

PRESS RELEASE

GIUSEPPE SPAGNULO
terra cotta
WORKS 2012-2014

curated by Bruno Corà

Verona, Galleria dello Scudo
13 December 2014 - 31 March 2015

inauguration: Saturday 13 December 2014 at 7 p.m.

opening hours: Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. / 3.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.



Giuseppe Spagnulo, 2014
(photo Claudio Abate)

Over the past two years the need to return to modelling clay has led Giuseppe Spagnulo to renew his involvement with sculpture and to revisit his introduction to art when, very young, he made his first clay pieces in the kilns of his father, a master potter in Grottaglie, Puglia; this interest was to lead him to study various disciplines at the Faenza ceramics institute, a vital centre for experimenting with "high temperature" materials. He moved to Milan in 1959 to attend the Brera Academy, and collaborated with his friend Nanni Valentini in the making of some works by Lucio Fontana. Spagnulo says "it was Valentini who made me understand that art is a stupendous adventure that has to be experienced to its fullest extent, and who gave me a deep feeling for the use of earths". In Milan, an extraordinary crossroads of contacts, he met Tancredi and Piero Manzoni and intensified his interest in the Informale movement which was to inspire much of his earliest work.

After his debut at the Salone Annunciata, Milan, in 1965, where a sandstone piece was exhibited side by side with a small wooden sculpture, various solo shows from 1968 to 1971 acted as the stepping stones to a series of exhibitions of international importance. He was invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1972 and 1986, and was seen in various exhibitions in important German museums: the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 1978; the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, and the Kunstverein Braunschweig in 1981; the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, in the following year; the Lehmbbruck Museum, Duisburg, and the Kunstverein, Hamburg, in 1985; the Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, and the Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, in 1991. Of particular importance was the show *E se venisse un colpo di vento?* curated by Luca Massimo Barbero at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, in 2005, which also hosted in the Nasher Sculpture Garden the important steel sculpture *Torri*, 1999, which was all of 5 meters high.

The Galleria dello Scudo is now presenting the first solo show by the artist wholly devoted to terracotta works. The aim is to document this surprising new phase of Spagnulo's sculpture, with its explicit return to often large-scale forms which have an intimate need both to affirm the concreteness and physicality of sculptural language, and to demonstrate ancient manual skills. The works exhibited are the proof of his desire to use vigour and strength for a renewed perception of weight as a challenge to the inertia of the material: the artist does not model but constructs. To knead, mould, excavate, break, add, throw: all these works pinpoint the infinitive forms of verbs connoting actions that seem to belong to an irremediably lost period of art but which, instead, have come to be of great topicality.

The exhibition starts with *Rosa dei venti*, 2012, a sculptural prodigy that reveals a tempest of natural forces such as to overthrow and disperse the constructive elements of the circular body, reduced in this manner to an uneasy and solitary ruin burnt by fire.



Rosa dei venti, 2012
engobed terracotta, iron oxide, and copper oxide



Terramoto, 2012
engobed terracotta, iron oxide, and copper oxide



Turris, 2012
engobed terracotta, iron oxide, and copper oxide

The two gigantic installations, also dating from 2012, *Terramoto* and *Turris*, show (in opposition to the horizontality of the two-dimensional *Paesaggi*, 1976, created as clay and brick floor surfaces) the accentuated vertical extension of certain large-scale terracotta works dating from 2012-2014; at times they have an apparently unstable balance and seem almost at breaking point, at others there is a precarious re-composition of the fragments of archaic buildings. So in fact *Terramoto*, even while revealing the immanence of an earthquake within a mass subjected to the artist's feelings, rises up by subtracting itself from natural laws and solidly holding together the variously painted blocks that compose it. In *Turris*, the terracotta's acceptance of the tiniest imprint by the artist's hand is something quite different from the resistance and heaviness of industrial metals that have been repeatedly forged and it lends itself well to a figurative aim that refers back to archetypal forms with an obvious symbolic recognisability and a strong emotive impact. The work, broken and sadly evocative of the tragic events of history, is therefore recomposed thanks to the sculptor's hands which act with impetus and angry aggression in a dramatic and continuous contest with the material.

Circularity, in the sense of the need to delimit the space in which the artist acts, in other words the "landscape", is peremptorily announced in *Fine d'Io*, 2013: lumps of pressed and flattened clay are raked by impetuous orthogonal lines which would dig even deeper were they not held back by the painful stitching of the iron wire. Then again, *Panorama scheletrico del mondo*, 2014, an imposing and menacing construction enclosed in a circle that hardly manages to keep its concavity intact, brutally refers back to the clash between the excavated elements in a fatal dialectic between centrifugal and centripetal forces. The wounds return, something the oxides highlight with their superb chromatic strength.

Also from 2014 is *Trasfigurazione*, a wall piece in which the artist tends to shift from an earthly situation to one of the spirit. The material clumps, the forms seem to lose their distinguishing features, the colour of the deformed terracotta becomes uniform, halfway between opacity and glossiness in a dark prediction of death. On the other hand the three contemporaneous elements that make up *Da "I volti del dio Penn"*, inspired by a divinity of Celtic-Ligurian origins, allude to a "natural" noumenon, one with human resemblances impressed on the stone.



Panorama scheletrico del mondo, 2014
engobed terracotta, iron oxide, copper oxide, and iron

The sculptures are flanked by works on paper that are painted or, rather, "sculpted" by volcanic sands, iron oxides and coal which signify impetus, pulsations, thunderbolts ready to lacerate violated, perforated, and torn surfaces in which is evident just how Spagnulo's creative action has reached "the intensity of a panicked and shamanic liturgy" (Bruno Corà). In the large paper works exhibited, the dynamic sense of the composition is increased by iconographic aims without any particular explicit figuration, but not for this any less eloquent or less lacking a strong organizational pathos. This is the case of *Ombra dell'amore - il lutto* and *Icaro* del 2013-2014: the paper support, due to its high percentage of cotton and the density of impastos based on natural fibers, does not always resist the impact of the artist's pictorial-sculptural action.



Right: *Trasfigurazione*, 2014, engobed terracotta, and copper oxide. Left: *Da "I volti del dio Penn"*, 2014, engobed terracotta, and oxides

The heir to the kind of plasticity that, following Medardo Rosso, had such authoritative interpreters as Arturo Martini, Lucio Fontana, Leoncillo, and Fausto Melotti, today Spagnulo's sculpture is considered as one of the most efficacious and convincing lessons in sculpture on the international scene. His status among famous artists of the past forty years, such as the Europeans Cragg, Gormley, Baselitz, and the Americans Morris and Serra, has made him an emblematic figure.

For this occasion, the Galleria dello Scudo will be publishing a catalogue in three languages, introduced by an essay by Bruno Corà, the show's curator and author of a monograph devoted to the artist, published by Gli Ori in 2013. Furthermore, it will contain an interview with Luca Massimo Barbero who, after undertaking a new analysis of the work, has broadened his previous ideas about it. The volume will also contain photographs by Claudio Abate, a first-hand observer of the contemporary art world.

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