

Paolo Grassino

(Turin, 1967)

After a childhood dedicated to drawing and painting under the guidance of his father, Paolo Grassino took his first steps in the art of sculpture in the studio of Luigi Mainolfi, in a cultural context – that of his city, Turin – still dominated by the pervasive presence of Arte Povera, with which he also shares the year of birth. And yet Grassino immediately managed to develop a surprisingly autonomous and original language, one which rejected connotation so as to open up to a wide range of materials, in a constant tension towards the language believed most suited to the occasion. The modular structures of recipients full of pigmented water that give shape to his debut works, such as his *Torre* (1993), seem to wish to envelop sculpture and painting in the same place, spreading out plastically in the space and at the same time capturing the gesture of paint inside the paint pot. They are followed by a group of works made up of nets of orange tubes in PVC, of those generally used as wastewater pipes: initially clustered around themselves; in the later versions, branching out, even conquering the outside of buildings.

It was these invisible veins found in the home that introduced the element of the body to Grassino's art, in a necessary passage from the container of materials to that of our existence. The artist begins by replicating the surface that covers it – the skin – with strips of silicone, before going deeper down, into the rib cage and the organs it protects. By choosing chromed iron in this case or molten aluminium, the solidity of which contrasts with the fragile nature of man, Grassino embarks on the – in real terms unsuccessful – attempt to construct an enhanced body, one ultimately more resistant. The large replica of an explanted heart with severed veins and aorta, titled *Cardiaco* (2006), is further developed in the sculpture in the collection, *Albero cardiaco* (2014). Commissioned by the Fondazione per i Giardini di Palazzo Cisterna in Turin, the work compares the structure of the tree branches with that of blood vessels, acknowledging the incredible similarities between the inside of the human body and a number of other natural expressions.

Constantly searching for the meaning of existence, Grassino does not overlook elements of disturbance in his works – broken bottles stuck into the flesh, bodies crossed by iron girders, electric cables inserted into the back – which may lead us to reflection on the conditions of life in contemporary society. One of his best known works, *Analgesia*, exists in versions that differ in the materials and the components of the background: sometimes piles of empty pallets, more often the carcasses of FIAT cars; instead, what remains unchanged is the aggressive and unsettling presence of a pack of wolfdogs moving towards the observer in the role of guardians of a desolate world, perhaps even post-human, of which there is no more than car wrecks to defend.

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