

*‘Art is in reality the rediscovery of stone, of wood, of gold, ...’*

- Il filosofo (Mario Merz)

Alchemical does not even start to describe Marisa Merz’s Art. In fact, to remain true and reverent to her jealously guarded secret, one should resist over-interpreting and over-rationalising her creations, but rather let them take us on an enchanting and poetic path.

In her realm, it is not what we know that matters, but definitely what we don’t. And in a Western World that has, since the Middle-Ages, increasingly sought explanation and structure, Marisa Merz offers us a remedy of Byzantine mystery and Animist ambiguity.

Her works seem to always answer with a question. Often undated, unlabelled or uncatalogued, they are meant to create their own history, their own chronology and their own historicity: in her hands, objects are not mere illustration or product of an artistic mind or practice, but the hushed, living proof of it. In other words, Merz does not make Art from paper, stone, clay or copper, but makes copper, clay, stone or paper ‘out of Art’.

In describing how he twice encountered the work of Marisa Merz, in the midst of otherwise bombastic, male-dominated group exhibitions, Richard Flood stressed how she and her work almost hid in the smallest spaces, the corners and the margins; and how “this woman has saved my life in two exhibitions. Twice she has taught me the meaning of silence and twice she has taught me the meaning of peace”.

Merz, in her 90s, still at work in her home in Turin, is indeed the only woman within Arte Povera, a genius label applied to the group of artists - including Marisa Merz’s formidable husband, Mario - who revolutionized Italian (and European) Art in the late Sixties and early Seventies, with their rebellious stance and use of seemingly ‘un-artistic’ materials. Arte Povera did not really glorify or solely privilege the use of impoverished or refused things, but rather made a fetish of them in order to re-position them within an either collapsed or linear (Art) history and society. Crucially, Marisa Merz’s works are only fetishistic insofar as revealing the innate powers of rituals, repetition and secrecy.

The human face is prominent: in exquisite drawings and paintings on wood, card, paper or alabaster, ex-voto busts in unfired clay and wax, on pedestals or wall-mounted, with their starry eyes - seemingly empty and yet always watching - and with their delicate, ever-shifting features. They are

as much female figures, veiled madonnas, Medieval creatures and hieratic gestures, as they are animated souls. For Merz, these figures and heads are alive. Sometimes they speak and sometimes they don't. Sometimes "they don't have anything to say", but could just be waiting to become alive, with the right light, and under the right gaze.

This will be Thomas Dane Gallery's first show with Marisa Merz. Born in 1926, Merz lives and works in Turin, Italy. Among the institutions that have dedicated solo exhibitions to her work are Centre Internationale d'art et du Paysage, Île de Vassivière, France; Serpentine Gallery, London; Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, Italy; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Merz work has been included in countless group exhibitions all over the world, including: Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein; CCS Bard/Hessel Museum of Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. Merz has participated five times in the Venice Biennale, and in her fifth showing in 2013, received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement. In 2017, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and Hammer Museum in Los Angeles will co-organise a retrospective of Marisa Merz's oeuvre.

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