

WHEN PASSION TURNS TOWARD STONE AND METAL

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There is an aspiring subset of the arts that bears the name of Plastic Arts. This is a realm in which are visualized and expressed impressions related to the outer world – from nature, observations of social life, memories – and embraces the entirety of such art branches as painting, engraving, sculpture, photography and the like. Each of these branches of art has its own ways of perceiving and inviting perception, of comprehending and inviting comprehension – they are different for all the arts mentioned here.

The art of sculpture takes impressions from without and expresses these in three full dimensions, producing works that in a sense depict nature. Those who feel no special interest in the products of the sculptural art, who only glance at sculptures, see these volumed works of art as a direct reflection of impressions gleaned from nature. They like them well enough, but are slightly contemptuous of the artistic effort which lies behind them. True amateurs of art, however, who approach works of art with a certain curiosity and interest, feel a special pleasure in viewing sculptures. Whether or not the sculpture involves a description of nature, they experience the pleasure of confronting a work that is reminiscent of meaningful ties to a three-dimensional physical milieu. Thanks to the physical form in which it has been clothed, this work may substantiate and render visual brand new shapes, shapes which do not reside in the human memory. Confronted by a three-dimensional object to which his/her eye, mind and heart has been previously unaccustomed, the spectator realizes that it is the product of an effort to “search for the beautiful and true,” and at this point notes that delightful feelings begin to well up inside him/her. A tremendous bond has been established here between the creator and his/her spectator. These people do not, and never will, know each other. But the magic of art brings them together around a creative instance which has brought itself forth in the three-dimensionality of nature. In arriving at this pure, belief-rich meeting, it is true that in the sculptor’s art greater difficulties are sometimes encountered than in other similar arts. The fact that in sculpture the three-dimensionality of natural objects can be easily rendered may seem to facilitate the task of the spectator. But actually it draws that spectator on the narrow pathways of an intricate, thorny process of perception. That is to say, the sculptural art is a perilous business.

Filinta Önal is a passionate traveler of this thorny, arduous road. He squabbles constantly with stone masses which are large or somewhat smaller. It is both a physical and a mental altercation. Cutting stone, carving it to produce expressive shapes – it’s not easy. It’s tiring, and wears you down. Even for those who like Filinta approach the tools to be used in this pursuit with a superior sense of mechanics and a keen adroitness, this trade is arduous and patience-taxing. The artist must generate a powerful mechanism of inner and outer pressure stemming from his creative urge. As he sets out to cut and carve, Filinta of course has a preliminary shape in mind. But as the work progresses he can be drawn to new forms. The human hand and intelligence will embrace to such a degree with the characteristics of the material that new details will emerge, new sub-forms. Filinta Önal is an artist who readily shows this flexibility, and indeed who takes it as an element of motivation. Mind and a program are inherent in his work, but he is always in the presence of imaginative flexibility. Filinta is not interested in a plethora of materials with varied mechanical and visual characteristics. Ever since he was a B.A. and M.A. student of Fine Arts at Hacettepe University he has believed that works of art are achieved not because one seeks this or that material, but as the result of shaping by the human mind and heart. Since that time he has thought, and still does think, that this is a highly important element of a discursive attitude peculiar to the sculptor. He treats sculptural expression not as a branching proliferation but in the framework of an essence possessed of dignified simplicity and gravity. For a young artist, this is a praiseworthy, pride-inspiring attitude.

Within a frank, correct, honorable and sensible style, he has also become attached to metal as a material, with a love and respect that rank as passion. During the years when he began to mingle with the world of metal he was greatly influenced by the highly instructive approaches of that great artist, the late Kuzgun Acar. Later he made great efforts to develop his own style and language. He found pieces of used metal which had been discarded and left to twist and rust in the lap of nature, and developed special skills to turn these into new surface forms at high temperatures.

Filinta waxes rhapsodic talking about the relationship between metal and heat. The cleaning of the old surface, installing a fresh form there, the layers of paint which are sometimes applied to it – all of this makes him excited. He speaks glowingly of the satisfaction he gets in exercising his imagination and using his material to the utmost when crafting a human bust in bronze. Telling it, he seems to be making the sculpture anew.

Filinta often expresses a strong wish to do large-scale outdoor sculptural compositions with an historical message, compositions which would symbolize a love of country. In the past such sculptures were executed with the War of Independence, the social reforms and Atatürk as their subject matter, but in our time sculptures of this type are done very rarely in this country, and only powerful public institutions can plan or commission them. But Filinta is keen on the matter and believes that as an artist the proper chance may yet arise for him.

