cycle*.

Another story told through images. The selection of works on display is completed by a video that documents the large-scale creations carried out by Somaini since the 1960s: wall graffiti, floor mosaics, garden projects and projects for urban redevelopment competitions in European cities, actions carried out in the territory and other interventions of various kinds that explore the evolution of his poetics over the years. In some of these works the artist anticipates the themes proposed by Gilles Clément in the *Manifesto of the Third Landscape* (2004).