

Giuseppe Calonaci, analysis of periods

Edited by Nicola Micieli

He trained in the climate of "MAC" (Concrete Art Movement) of "Forma 1 " and mostly of Florentine "Astrattismo Classico". He has elaborated and developed the "Abstract/concrete" lesson in a wide range of technological applications and formal solutions. He has carried out and fulfilled works with a full range projecting vision, facing painting, sculpture, graphic, design, macro intervention on territory, performance. His work involves the traditional even outdated techniques (such as the fire-glazing and the engraving on metals) and those colder and more sophisticated like the computerized elaboration of models for the automatic execution of big works in metal sheets. Equally rich is the range of material that he uses, from the traditional ones, painting and sculpture, up to the synthesis products and ephemeral ones like the sand.

His research evolved through cycles always characterized by a title which synthesised the dominant theme: Astrattismo classico formativo - Le Cattedrali - I Disponibili - II Messaggio del Sole - Segnali della Memoria - I Tatuaggi - Le Macchine del Sole - Immigrazioni - Spiritualità - Astrattismo & Citazione. They are the laps of a reflection on abstract language which has led to individuate some symbolic primary forms, as the radiant circle or the energy generator principle, where the human faculties of ordering logic and of creative intuition, which are the dynamic factors of knowledge symbolically, find a solution.

Before the periods (Training Period)

Calonaci's artistic formation has been fulfilled during a decade at the beginning of the Fifties.

After the scholastic rudiments of drawing, he attends the art school run by Professor Pilade Moni, with the collaboration of other local Professors such as, Prof. Otello Chiti (Biennial Exhibition award '32), Prof. Lionello Buonamici (Parisian painter), Prof. Sergio Manetti (Cultural Operator), and many others, where Calonaci knows works of the great masters such as Braques, Mondrian, Picasso, Kandinskij, and where they debate on Art as it was a real Academy in Poggibonsi during the post-war years. He learns in artisan and industrial laboratories the techniques of working glass-ceramic, precious metals, fire-glazing (which afterwards he applies even on big surfaces of abstract period works) and of engraving on metal. He acquires automatically the various techniques of painting and those of formation, melting, chiselling applied to sculpture and integrating modelling.

The reference models are those of the artistic tradition and of the daily life. He makes small canvases, terracotta, enamels on copper, engraving on zinc, gilded woods with pictures of dancers, nudes, saints with an attention to the great Byzantine and Tuscan medieval tradition - glass-windows and altar panels - but also to themes that can be called ethnographic and which include aspects of contemporary reality. The discovery of great masters, the integration of abstract shapes in the freedom of imagination and the awareness to build an architecture of images, allow the development of towers, shapes, figures and observations on concrete abstractionism that will be present in many future phases.

I Period

Astrattismo classico (Classic Abstractionism)

Up to 1969

The period of the meeting with Florentine classic abstractionism and of the reflection on abstract-concrete language. The previous technical-formal researches, after having abandoned the traditional iconographic links, converge on the theme of abstract structures, now composed as perfectly geometric and now a sign-symbolic type. The main problems are those related to form-structure in the space, in the orbit of a geometrical abstraction which is looking for application possibilities beyond the usual borders of painting or of sculpture.

Among the most significant participations of this period there are the exhibitions organized by Fiamma Vigo of "Numero", the Florentine gallery which has been an important centre of meeting and formation of international abstract researches. In 1958 Calonaci created a big panel in porcelain-made steel (mt. 7) for the Siva Factories.

II Period

Le Cattedrali (The Cathedrals)

1970-1972

The abstract-concrete research during the early 60's converges on the theme of "Cathedrals" as a modular structure which allows architectural variations of the circle, the geometric shape that from now on will be primary and dominant. Calonaci aims to the perfection of form and to the purification of "matter" through homogenous drafting and refined tonal register. Technical variations are plentiful. Among the most interesting there is the experiment of the big engraved

steel panels which allows to obtain a triangulation of light with optical effects of third dimension. With the engraved steel begins also the chapter of "flat sculptures" which should have a remarkable development during the '70. Even in the perfect formal solution of the scores, the "Cathedrals of Skies" evoke imaginary landscapes with horizons projecting towards infinite, thanks to structures opened by composition, to the wide façades of the shining pieces which are the forms organized in fantastic architectures, to the linear modulation of profiles which transmit themselves from a central core to the periphery of the image and overflow as if they almost were longing for further spaces.