For a young artist it is of course a source of pride to be the son of a patriotic intellectual, a famous poet whom the public follows closely and respects. However, for Filinta being the son of Ahmet Arif is not simply a matter of pride. He knows that his integrity of stance as a progressive intellectual, like the courage and fearlessness he displays in carrying this out, stem from his genes and from his solid upbringing. His loveable wife, too, Natalya, has the background of a progressive intellectual steeped in artistic sensibility, and it is no great coincidence that she comes from the line of that giant of Russian culture, Leo Nikolai Tolstoy. Children with sound genes have encountered each other somewhere along the way, and the presence of Natalya is for Filinta an element of motivation to enthusiasm and zeal.

The Hidden Language of Objects Or The Sculptures of Filinta Önal

Ahmet TELLİ

People pass by on the streets
Their own dead bodies on their shoulders
A life all out of breath and forested
People pass by on the streets
Love has overflowed, pity is stone
We waft up from stone and soil

Cahit IRGAT

Immediately after the break-up of the Soviet Union, I watched the Lenin statues on television as they were removed from the squares. As I watched, the statues were wrapped in thick chains and torn up by winches, and I thought, if these works had been done by Rodin would the mob of muzhiks still have applauded their uprooting?

Wandering around Vienna I noted countless statues—on the streets, in the squares, in recesses and on projecting parts of buildings, even on the rooftops—and it occurred to me that without these statues Vienna would be a drab city.

Yes, statues are ideological. It is possible to tell the difference between barbarity and civilization by a society's relationship to statues. If you ask me, the tearing down of statues in Russia, or the defacing of huge statues in Afghanistan under the Taliban, these were barbarism, while the statues in Vienna represented civilization.

In this respect Turkey's past is, from the standpoint of civilizing society, hardly to be praised. When the Republic had been founded, the huge statues that filled the city squares were mostly done by foreigners. Of course there was nothing wrong with this. In a region which for thousands of years had been ruled by religious fanaticism, where statues were considered to be idols, the art of sculpture had not developed, and what's more, the statues remaining from earlier civilizations had been left underground or defaced. Such being the case, in the early years of a Republic built on new principles it was inevitable that statues would be carved by foreigners. That these statues were ideological expressions of political power, overbearing in aspect, is another matter. As the years went by our own artists appeared, but the official ideology could not be at peace with the fact that in modern societies sculpture is not monumental but aesthetic. It is for this reason that I say the art of sculpture is ideological and has always been an indicator of the degree to which a society has achieved freedom, democracy and civilization.

All of this came to mind as I viewed the sculptures of Filinta Önal. Clearly, while intellectuals were struggling, through their thoughts, in the fight to civilize, sculptors were engaged in the same struggle via the statues they put up in the squares, on the streets, and in museums. For to repeat what I indicated above, statues introduce a city to culture while bringing civilization to a country.

Filinta Önal sends each story in his sculptures on a personal inner voyage, like that in the imagery of poems, but in his case the image is drawn from social life. For example, "its star rusted" lies face down on a dried-up river, but on the other hand, with its thirty-three bullets and thirty-three hollows the sculpture bears the symbol of bullet-holes. It alludes to a famous poem by Ahmet Arif, "Thirty Three Bullets," but equally conveys the flame of sadness.

Viewing "The Sailing Ship and the Little Boat" I think of the great and adventurous voyage made by Oysseus to reach Ithaca. And once again I wonder if the Boat on those waves will arrive at its destination.

Obviously Filinta Önal attaches special importance to the metaphors of mythology. This is shown by such sculptures as Cybele, Marduk, God and Goddess, and Winged Horse. But this is not nostalgia binding him to archaic times. Nor is it an elegy for what is lost and gone. On the contrary, closely tied to life and the future the artist seeks and finds contemporary forms in these sculptures, as shown by the abstraction and the easing of gravity.

I am one of those who feel drawn to art works I can touch and read. Or rather, if a sculpture is a work of art it should arouse in me the desire to touch. The rough texture of stone or metal should give a sense of the finite, just like life in the living, and while conveying this should be able to illuminate my consciousness. A perfect example of this is Filinta Önal's "The Call." Of course, the others as well. All the sculptures find their proper place in our mind thanks to the crystallizing of the labor that has gone into them.

I can readily say that Filinta is an artist who places "One Stone Upon The Other," and that he makes us feel these stones roam in the geography of our lives. Viewing his works I whisper, "Minor sensibility can lead to major upheavals.."

“So much goes nil and constantly,
its secrets in a crumbling mirror,
like the aging of time,
Mystery-laden words go nil,
their spell lost in the questing range.
Dreams age, so do things;
in the grottos of nothingness and the forgotten.
In those grottos Filinta garners finds.
Finds that sigh
in the depths of lost time.
He kneads his own images
and mysteries into those finds,
to make sailing vessels
which he floats in the atlas of dreams.”

İbrahim Karaođlu
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