



Reprinted from Jan van der Marck, introduction to *Virginio Ferrari* (Milan, Italy: Galleria Salone Annunciata, 1969). Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Virginio Ferrari” shown at the Galleria Salone Annunciata, Milan, Italy, in collaboration with Franzp Arte Contemporanea, Torino, Italy.

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Virginio Ferrari is a sculptor seeking to cast an imagery that relates to his European heritage in a mold provided by his American environment. Having found a personal idiom, he is off to realize some of the best work of his career.

Before leaving his native Verona and after settling in the United States, Ferrari was exposed to the biomorphic aspects of surrealism. He frequented the Arturo Schwarz Gallery and Alexander Iolas Gallery, befriended Matt and took a strong interest in the work of Gorky in particular.

The case bronze sculpture he exhibited in his first America exhibition at the Makler Gallery in Philadelphia in 1963 points up the influence of his teachers Minguzzi, Ghermandi and Somaini. Yet, the polarization of the male and female principles in formal juxtaposition and the grafting of biomorphic onto geometric form are distinctly Ferrari’s early indications of an interest in pervading his career.

While his depiction of anatomical parts relates to that of such diverse artists as Mirò and Saul, it is still a personal interpretation of organic — particularly reproductive — processes. The artist’s imagery is clearly a celebration of the principle of mutual attraction in love and sex. Blood and sperm, the life-giving fluids of the body, are a prominent feature in the drawings that are corollary to the sculpture.

Blood drops and spermatozoa languish in limbo between womblike enclosures with openings and protuberances or rodlike symbols of male aggression. There is a distinct suggestion of protoplasmic life, the state in which man has to be shaped before he can shape his destiny.

Alert to experimentation with materials, Ferrari moved from simple bronze casting to combinations of aluminum or steel and bronze, wood and bronze, epoxy, plexiglas and, finally, naugahyde. With a sensitive feeling for materials congenial to the morphology of his subjects, he plays organic form in bronze or epoxy against geometric form in steel or aluminum.

Since early 1968 Ferrari has employed naugahyde stretched over padded plywood frames. In a circle set within a square, the artist fits two or three jigsawed fragments of form that just miss setting. Male and female connotations depend on color as well as form: white, yellow, pink and orange usually stand for female while black, blue and grey are their male counterpart. These works in bright and pastel colors — instant soft love kits — convert into an assembly of pillows when taken apart.

The containing form, in which the elements fit like embryos in a womb, can become so big that a person can crouch inside. The next step would be for the room itself to become the frame, while the jigsawed elements are freely moved around to serve as reclining couches and supports. If we return to Ferrari's formal inspirations and use of materials, then Gorky and Fontana are to the former what Oldenburg and Dine seem to be to the latter. How did this American application of European formal concepts come to fruition? In Chicago, home of a pop art derivation that thrives on urban sub-cultures, Virginio Ferrari has acquired some of the funkiness that underscores his basically surrealist orientation. As such, it may have been the catalyst that fused the native and acquired qualities of his work.