During the period emerge, further than the exhibitions of Gallery "Numero", the personals at Gallery "L'Indiano " organized by Lara Vinca Masini, and the Gallery of the newspaper "Il Giorno " in Milano, both in 1961. In 1971 it is inaugurated in Barberino Val d'Elsa the Cathedral of Light, the new Factory of "Arcobaleno " drawn by Calonaci and projected by Architect Enzo Del Zanna.

III Period

I Disponibili. La meccanica delle forme piane (The Availables. The mechanics of flat shapes) 1973-1976

At the beginnings of 70's, the structures that already overflow by intuition the enclosures of the canvas and optically suggest the three dimension, develop in a new geometry which interests both the surface and the open and concrete space of nature. As regard to surfaces, Calonaci accentuates the three dimensional simulation of shaped patterns which are organized in simplified structures on the circle theme.

A further spatial suggestion is the definition of the background in negative which plays trough a "fitting way" with the positives. As regard to open space Calonaci fulfils the so-called "Disponibili", or structures where the conception of "shape" not only is identified with much decision as a three dimensional object and by "all-around", but it acquires the characteristic of modularity which allows to modify the structures in the space and to develop some formations even monumental, adjustable accordingly the external co-ordinates of light, of sun, of astral points, etc.

With the "Disponibili" the logic of pure geometric form is integrated by a symbolic function, always more readable in solar key, and the values of the vital energy are put in evidence and identified in the lines of force of the radiant structures. In this period the research for objective three-dimensionality takes a remarkable importance.

During this period Calonaci holds many personals shows at Palermo, Rome, Bergamo, at gallery "Giraldi" in Leghorn and in Florence, reviewed on catalogue by Enrico Crispolti, Raffaele De Grada and Piero Santi. At gallery "Jacopo della Quercia" in Siena was presented the monograph edited by Corrado Marsan. Carmine Benincasa introduces the one man show at gallery "Rinascita "in Reggio Emilia.

IV Period

Il messaggio del sole (The messages of sun) 1977-1981

The conquest of physical space with the "Disponibili" which insert themselves in nature, decide the final assumption of solar trajectory as a vital symbol. Calonaci ponders about the generational process of form which finds continuous relations in nature and by that it is synonym of life. Works tightly develop on the theme of Sun trajectory, to establish the co-ordinates of a formal structure which takes from the celestial geometries the dimensions for an ideal town. Works of this period have the appearance of urban plans, as future-possible projects. In painting there is the domination of the polychromatic constructed by composing three dimensional shapes, in lacquered woods and others materials of uniform colours, assembled at different levels and with the inlaid technique,

But painted canvases are not missing, as well as the bronzes in flat sculptures, the coloured inlaid xylography.

During this period we must remember the one-man shows at the Royal Palace of Caserta with the presentation of the book "L'opera di Calonaci" by Flavio Quarantotto, at gallery "Senato" in Milano, introduced by Giuseppe Marchiori, the French presences at "Salon des Réalités Nouvelles" in Paris and at the Chamber of Commerce in Avignon.

V Period

Segnali della memoria (Signals of memory) 1982-1986

Since the end of 70's up to the early 80's, Calonaci pauses to ponder on those forms which contain in their simple architecture, extraordinary for beauty and functionality, a kind of constructive wisdom of nature. They are fossils on whose forms it seems to be recorded the long process of natural selection and so the world history. The suggestions of

this wrecks and of others documents of ancient civilizations bring the idea of work as a sign or a writing to which commit a message destined to the memory of time.

We will have ephemeral realizations as the big work "Segnali della Memoria" fulfilled on a beach of Maremma (1983) and soon cancelled by wind and tide, or durable constructions thought as real and true monuments, like the "Porta della Pace" made for St. Giuseppe Church in Poggibonsi. Very significant in the painting field is the technique of graffito with which Calonaci melts the mechanical idea of solar structure and the communicative functions of signals of memory, because through the abrading, from the coats of different colours of which is made the pictorial material, we obtained weavings of superimposed signs which are a kind of graphic code, an evocative "writing" of space-time.

