

Gregorio Botta

It's a Natural Thing

@ Gregorio Botta, Francesca Simondi



opening:
16 November 2023

6 > 9 P.M.

exhibition:
17 November >
23 December 2023

opening hours:
Tuesday-Saturday

3 > 7 P.M.

MORNINGS BY APPOINTMENT

Turin, October 1

Dear Gregorio, I was thinking about *It's a Natural Thing*, the title you proposed for your gallery exhibition, and I find it evocative. It brings to mind memories of this summer when I came to visit you in Rome: the scooter ride to your studio, the dense bamboo groves surrounding it, the distant view of EUR, and echoes of Pasolini at his *Ristorante Al Biondo Tevere*. In your studio, the sounds of bronze and glass blend with wax sheets, rice paper with flowers, copper with water and fire. In this space, Rome seems to almost disappear, yet it was the moment when I felt most intensely that I was living and breathing the city. Together with you, I discovered a Rome I didn't know, "your" Rome, "your" story. A "natural story". If you think about it, "natural" is a term related to nature, but it also implies something fresh, genuine, and spontaneous. Your works, just like your world, convey precisely this feeling. Yes, *It's a Natural Thing*, and I really like it. I'd love to know what it means to you. - F.

Rome, October 2

"Why did you do it?" "Because it's a natural thing". Well, dear Francesca, I would love for there to be this level of essentiality in art. I understand that art is artifice — in the literal sense of the term — to bring about cultural vision and thought. But the entire history and incredible complexity of art must always be traced back to its origin, to its coming into existence: an act that is free and somewhat inexplicable. As Emily Dickinson wrote, "Beauty — be not caused — It Is". And indeed, sometimes, in the happiest moments, the work arrives unconsciously, as if flowing from a secret source. Many artists have recounted this experience. Let me mention one, my beloved Klee: "Works appear as if they were born on their own, as if friendly forces were helping me...".

But other reasons led me to choose this title. One of them is the word thing. We increasingly live in dematerialized, virtual experiences made of mere software, a *world of non-things*, as the philosopher Byung-Chul Han called them. I think this separation has something tragic about it. For me, what's important is the relationship of the body, to the physicality of life and, therefore, to art. Works exist in space, they are space. Space filled with signs of the past, with meaning. The materials I work with; wax, water, leaves and flowers, rice paper, lead, marble, and glass are all connected to our anthropological DNA; they remind us of our corporeality, and of our embodiment. - G.

Turin, October 6

Tragedy doesn't only reside in *non-things*; often, things themselves contain the ruin of our time. We are surrounded by matter that seems estranged from aesthetics, by ephemeral objects destined to be consumed in an instant, and by a temporal flow that engulfs the present.

Your art frees us from this condition and transports us to a different, suspended, and ethereal time. The Tibetan bell is an element that often appears in your works. Sometimes, it's silent, immersed in water, while other times, it's suspended in balance or supported by delicate and fragile glass plates. The one we will exhibit in the show produces a sound brushed at a rhythmic pace by a weight moving through space. The encounter and separation of these two elements create an alternation between sound and silence, making both material. Their physicality reaches the most intimate chords of our body and mind, allowing us to connect with deeper levels of perception and understanding of life. As you mentioned earlier, this allows us to connect with our anthropological DNA.

Maybe this is why, when I close my eyes and mentally immerse myself in your

works, I find myself in Plato's cave, sitting among majestic cedars or amidst the evocative ruins of ancient Ayutthaya. You take my mind to places and *non-places*. And then there are your stones... - F.

Rome, October 8

Stones, indeed. They, too, speak of our embodiment, of our having a body and inhabiting it. We are made of weight and air, of gravity and lightness. We only perceive lightness by also perceiving its opposite, the *pondus*. Planes wouldn't fly if the air didn't have gravity; atmospheric pressure supports them in the sky. It's a common experience for those who meditate: feeling the body's full weight as it settles while the mind slowly calms, falls silent, and becomes empty. Stones stand: ancient, immobile, indomitable. Witnesses of an extremely slow geological time while life dances around them at different speeds. Time is another element that I love to explore. Have you noticed that "time" and "water" share the same words? They both flow and have their own course. - G.

Turin, October 9

I hadn't thought about it, but it's fascinating to note that the words "time" and "water" share the same vocabulary. Moreover, both are elements "in becoming". If you look into the etymology, you'll discover that the word "water" has an Indo-European root, "ak", which means "to bend". Water bends and assumes the form of what contains it, but at the same time, it molds the matter it comes into contact with. Think about the Mangystau desert; it took water and time, working together over centuries, to sculpt it. Two other concepts frequently reappear in your work: the visible and the invisible, what emerges and what the eye manages to discern beyond a subtle trace of black smoke, graphite, or hidden beneath a layer of translucent alabaster. This brings Plato to mind: "It is not the eyes that see; rather, we see through our eyes". In his myths and allegories, Plato speaks of things and ideas.

I can't explain why Plato comes to mind when I think of your work. Have you ever considered his philosophy's influence on your art? - F.

Rome, October 11

Well, Plato is a river that runs through and irrigates all of Western art, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly. The allegory of the cave is foundational: what we see is an illusion; there's another world we need to discover. If you think about it, this anticipation of modern physics and astrophysics occurred two millennia ago, pushing us into a new world where finite matter contains abysses of infinity. In this world, the universe isn't just unrepresentable but is situated at the limits of what's thinkable. I'm referring, for instance, to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which Einstein fought against for so long and, ultimately, in vain. There's a constant tension between what we know and what we wish and can understand. We're aware that our vision, every vision we have, is fragmented, momentary, and incomplete. Yet, we're equally driven by a desire for totality. This desire is the subject of my work: my elusive forms, my shadows, my alabasters, the inviolable interiors of my wax angels arise right there, on the border between the visible and the invisible. - G.