



Reprinted from Virginio Ferrari, “Meeting with Sculpture,” in *Virginio Ferrari: Sculptures* (Paris, France: Paris Art Center, 1985), 23–25. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Virginio Ferrari: Sculptures” shown at the Paris Art Center, Paris, France, and Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois.

Virginio Ferrari—Sculptor

My first artistic experience in the ‘50s was abstract expressionism. Then came surrealist exercises, Pop, and Funk from ’63 to ’69, and finally, from ’69 to ’80, formalist work.

I will speak about this recent period, which is without a doubt, the result of the intense activity of the preceding years: the cultural and technical experiences, the experimentation with various materials, the desire to understand them and to form them, to possess them by fully appreciating their function and quality, and finally, of the mastery of modern technology and of the freedom of expression that such mastery permits.

These experiences and technical expertise led me, quite naturally, to my most recent forms of expression in iron, steel, aluminum, marble, bronze; each material exploited for its unique richness and mysterious strength, each piece cut, bent, welded polished to accentuate its surface qualities, its marbling, its junctures. Mastered techniques and spontaneous creativity must be harmonized.

In an urban environment with its social problems, the individual can either decide to participate or remain indifferent, but he must make that choice again and again each day since the problems remain. They are part of the society and have made the city. Architecture and city planning are extremely important and they take shape from this urban reality. I have been completely absorbed by this social reality, its negative-positive, its empty and full spaces, the problem of participating or not. Consequently, my sculptures since 1969 have interacted with the environment, often playfully in contrast to it, at other times fully participating in it.

In 1969 my show at the Social Service Building of the University of Chicago, a building by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, presented plexiglas pieces which were complete in themselves, but which at the same time were made for their environment, incorporated into that particular space.

In 1970 I made *Diagolo* for the Albert Pick Hall for International Studies at the University of Chicago. The sculpture is formed of four interrelating bronze elements, which unite as well with the surroundings, bringing together dramatically the forms of the building and spaces around and in front of it. It embodies characteristic elements of my style in the early 70s, in particular masculine and feminine forms (fitting into one another), a union of technology and nature, which I accentuated and used as expressive elements. There is an earlier expression of these forms in a series of steel sculptures from 1963: one is a cylinder cut by a curve through its center forming masculine and feminine sections (figuring copulation); there is similar prism, circle, etc...

My sculpture entitled *Ecstasy*, now at Ravinia Park, is from the same period. In it the same elements are used as key points along the verticality of two shafts whose division is a single cut, resembling a drawn line, for all 27 feet of its height. The top of this flat obelisk looks like a subtle architectural detail; it is a playful, romantic kiss, the slightest suggestion of curls.

These sculptures marked the beginning of my recent period — seven years of intense activity — rich for me and for my art in both experiences and in production.

In 1977 I had a show at One Illinois Center composed of 15 models for environmental sculptures and three such sculptures, which were actually realized on full scale for the adjacent square. One was composed of 40’ by 8” cylinders arranged as through by chance to create a curious contrast to the rigid geometry of the surrounding buildings. Another was made of thirty cement spheres measuring 24, 20 and 18 inches in diameter which were rolled here and there to suggest the random comings and goings of passers-by — the



man in a hurry, the couple in love, the bored doorman — the kind of theatrical space which includes the daily life of the city.

In the Sears Tower show in 1977 all my sculptures were of highly polished bronze. Most were primary forms placed in contrast to one another: a prism suspended above a cube, a sphere above a cube, a pyramid above a square, a cylinder leaning against the edge of a cube, a bar passing through a column (this line of investigation has continued to prove very fruitful, and I have now about a hundred pieces of this sort). The show also contained more playful pieces: for example, the rectangular solid from which an edge seems to be peeling away, as though it were being ripped off.

Curiously and Observed are two vertical bronze structures 29 feet high which I showed in 1978 at DePaul University. Each is a column. One has at its summit a form that breaks away and seems to be falling; the other has the same form at the top, however this one is opened up like a box revealing its thickness.

In 1978 and '79-'80 I realized a long-time desire to work in marble. I made approximately forty sculptures composed of marble blocks and sheets, cut, laminated together and polished: aurora rose from Portugal is united to focacci white from Carrara; porta oro black from La Spezia is also united to Carrara white. Another work is a series of cubes in focacci white lined up on the wall at eye level, one of which seems to be falling. There is a group of sliced columns whose sections are of different thicknesses, suspended from the ceiling at different levels; the effect is both pleasant and disconcerting.

Among my most recent works is a cylinder inside a prism in highly polished bronze, 26 ft high, made for Vanderbilt University, where it sits in the central part of the Medical Center lobby. Another, done for Northwestern University, is a prism, which penetrates two square forms, 96" by 82"; it was designed for an outdoor space next to the new theater building.

Today, in this period of the mass-media reproduction of images, of mass production in general, it is perhaps time to consider how fast things disappear and become more aware of the process of making art to live with. I want to create situations that delight the eye, in the streets and the squares and the corners of the city. I want the passer-by to be pleasantly surprised to encounter sculpture, as though it were a natural part of the city landscape. This intersection of sculpture with people can give the modern city a human dimension.