During this period the one-man shows and exhibitions are very numerous both in Italy and in foreign countries. Just to mention some of them, at gallery "Sanvitale" in Bologna, introduced by Franco Solmi, the exhibitions in foreign museums promoted by the Quadriennale of Rome, at Fondazione Pagani in Legnano, the exhibitions at the Italian Institute for Culture in Montreal and at Simon Frazer University in Ottawa.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the "Porta della Pace" a book was issued with a critical testimony of Giulio Carlo Argan, Fortunato Bellonzi, Carmine Benincasa, Aldo Cairola, Enzo Carli, Enrico Crispolti, Giuseppe Marchiori, Eugenio Miccini, Gino Morbiducci, Tommaso Paloscia, Dino Pasquali, Flavio Quarantotto, Pierre Restany, Giorgio Segato, Franco Solmi e Giuliano Serafini.

VI Period

I tatuaggi (The tattoos)

1987-1990

It's the development both conceptual and formal of "Segnali della Memoria" in the course of years '80. All the news received, our genetic patrimony, the history of violence as well as of loves, the value of life, the richness found and dreamt, the remote research, the science discoveries, the future hypothesis: in short the history of man from the origins and up to the edge of time is carved on our skin as an infinite tattoo, recorded in the memory which goes from ancestral sources to the future dimension that imagination knows how to conjecture and by consequence to anticipate as a fantastic sign.

Calonaci materializes such contents, realizes now geometries and now shapes, in a theatre where the escapes towards past and towards future are synthetically represented, always playing on that imaginary line that from work, from sculpture or from painting marks the way of the glance towards the sky or the solar zenith, from where man, constructor of machines and dreams, continues to draw his vital energy. There is an ideal tension in this writing of the forms created as hypothesis of tattoos to understand in terms of history and by that as messages of civilization which must represent for man a warning not to provoke lacks of balance in the order or in the harmony of elements.

During this period Calonaci fulfils paintings, sculptures, ceramics, xylography. He attends to exhibitions and holds personal shows. To remember the personal shows "Tatuaggi" held at Accademia dei Rozzi in Siena and at the Museum of California State College presented by Enrico Crispolti, or the shows at Grand Palais of Paris, at Fondazione Pagani and at Castello di Volpaia, thè performance "Tatuaggi" at The Ueno Royal Museum of Tokyo. In 1987 the monument "La Porta del Lavoro" is inaugurated in Poggibonsi.

VII Period

Le macchine del Sole (The machines of Sun)

1991-1996

In his work at the end of 80's up to now, the principle of vital cosmic energy settles in the concept of "Machine of Sun". It is all what moves and lives by energy, functioning as it was a machine constructed by a superior mysterious, logical intelligence (photosynthesis, chlorophyllian process). Plants and man, as all living beings, have adjusted their habitat in function of this energy, each species with their own ecological niche, which for man have been caves and houses and towns. Town is a symbol of energy confluent in the dynamism of collective life and so we can imagine towns of "feast", of "sun", of "sea", of "earth", of "sky". Every sculpture, every painting becomes a symbol or a real ideal project and a model of a "machine-town of Sun" as a possible form of a constructive utopia that shows the new dimensions invented by man with the complicity of Sun. Calonaci works on Ibis theme with a great inventing fertility and with the full awareness of the language that, beyond any cultural scheme and sterile aesthetic placing, expresses poetically a symbolic contents of high civil value, while he elaborates the absolute form of visual structure in the space, or better he involves the external space in the dynamic of the forces animated in the interior of the composition and in the multi-planned structure of the work. A message, Ibis, confirmed in the great "Macchina del Sole" which has been recently placed in Tokyo.

Among the intense expositive activity of last years we point out the personal shows at Art Gallery Biot/co in Tokyo, at Herr-Chambliss Fine Arts of Hot Springs in Arkansas, introduced by Nicola Micieli (in this occasion he was granted by Bill Clinton the title of Honorary Ambassador of Arkansas and Honorary Citizen of Hot Springs); the performance "In Vestiito d'Arte" at Museum of Bali. We point out too the big anthological one held in 1991 at Palazzo Lanfranchi in Pisa, with the patronage of town authorities and edited by Nicola Micieli.

