

KATZ CONTEMPORARY

Customs and Space Travel

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The most seductive and intriguing meaning of the word “vehicle” is the one that the Italian Dictionary Garzanti lists as third and last. It refers to the world of chemistry and defines a “vehicle” as an “inactive substance that mixes with an active substance so that one can use the latter in the desired way”. It would appear to be the entry with the most potential for metaphor, and the one that is closest to the problems that an artist has to face when, shut in his studio, he must find the ideal manner precisely to embody concepts and ideas.

Veicoli (Vehicles) is also the title that Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg have chosen to give to a collection of some of their most recent work. Their reasons for choosing this word are, however, perhaps more trivial, as it cannot leave a pun-loving German speaker indifferent, and many of their works recall, allude to, or represent real means of transport.

Though spaceships are perhaps less common, they are the most likely vehicles to trigger the imagination. Razzo (Rocket), the principal vehicle for space exploration, is the title the two Zurich based artists have given to one of their sculptures. The work consists of dozens and dozens of wooden objects, collected from flea markets here and there and assembled to form a kind of wedge, whose muzzle, a crouching hare, seems to be howling to the moon. Under the hare, the most disparate objects are woven together, almost through a process of “sculpture automatique”: an African mask, a carpet beater, a good luck talisman, a statue of Buddha, a branching root, a model of a spinning wheel and a simple sphere. Because of its shape, which soars towards the sky, or perhaps due to its totemic appearance, this surreal heap of everyday objects and fetish figures, enclosing both complexity and simplicity, radiates an almost mystical aura. One is tempted to define Razzo (Rocket) as the super totem of Pataphysics. Because of its heterogeneous materiality and its compositional rhythm, because of its heights and ravines, one could almost say that the artists have succeeded in creating a three-dimensional representation of the “surface of God”; to the immense delight of Doctor Faustroll – a figure invented by the French writer and creator of Pataphysics Alfred Jarry - who attempted to measure it.

Lutz/Guggisberg love to combine differences and extremes. They counter technology, to which they allude through their choice of theme, by using natural materials, which they sometimes collect directly from the woods. They set their pantheistic totem against the Città Razzo (Rocket City), a sculpture that could be a model from Calvino’s reminiscences of ideal cities, in which density and lightness coexist. In this work, a finely engineered structure supports and contains a wooden meteorite that has been sculptured by the passing of time and by the busy work of insects. It is an atavistic and organic architectural structure that, however, does not lose its potential to evoke a sci-fi utopia.

A continuous return to the model size, allows the artists to avoid directing the perception and interpretation of their work into an unequivocal and, therefore, limited direction. The forms they create are not closed, in spite of the precision and infinite care with which they are realized. The fact that they are static and complete objects does not hinder a dynamic use of the imagination and multiple interpretations. Lutz/Guggisberg are the disciples of the ambiguity of form, an ambiguity used as a resource and enrichment, rather than enigmatically to avoid taking a position on reality. Therefore, if a sculpture like *Complesso* (Complex) initially evokes the architectural dimension (of a monumental, inaccessible and labyrinthine building), its title suggests a psychological subtext in an ironic but also a troubling fashion. The collection of wooden scraps (cubes, small beams and various bits of wood, that have been saved from being discarded) opens onto a wider spatial dimension, which can with one object, include the infinite meanders of the subconscious and the irrational.

Lutz/Guggisberg accept their role of artists-demiurges without hesitation. They give shape to ideas. At the same time, however, they are also capable of doing the exact opposite: of shaping material into ideas. Their attitude of not excluding any kind of media from their work, from video and painting, to sculpture and installation, but also texts and music, makes their work so consistent and fascinating, but also so multifaceted and diverse. Thus, in *Ferroberto* (Iron Bert), they gather word games and plastic forms that are suspended between the abstract and the figurative, and meld them into a kind of Golem. In it the special dynamism of the sculptor Boccioni, the mannerism of Arcimboldo, as well as the fingerprints of the artists melted into the iron, the energy of a manga figure, and Uncle Tom's cabin cohabit.

Lutz/Guggisberg paint images exploiting the shadows and the reflections of white on almost white canvases; or they invert enamels and colors on photos taken out of newspapers, organically blending current affairs and abstract forms. Skilled and audacious art chefs of fusion cuisine, they combine "Mari e Monti" in *Razza di Bosco* (Wood Ray), an animal– shuttle, whose perfectly aerodynamic shape, covered by a fur of lichen, is capable of sliding like a monorail along tracks that seem to come directly from a museum of minimalist art. These two artists succeed in mixing registers, ironize and play with shapes, they continually surprise, without ever losing the seriousness of their intent. They drive their vehicle in a sure and spectacular fashion, taking the curves at breakneck speed and then braking suddenly when the road is straight; and they never go off the road.

Translation Frances E.Maunder