

“You see a block, think about the image: It’s inside, you only have to undress it. I’m referring to sculpture, that which requires taking away and placing, it’s similar to painting: as long as namely sculpture and painting come from the same intelligence, they can be left together in peace, leaving aside many disputes; because more time is lost on these, than on making figures. “
(Michelangelo Buonarroti)

SOLID AIR Soloexhibition 2015

DAVID BEGBIE: THE IMMATERIALITY OF BEING by Massimiliano Sabbion

The human body is the first aspect of aesthetic and formal investigation with which one comes into contact; it is the discovery of oneself, one’s conscience and knowledge. It is the contrast between oneself and the outside world, with other bodies, with other human beings.

An infant touches itself, discovers itself, reveals itself and this primordial knowledge then develops in the body that forms and changes in adulthood, until the end of life. In the contemporary world the body is increasingly considered a temple, a place of rationality and upsets, where social and cultural lines merge, creating presence and representation of aesthetic ideals and standards to refer to.¹

There isn’t a culture in which the body is not at the basis of aesthetic, moral and religious thoughts, both a daily blessing and a curse: it is the visual and tactile communication alluded to every day by mankind².

The body is also the medium of investigation and development for the sculptor David Begbie.

The physical material which shows through in his sculptures becomes the explosion of shapes, muscles, tensions and postures that reflect the use of an idealised body, whether male or female. On the one hand the power of the masculine body, the gentleness of the moulded shapes of the female figures, all created with a modern material which undoubtedly does not arise from the standards for classical sculpture: the metallic net, an industrial product with a weave which allows light and air to pass through making the figures ethereal and intangible, almost spongy and light but equally real and physical with their presence and carnality. The great strength of interest in human anatomy shows through in every work which is equipped with a unique personality, one-off pieces created by the artist’s hands that are the result of multiple studies done with models, everyday observations, sources that continually bombard Modern Man. The body is present and speaks through photographs, advertisements, the gym, video, music, cinema, theatre, dance, in an unconscious and sublime manner, today we are continuously subjected to the exhibition of the human body³. The physical aspect, viewed in an annoying and often obsessive manner, is a contemporary feature where one searches for a perfect and ideal body. In David Begbie this reflects and breathes almost by subliminal osmosis with the idea of a physical body living again in motionless energy from which created shapes arise. Body postures and the way the artist composes them refer to the sculptures of classical antiquity, where remote standards of beauty merge with the past that tore apart the bodies

and returned sculptures with missing legs, arms, heads, thus leaving only the essence of the body itself.

The material, meshes of iron and bronze and metallic nets, are linked inseparably with the idea of a modern industrial compound, which places the works in a completely new context capable of speaking a language which becomes the stylistic tone of “doing sculpture “ in the new millennium.⁴

Another element that mixes perfectly with the final work is light, through lighting, shadows are created which give a weight to the works that are ethereal, empty shells that refer to the perfectly moulded body. Light is the final principle and responsible for giving life to the artist’s sculptures, it absorbs and expands, they thus remain full and empty, reflections and plays of the light that produce a real and physical weight arriving in surreal points in the final creation: it is a body that stands out in the light and lives with modelled shadows which are reflected in surfaces that appear to move and pulsate with life. The viewer is required not only to “see”, but to “look at” that is to go beyond the simple mechanism of vision. Often the desire to interact with the element created is strong, they are both delicate and strong shapes at the same time, you feel the desire to embrace the sculptures, to touch the immaterial because that before the eyes of the beholder is real but in contrast it is light and transparent, like a cloud created by one idea and thought, an antimatter that is moulded. Understandably, the reference to the great attention of sculpture of the past, not only citing the classical world and the beauty of the Greek-Roman shaped bodies, but a whole host of artists to which David Begbie was inspired by an interest in formal appearance in the first place but then going beyond the expressive, emotional, physical and passionate study of sculptors such as Michelangelo, Auguste Rodin and Medardo Rosso⁵.

From Michelangelo, sinewy shapes and exaggerated forms typical of Mannerism were derived, that led to a spectacular overtaking of the human body, in which muscles and contortions made the body alive and went beyond the natural beauty. Sinewy shapes are found again in the art of Egon Schiele and in studied compositions of bodies and postures. Regarding Auguste Rodin, David Begbie admires his ability to model the expressions and emotionality that arise in the form, from the French master’s sculptures the concreteness of flesh is acquired that starts the physical revelation of his characters’ personalities.

Medardo Rosso’s art, so intimate and able to solidify the *carpe diem* Impressionist, blends perfectly with the research of David Begbie, both pursue the fleeting and delicately modelled incorporation of air and light, and the words of Medardo Rosso also apply for the contemporary sculptor: “*Nothing is material in space ... we are nothing but tricks of light: what matters in art is to let the material be forgotten.*”⁶

If the material is forgotten in front of David Begbie’s works, it’s not the case with the end result of the physical and bodily reproduction. “*My concern is precisely contemporary in the fact that I’m transposing a modern industrial material, in a similar way to Mannerism but in no way in the same style of Michelangelo because my influences come from a much broader context, in today’s society. My sculpture is completely different due to the nature of the material, even though the results invoke the same emotions. Our bodies are compared with the world on many levels, that which we individually see, feel and appreciate, and how we see each other, it’s staggeringly important.*”

The emotion of a body reproduced, according to aesthetic principles by means of new

materials, is left to live in air and light and it is in this way the vision of a look that brings contemporary sculpture to new experiments, new worlds, and new bodies.

1. B. 1. B. FRIGERIO, 1 B. FRIGERIO, Exposed Bodies. Beauty and Anesthetics in Contemporary Art, Con-Fine Edizioni, 2001
2. S. O'REILLY, 2 S. O'REILLY, The Body in Contemporary Art, Piccolo Biblioteca Einaudi, 2009
3. T. PLEBANI, A. SCATTIGNO N. M. FILIPPINI, Bodies and History: Women and Men from the Ancient World to Contemporary Times, Libreria Editrice, 2002
4. F. POLI, Twentieth Century Sculpture, Editori Laterza, 2006
5. M. DE MICHELI, Twentieth Century Sculpture, Garzanti, 1992 6. G. LISTA, Medardo Rosso. Sculpture and photography, 5Continentes, 2003