

Paola Parodi

Charles Simonds

the work presented at the Neuegalerie in West Berlin covers a vast range of possible stages of evolution of the "little people" created by C.S. The sculptor offers us an equal number of presences in different temporal and spatial moments in 12 sculptures.

at the beginning there is only the flat, arid earth. The cracks begin to form with movement and undulation, like interior energy that wants to show itself and burst out into the light.

then there are the open surface corrugations, a double identity of flat hills and a covering of elementary openings spring out, some of them swollen, others small with complicated structures almost like flowers that grow vertically, phallically.

the earth, the various colours show themselves and divide; between the tracks and the attempted constructions one senses presences; a silent message passes from one place to another.

the development grows more complicated, advances through progressive experiments.

the constructions solidify, others enlarge, others articulate.

everyone follows his own course, every culture finds its definition, its character, defines itself by deliberate choice.

every piece of land, every space originates its own culture which imprints what it has made with and on itself; colour, consistency, location all vie with each other to characterise C.S.'s dwellings. Each world produces a particular, characteristic civilisation.

from the dried up plain, tender curves of sensuality give birth to the vital process. It may come about or not. It may choose diverse ways of development. It can grow up following varied parabolas and like all living processes reach a stage of destruction; energy transforms itself and moves itself: life is born and dies.

the earth is seen as body. The artist himself in the sequence of a videotape emerges from the slime, is born, is reborn in an ancient ritual of the unformed earth; and straight after he begins to erect dwellings on himself, the forms of his own body are equivalated to the curves of the hills and mountains and vice versa the landscapes modelled by S. seem almost agglomerates of bodies without frontiers that intersect and fade one within the other. beside the dwellings sexual organs are always clearly visible, inserted in the landscape between the tiny buildings. Sexuality is in the world, it impregnates it, it is a part of nature and the ambient that surrounds it, it is an inseparable part of life and appeals for the right to exist freely in any kind of civilisation and social organisation.

the earth is not only a malleable instrument, raw material of construction but is THE raw material, the primal element from which artefice derives. Some constructions of C.S. are made from sacks of earth, rich with the seeds of various plants, in this case the twin aspects of the earth genatrix and earth as a construction element coincide and also declare themselves to be compounded in the intrinsic nature of building transformation and vital evolution.

C.S. has also used other materials, not only earth, he has constructed with stones, he has built living walls, he has made images of floating cities.

each time he has given life to a new, miniscule population with its own history, civilisation and culture, its own social and economic problems.

the content of the work goes beyond immediate sculpture and construction; every dwelling is a trace of a whole people, it is an example of a social organization, it is a testimony of another culture.

every type of construction bears in itself the way of life of the people who could have planned it.

the relationship with time, the conservation or the rejection of the past, the meaning given to life, interpersonal relation: everything is eventually recognizable and restructurable and sometimes S. has reconstructed and explained in writing inventing archeological digs, travellers' tales and journalistic accounts.

the result is the creation of imaginative sociology, inventions of peoples and social structures that could exist, perhaps they do or will exist, perhaps they are nearer to us than it seems at first sight.

they are cultures that inhabit the oldest quarters of the city, tumble-down houses, breached or crumbling walls.

Today the "little people" have begun to instal themselves in museums but their timeless origins ought really to be placed in poor and neglected areas.

apart from purely descriptive considerations, this is the message that all this communicates to me: it tells of the existence of other lives and affirms that everyone can invent his own life and his own culture.

the existent social organisation is subject to verification in comparison with unreal but absolutely realistic examples of other societies; here is shown the ability we have to free our minds of the heavy social structures that cobweb them, assimilated by now to the point of seeming irremovable.

I do not think it irrelevant to recall that the work of C.S. was born in New York, a city in which great and ever higher buildings are normal practice. Simonds is not the only artist to feel the need to flee from this far from

man-size "giganticness" to create a non-dominating alternative, of proportions that bring man back to consciousness of his own realities, which open his eyes to less crushing realities and more positively stimulating consequences.

to construct stops being boring, obligatory toil and becomes very serious free play.

the traditional construction mentality based on precise a priori planning and rigorous execution right up to the completion of the work is supplanted by the insertion of fluidity and precariousness of life in the styles and development of the dwellings.

there is no fixed scheme to follow and there is no utilitarianistic object to attain.

there is something that on the spur of the moment decides to be born, grows, develops and usually stays in a state of non-perfection, open, both to the possibility of a hypothetical future completion and as a sign of an already begun, inevitable destruction.

the little constructions of C.S. leave us in doubt, they present themselves in a moment suspended between construction and destruction, in a temporary state which can be read in a diametrically opposed manner: coincidentia oppositorum?