

Nanni Valentini*

(Sant' Angelo in vado, Pesaro, 1932 — Vimercate, Monza, 1985)

Valentini chose to work with clay, which is both substance and place, identifying in it the material of memory. Using this material, he found the capacity to respond, with a cycle of destruction and creation, to the need for signs to appear and dissolve, to be reborn at any moment.

The artist, who had an unusual ability to express himself through writing, described the origins and reasons behind his art: “The material and expressive technique I have favored is that of ceramics, specifically terracotta. As stone ties the tower to its environment, becoming itself manifestation and rhythm of the site, so too my goal is for clay to become a trace and manifestation of a continuum. In fact, if we consider certain aspects of its symbolic content, we find in mother earth the myth of the Ancestor-Son: ancestor as a being already born and preserved in the earth, and only later manifested. We can consider clay to be a trace of the river’s continuity; indeed, transported by the water it is deposited in the bends of the river, settles and becomes the most filtered part of the earth. We can imagine the clay as the central moment of a water-fire dialectic, or as the material of the vase, or the material that ties the centrifugal and the centripetal in a continuum. The Cretan vase where an octopus is painted that attempts to cling to the horizon, which turns infinitely on its own axis, is perhaps the most meaningful image.” (“Negli Appennini centrali...” in *Birth of the Work, Five Italian Artists in U.S.A.* Boston: Harbor Gallery University of Massachusetts, 1979).

The continuous flow of material, in deaths and rebirths, takes shape in his work in spirals that rest on the ground, as if they were fossils of ancient shells set into the stone upon which we tread, in some way memories of the liquidity of the sea that they once inhabited. His clay congeals in the archetypal form of the house, open to the sky like a ruin, simple and essential as the square symbol that is the origin of one of the first hieroglyphs and the letter Beta, which still is part of our alphabet. Or again, he composes lunettes on the white wall: architraves, thresholds, and portals of a space that was meant to grant him, like all his generation, a plane and an infinite depth that the canvas of the painting was no longer capable of containing. (EV)

Additional Works in the Collection

Untitled, 1982-83, mixed media on paper, 59.10 × 39.40 inches

Untitled, 1984, mixed media on paper, 59.10 × 39.40 inches

Untitled, 1984, mixed media on paper, 53.13 × 37.82 inches

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