

Ivana Rončević - "Through the Looking Glass"

At the beginning of this account, I hope I may be allowed to voice a rather strange coincidence. While we are preparing this exhibition in Zagreb, at the same time another show is taking place in Rome, also very important in the life of this artist – at which Nunzio di Stefano is presenting Karolina Pernar in the Biblioteca di Villa Mercede, closing on Friday, November 24 2006. It is a nice coincidence that this sculptress, living between Rome and Zagreb, should have started exhibiting to the public with such fateful symbolism. Karolina Pernar has been exhibiting since 1999, mainly in Italy, where she was also trained. She has introduced herself to the Croatian public at collective shows (the 39th Zagreb Salon in 2005, the 1st Vukovar Salon in 2006 and at the last Sculpture Triennial, as well as with an independent exhibition in Zagreb (in 2001) and two in Rovinj (2005, 2006). Although at the beginning of her creative path, this sculptress has an expression that is mature and cogent, uttered in the best tradition of modernist investigations of the issues of sculpture.

The work of Karolina Pernar is characterised in particular by her investigation into metal monumental sculpture (Herbert Read, one of the most influential writers about modern sculptures, has written of the "new iron age"), shaped with the organic weaving of bars, in an outsize version of wire sculpture in which supple wire is the most characteristic form of the material. It is known that it was only with the discovery of iron that the form of the spiral started to be used in the visual expression of prehistoric man) and to be placed in juxtaposition to the surrounding space – to various interiors (that the artist transforms with her interventions) or to the natural landscape. The outsize curl of the otherwise sophisticated concept of the open wire sculpture is a paradox in itself, and accordingly indicative of the development of the sculptress's basic strategy. The sophisticated in contrast to the monumental. The key concept for the understanding of her art is actually this avoidance of obvious conclusions. What seems to us at first glance completely simple and self-intelligible, what is

deliberately and facilely offered up to us, is not the right answer. The more careful observer will note the fine artistic traps, the deliberate misdirection towards a specious conclusion that is later to be found wanting. She starts with the work, at first glance with a logical construction, and the observer, on the basis of the beginning is inclined to use the same logic to construct and build upon the structure. At the moment when the observer's imagination, under the illusion of having mastered the code, starts to build his or own internal image (believing it to be identical to the external) then the sculptress brings in an irrational about-turn that it is impossible to justify with any logical conclusion. Thus the observer / joint-creator / thinker is cast into the delirium of wonderland, a kind of Alice, whose head the scene "fills with ideas, but she could not tell exactly what they meant". The artist's "wire" quite often pushes out beyond the gallery walls, flows through them, pokes out of or into the walls, calling into question the tectonics of the wall itself, and its function as border that does not allow of breach and halts all movement, sets the parameters. Then, with its dimensions, often filling up the whole of a gallery space, it will threaten to engulf and outgrow it, refuse to submit, and re-examine the traditional concept of public monumental sculpture, the proper place of which, or so we have learned, is outside. Even when, going some way to meet the diehard conceptions, the sculptress places some similar sculpture outside, we will find it on the peak of a mountain, against the pure background of sky and nature where, as a result of the difficulty of access, the function of being "public" is once again gaged. The strategy of paradox and irony (in which shadows are frequent building blocks and the basic presumption of which is the concealed complexity, i.e., the full which only seems to be the empty – illusion) and the idea of monumentality and the topic of "challenging the wall" connects Karolina Pernar to her teacher and the artist with whom she today works – Nunzio de Stefano, as well as with the current moment. On the domestic scene, her philosophy is close to that of Goran Petercol, although the sculptress arrived at conclusions that are to an extent similar quite independently and intuitively, with a markedly personal interpretation. This revolutionary concept makes her art an authentic and

legitimate continuation of a series of important modern and contemporary masters in which, while respecting its tradition and the line of continuity, she nevertheless adds new issues of her own, typical of her own time.

The sculpture that the artist has made for the Josip Račić Studio continues to develop the aspirations outlined above. It is at the same time the first sculpture by this artist on a large scale (the wire curve fills the whole rear space of the gallery, which is invisible to the gaze looking in from the street shop window front), with which she has developed her original vision of the involvement of the movement and dimension of time in its conception. In a reading of the artist's message, the linear shadows of which the material origins are not always revealed take on a key role. In this manner the artist deliberately confuses us and makes us wonder about the correctness of our rational conclusions and the search for cause and effect connections. On the dominant wall of the first room of the gallery (which we can see through the glass window or the door of the gallery) there is a moving projection of a linear, spiral shadow, the source of which is unknown to us. It is simply not there, does not exist (there). The view looks for it in place where from the logic of experience one would expect to find it. Nothing. Giving up in confusion, we enter the second room. There, in despite of all calculations of probability, lurks the sought objective source – the vast wire curve floating in a vortex around its own axis. A new unknown is the mysterious motility of the sculpture. It is not clear whether there is some concealed mechanism or even some living organism. Forms are, after all, organic, but the material is studied in the framework of inorganic chemistry. Apparent to us are only the pure white walls of the room from which the curve exits and into which it runs, with its linear shadow. Ostensibly minimalist and pure (at the formal level), this work is revealed to us as an extremely complex concept, in a mannerist manner. At the level of content, it takes issue with the phenomenon of the illusory in clash with the real, the tangible, the experiential. The irrational (the work) is opposed to the rational (the expectations).

In spite of the technological time and the technologised world, Karolina Pernar creates in a metaphysical key a mysterious, complex, intellectually demanding,

sophisticated magic, which corresponds with the collective consciousness and becomes a catalyst for emotional human reactions in the ever more acutely robotised society of today. Man against the machine. The artist, with her conscious and deliberate abrogation of the immanently sculptural categories of mass, volume and tectonics achieves an impression of dynamism, of something happening, of immateriality / virtuality, transparency of form as against enigma of content, of the unbearable lightness of being.