VIII Period

Immigrazioni (Immigrations)

1997-1999

Between 1996 and 2000, almost in augury of the new millennium, the Stars in the Desert come to rest in the work by Calonaci. These are flowers of stone seeded on still soil, evidence which, like fragments fallen from a universe built in times lost beyond thought, brings testimony to the presence of man in the course of civilization: ciphers of an undecipherable writ, arcane traces that invade the enclosure of our lives or contaminate it with their presence arousing memories. Calonaci has called them 'Immigrations'; transfers of sensation from figurative fragments that seem to settle and sediment themselves into a recurring archetypal motif a thousands years old experiences waiting on the horizon of our own personal experience and collective consciousness, now once more brought into awareness, in perspective of the century and millennium, of messages; something obscure from the vestiges of the past, mystical or Pythagorean as they may be.

Certainly the artist remains fascinated by the aesthetic violence of alien fragments that intersect during his wanderings through the desert. These articulations and jointures from various levels of the generated nuclei of modelled forms touch and enchant him. He loves to immerse himself in the strata of matter that makes itself the web and weft of strokes in painting; multi-level articulations of plastic structure in sculpture. The message of astral fragments consists for him substantially in the seduction of divine beauty, intrinsic to the formal order of an object in which is mirrored the created universe. To this glimpse of beauty he erects altars and burns incense in order to capture a shadow at least in the pure physicality of the work to which he dedicates himself totally, with the ideal tension of the soul and the vibrating charge of one who has truly lived, in which everyone can recognize a portion of themselves, of their own story.

Among the personal exhibitions we can report: Stelle nel deserto/Stars in the Desert, Crypt of Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena; Oriente e Occidente nelle peregrinazioni di Calonaci e De Canino/East and west in the peregrinations of Calonaci and De Canino, Roof Garden, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma, under the auspices of Ferruccio Ulivi; Immigrazioni/Immigrations Palazzo Pretorio, Certaldo, and Via Crucis/the Way of the Cross. Accade nel 33d. C./It happened in 33AD, Museo di Santa Maria della Scala edited by Omar Calabrese with a presentation by Marcello Lazzarini, Siena and Palazzo Comunale, Poggibonsi, under the auspices of Nicola Micieli. Among the many exhibitions: Contaminazioni/Contaminations, Atelier Arti Visivi, Carrara, and Occasioni di fine stagione/End of season sales, ex Psychiatric Hospital of Iucca, under the auspices of Micieli; Toscana in arte/Tuscany in Art Crypt of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena, under the auspices of Bamo Santi; Arte in Vetrina/Ari in the Window, Cerreto Guidi, and Sette scultori nell'antico borgo/Seven sculptors in the old city, Rocca San Giovanni (L'Aquila) under the auspices of Corrado Marsan. Also numerous are sculptures destined for public places: L'Albero del Fuoco/The Tree of Fire, Parco dell'Intesa, Siena, La fonte del Sole/Source of the Sun, Casole d'Elsa, Porta d'Europa/Gate of Europe, Salceto, Poggibonsi.

IX Period

Spiritualità (Spirituality)

2000-2001 (Jubilee)

The new millennium opens with a surprising series of imposing sculptures of sacred subjects in bronze, in which Calonaci happily contaminates the formal abstract syntax and expressive language of the representation. Among other works stand out the fifteen panels of the Via Crucis/Way of the Cross for the monumental park of S. Agnese in Castellina in Chianti, and the Porte dell'Anima/Doors of the Soul for the church of Vico Alto, Siena. The Porta della Pace/Door of Peace (1985) of San Giuseppe in Poggibonsi, whose abstract-symbolic division evokes an ideal of concord steeped in sanctity that can be considered the antecedent of these works. For the first time in these Calonaci assigns to the geometric structure the function of constructing the scene where the different personages move and the suggestion of the locations and situations of the sacred representation. Calonaci contaminates styles with the conviction that the sculptural language, when used to confront a sacred theme, must signify, or perhaps, even better, visually communicate the representation and the plastic tangibility of the material, the great mystery of divine manifestation in the reality of history. Accents of intense drama are not lacking in the different stages of the Via Crucis/Way of the Cross each countersigned by a biting observation of human psychology, the corporal and spiritual passion of Christ being a paradigm of the human condition, He, who in the end is resurrected liberating Himself into the air wrapped within the

