

The Implications of Glass

by Allison Grimaldi Donahue for Lydia Silvestri

*The goat was called ‘Motin,’ she didn’t have horns,
she smelled like ferns, she had golden eyes and she licked my hands.*

Hands to reveal identity and hands to conceal it
a rapid touch a thwacking smack a brush with tenderness
hands to do the touching and be touched
active and passive reaching and reached for
on a reiki bed or a bed of coals set ablaze for tradition
wiping them on dungarees slathering oil and adding herbs
hands to cure hands to kill hands to break and hands to bond

looking for a diadem I found these
these spheres and baubles of
libidinal excess
tongue tip to nipple round
there is a point that is no point
in the womb shapes become forms
take to wood take to glass
every protuberance leads to something else
yes, something else protruding
be it fear or idleness or the risk of

inopportune love

Need and boredom
being the only true real reasons to do anything at all
take up new materials, feel in the darkness
swap this for that and that for this
saint Simon says and so shall follow
gnawing on a pencil orality takes center
all emotion through hand moves to mouth back up to eye
to look at the plan is to thus imagine the execution
should it occur or not occur
should it unfold or remain folded
secretly they tell you which colors to use
secretly you know the human body contains them all
when green takes over flesh
when an unexpected transparency becomes
opaque in the waiting
time takes its time to tell

Allison Grimaldi Donahue is a poet, artist and translator. Her work appears in print and performance. She lives in Bologna.

Lydia Silvestri (1929, Chiuro, Sondrio – 2018, Colico, Lecco) is an Italian sculptor. She studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts with Marino Marini. Fascinated since childhood by mythology and plastic forms, this passion has accompanied her throughout her artistic career. Silvestri’s work is characterized by a constant search for form and materials: abstract forms, anatomical details, and intertwined figures in constant erotic tension arise from the combination of stone and marble, bronze and wood, semigress and terracotta, as well as from innovative materials, compounds of inert and palatal resins (*magma*) and compounds of inert and epoxy resins (*lapis*). Between 1969 and 1970 the artist worked on a series of Murano glass sculptures that will later be presented at Galleria del Naviglio in Milan in 1971. They are called ‘Dreams’ because of ‘the presumed unreality of the material, elusive, fiery one

Used Things

Things tire like gestures,
slow. to buy something and use it
is a gesture, like a breath.
used things are like breathed breaths,
they are consumed, they cannot
be used a second time. they are things
that have happened, and that which has happened, beautiful
or ugly as it is, doesn’t change doesn’t repeat.
Used things get bought again,
they are breathed again
wrapped up again in cellophane;
aren’t washed, like a breath isn’t washed,
after the first use they lose
opacity
and don’t get old or die, but simply,
they are used.

—Carlo Bordini

Question: And the most tiring thing?

Response: Being tired of being tired, a price known only by those who pay it. The mountains to carry up mountains: Sisyphus!

The eternal: ‘I’m coming too’ ‘No, not you!’

Monstrous physical effort.

Doors in your face and dozens of fattened toads.

The tiredness that makes you ugly like a beast, sordid, unjust: lying down on the ground like a hunted, exhausted animal.

But not being able to do without it.

Look, this is sculpture for a woman doing sculpture.

it is the work that grants the vision
never the other way around
the hand not moving will see nothing
the hand moving the pen
to paper allows the light in

newness as a male obsession and so one asks
‘what’s better than newness?’ and it’s love over and over
to fall in love to make work to then love that work borne of love
and the power and the agency gained from love
to be grateful to fall in love over and over again
and a blond Irish poet Patrick, who I was in love with.

I think in part that I owe it [pleasure in using my hands] to my mountain upbringing: weaving baskets, whittling bowls and clogs out of wood, kitchen utensils, seeing a wall grow stone by stone chosen out of a heap of stones with a careful eye, and silkworms constructing perfect cocoons of gold, making vats for wine, repairing a doll’s arm or the hoof of a calf, always, it was everything with the hands and an essentialness of movements, of behaviors and of logic.

sitting on the bench eating apples and yogurt and watching the sun come up and then down
promises were made and kept, just in ways few people imagined
when I think of you looking at me it becomes less and less certain what it is you see

Lydia Silvestri
STUDI PER VETRI,
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it began as a game: lay your full weight on me, empty me of this air
it ended as a game, bruised and sordid

You who are about to read these wanton games of disheveled song,
see aside the disdain appropriate to a man of Latium.
It is not Phoebus Apollo’s sister Diana who inhabits this shrine, nor is it Vesta,
nor the goddess born from the head of her father Minerva,
but the ruddy guardian of gardens, better endowed than normal,
whose loins are not covered up by any clothing.
Therefore, either pull the tunic over the part that must be covered,
or read these lines with the same eyes you use to gaze at this cock. (*Carmina Priapea 1*)

Always an amazement how these same eyes have been here and there and there
and there—should the mind be unveiled in all its dissonance,
could we still speak? Speaking here is not the goal, no.
Presence is found in the listening.

In the Alps

Where goes this wandering blue,
This horizon that covers us without a murmur?
Let old lands speak their speech,
Let tarnished canopies protect us.

Where after the wars, the peaceable lions,
The forests resting from their struggle,
The streams with loads upon their icy backs,
Is this a reason for happiness,
That one speaks after such a long time,
That the hand one holds leads one far away?

Is this a fairy tale then?
This new-discovered place where one can dream
Of tigers with fair hair and houses whose hearths
Are tended by knights lingering there?

Riding down to Venice on borrowed horses
The air is freed of our crimes,
Lovers meet in the inns of our fathers
And everywhere after dusk the day follows.
— Barbara Guest

I love friendship.

I love cooking.

I love cards.

I read mysteries, Poetry, the Lives of the Saints and Magic.

The most beautiful compliment received: from a little boy called Tommaso ‘Dad says you’re a witch, but it isn’t true, I swear, you’re magic!’

** All text in italics comes from an interview with Lydia Silvestri conducted for a 1985-1986 academic year thesis at Accademia di Belle Arti Brera.*

moment and then icy, mobile, non-palpable, impregnable.’ In her career Silvestri was included in major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale in 1956 and 1966, La Quadriennale di Roma in 1956. Solo exhibitions were held in private galleries in Italy and abroad, among others, at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1971 and Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1964. In 1999, ‘Arianna e il Minotauro’ a major public project was presented at Giardini Pubblici of Parco Palestro, Milan. She has also worked, often joined by architects, for public and private commissions, including: the Church of Santa Maria Immacolata (Francavilla, Italy), the Imperial Hotel (Tokyo), the Hyatt Hotel (Singapore), the Hilton Hotel (Hong Kong), the Cathay Pacific Area Company (Hong Kong) and the Sheraton Hotel (Damascus). Her work was recently presented at La Quadriennale in Rome in 2020.

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