

Francesco Barocco

(Susa, 1972)

Francesco Barocco's art cannot be easily summarised in terms of themes or languages, but it is, first of all, identifiable by an attitude that reflects the daily demands of work carried out in the space of his studio, in a search for a sense of authenticity of creation that cannot help but entail continuous new approaches. He forgets neither traditional techniques, particularly engraving, nor history – the totality of images from ancient to modern art, Western and otherwise, which he fully and freely draws upon as a patrimony all of his own. It is as if a universal museum, in the manner of Malraux, an infinite atlas of works, were covering the walls of his studio, opening them up to a world of references that is simultaneously total and subjective.

Two of the works that have become part of the CRT collection are composed of a sculpture or a sculptural composition and a white table that functions as a base. This latter element comes from the artist's research into the dialogue between the work and its base, originally seen in the work of Brancusi, and amplified to the theme of the table, which Barocco has utilised in the past as a white supporting plane for drawings, sheets of paper and slate. Now, however, the sculptural volume arises in the space of the two dimensional drawing, although in one of the two pieces entitled *Senza titolo* (2012), the work is the three-dimensional transposition, in the form of Breuer's modular tables, into an altarpiece – a thirteenth-century crucifixion rendered as a miniature in metal. This is a version of a sculpture that Barocco had previously created using other materials, on a 1:1 scale. The cross, placed on the table top, inevitably leads to a symbolic awakening. It is the offering of the body which occurs on the plank where the sacrifice is foretold. It is the symbol of the sacrificed body deposited horizontally, as in Mantegna's *Dead Christ*. But it is above all, for Western culture, the visual apex of the manifestation of divinity, and it is here, in the evocative chain of all possible meanings of the cross, that Barocco's work is insistent, reactivating every possible memory of that dimension of the contemporary eternal that a universal symbol like the crucifixion represents. And memory, free association, analogy and the entire range of possibilities of iconological variations become interpretations that the work contemplates in itself.

The other *Senza titolo* presents a head modelled in clay on a table top, arranged between two glass containers and a bottle of turpentine – all three sprayed with light-blue paint. The few delineated strokes of a beard on the head bring to mind classical statuary and later neoclassical work. However, the erasure of the face is completely surrealist and anti-classical, and the juxtaposition of the face, the rough colour of raw clay – equivalent to the chalky white of de Chirico's mannequins – with objects of industrial derivation is metaphysical. The composition of the jars and bottle is also metaphysical, and more fully Morandian, but in the shift that is created between the latter's painted bottles and Barocco's, there is a more forcefully stated tension, which can be identified as the artist's

primary necessity: to return from the work to the place of its making, from the painting to the objects in the studio that are its original source, from the history of painting, as seen in Morandi's work, to its daily unfolding in the artist's mind and with his hands.

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Senza titolo (2019) is the latest work by Francesco Barocco to become part of the collection. It belongs to a recent group of works in which the division between sculpture, drawing and engraving is broken down once and for all, and the three media merge together to give rise to archetypical figures that seem to envelop all the images from art history that Barocco has experienced over the years. These are shapes in plaster of an extraordinary expressive strength, modelled to simulate the contours of busts, half-busts or torsos without arms or head. Compared to his previous production, in which the bas-relief was maintained at least in certain elements – especially in the nose, with its long shadow cast – in these works the three-dimensionality is entirely entrusted to drawing. The clear cut in the frontal part of the block of plaster is designed as a blank page onto which anatomic elements may be inscribed. While the chiaroscuro reveals the bearded faces of classical figures – men undergoing a moment of superhuman fatigue – close up, the presence of the engraving may be noted, left by the tip of graphite on the surface of the plaster.

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Other Works in the Collection

Senza titolo (2012), fans, paints for etching, 135 × 120 cm