fluid undulation of his vestments. The closed panels of the Porte dell'anima/Doors of the Soul that appear to be 'suspended' in space anchored as they are in the crystal slabs of the support, make up a golden altar piece in which Calonaci re-proposes the same arrangement of abstract division to stage the sacred representation. In the sense that he uses analogous geometric modules to construct an architecture impressed with the typology of the triumphal arch, symbol and figural synthesis of time, of the created universe, of the church of Christ and the house of man.

Though occupied on works of great breath, Calonaci continues to exhibit the Via Crucis/Way of the Cross in the Sala Consiliare di Castiglion della Pescaia, in the Palazzo dei Vescovi in Pistoia, in the Palazzo Panciatichi in Florence, offices of the Consiglio Regionale of Tuscany, and in the Convitto delle Calze, Florence. He also participates in exhibitions: Generazione Anni Trenta/the Thirties, "Museo Bargellini", Pieve di Cento, under the auspices of Giorgio Di Genova, Adriano e le sue memorie/Adriano and his memories, Centro Internazionale "Antinoo per l'Arte", under the auspices of Ferruccio Ulivi; Le avanguardie italiane dal 1945/The Italian avant garde from 1945, Pinacoteca Civica, Follonica, Made in Italy, Six Contemporary artists, The Grace Museum Exhibition, Abilene, Texas, USA

X Period

Astrattismo e citazione (Abstractionism and Citation)

Since 2002

It should be remembered that in the last few years, and through systematic developments in research, Calonaci faced, with a certain type of System, the theme of 'statements', or rather the graft of inert implicit into abstract division, recognizable signs and symbols, and these as excerpts from reality, a life lived, and those cultural artefacts encountered during his wandering itineraries through the civilization of mankind, through which Calonaci filters cultural and artistic testimonials. The great sculptures of sacred inspiration are of the most evident figurative character. In painting abstract symbolism predominates. Here we are definitely dealing with deposits of memory that act in the artist's imagination and, in consequence, become the constructive material of his creative workshop, like the lines, the geometric figures, the decorative patterns habitually used in purely formal function. Calonaci has called this process of encounter and integration 'abstractionism and citation'. The abbreviation explicitly includes the periods of 'immigration' and 'spirituality', but implicitly invests his entire creative adventure in that Calonaci has always concentrated his attention as sculptor and painter on those formal structures in which the ingenuity and spirituality of man find their synthesis of significance. Help comes to us from the word of the artist himself: "Places and works, seated in the history of the world, witness to great events, inexhaustible receptacles of news, immigrated within us to emerge and give life to the word. The work therefore metabolises concepts and brings them to a different pieces, significance of which is imprisoned within an aesthetic solution passing beyond imagination itself". The great sculpture to which this catalogue is dedicated, "L'Angelo/the Angel" herald of the period "Popoli/Peoples" , is, in this sense one the most significant moments of 'abstractionism and citation'.

Among the personal exhibitions of the recent years are to be remembered Dalla forma pura alla contaminazione iconica/From the pure form to iconic contamination Museo San Pietro, Colle Val d'Elsa, under the auspices of Enrico Crispoti who produced a critically recognized catalogue of Calonaci's periods; Possibili convivenze/Possible cohabitations, Museo d'Arte Sacra, Certaldo; Contaminazione iconiche/Iconic contaminations, Le Lance Eventi, Fiesole, under the auspices of Francesco Gurrieri and Corrado Marsan; Museum of Contemporary Italian Art in America, San José, Costa Rica. Standing out among the exhibitions are those of Come l'ombra/Like the shadows, Archivio Generale di Stato, Rome, and Forme nel Verde/ Forms in the green, San Quirico d'Orcia. To arrive to "Calonaci, Vertical Cities", a personal exhibition hold at Accademia delle Arti del Disegno gallery, Palazzo Pitti, Boboli Gardens and Palazzo Medici Riccardi.