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The Brian Mercer Bronze Casting Residency 2010
at the Fonderia Artistica Mariani
Pietrasanta

ANNE MERCEDES ARBS

The Brian Mercer Charitable Trust

Dr. Brian Mercer OBE 'combined a strong scientific approach with an exceptional imaginative and creative mind that was able to develop the technological and engineering aspects that led onto the successful commercial realisation of his ideas'. In recognition of his outstanding engineering achievements, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 1984 and in 1986 gave the Phillips Lecture at the Royal Society. Amongst his many other interests, he had a passion for art and built a distinguished collection of paintings and sculpture, including works by Dali, Paul Delvaux, Joris Minne, Ralph Brown, Max Fruehauf, Helaine Blumenfeld, Pol Mara, Canogar, Niemczyk, and Palmeiro. He was a friend of Salvador Dali, who greatly admired innovators, and was one of only four people whose portraits were painted by Dali. This he gifted to the Royal Society shortly before his death in 1998. Throughout his life he sponsored young artists and he expressed the wish that this be continued.

The Royal British Society of Sculptors

Committed to the pursuit of excellence in the art form, the Royal British Society of Sculptors aims to inspire, inform and engage people of all ages and backgrounds with sculpture, to support the development of sculptors' professional and creative practice and to promote good practice.

With a worldwide membership of over 500 professional sculptors ranging from those at the peak of their profession to those who are just emerging, the RBS is proud to support diversity and creativity.

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The Brian Mercer Bronze Casting Residency 2010 at the Fonderia Artistica Mariani Pietrasanta

A fully supported scholarship to experiment with bronze under instruction from master craftsmen for three months, the Brian Mercer Bronze Casting Residency in Pietrasanta (Tuscany) is a fabulous opportunity for a professional sculptor. The aim is to enable a sculptor without previous experience of working in bronze to learn the technical aspects of the casting process, thus expanding their skills and developing their practice. The residency offers the successful candidate the opportunity to work alongside the artisans of the renowned Fonderia Artistica Mariani, developing an understanding of the lost wax process, from the creation of their own models in clay and wax to the finishing stages with chisel and patina.

The Brian Mercer Casting Bronze Residency in Pietrasanta was awarded in 2008 to Samantha Donnelly and in 2009 to Briony Marshall.

Foreword by Helaine Blumenfeld

The RBS Bronze Residency, in collaboration with the renowned Fonderia Mariani in Pietrasanta, offers professional sculptors the most amazing opportunity to explore the casting process and experiment with bronze under master craftsman for three months. The hope in establishing this opportunity was to allow a talented sculptor who had not previously been able to work in bronze to explore the possibilities of this ancient but complex process, and by so doing extend their own vision and personal language. This is the third year of the BM Bronze Residency at Fonderia Mariani and the experience was yet again a very unique one. Anne Mercedes when we selected her seemed a most promising candidate, but she truly surpassed all expectations in achieving her goals.

Dynamic, intelligently risk taking, quick to adapt to the unusual studio practice, Anne was flexible, diligent, and extremely talented in coming to terms with every stage of the bronze casting process. Mentoring Anne was a very rewarding experience for me. In the three months that she was in Pietrasanta her work really took off. She made a breakthrough in her sculpture, which had previously been mainly in ceramics. Her work was highly experimental and courageous. Working with the artisans, she was able to “invent” ways of supporting structures that seemed to be suspended in air. Once Anne became more adept at the process of translating a wax model into bronze, she used the medium with great skill to evoke the tension of unbalance in her aerial compositions. Her ability to learn quickly the “finishing”, polishing and patination of a bronze piece enabled her to give form to a complex expression of moods, emotions and personal perceptions. The bronze sculptures she created were original and really powerful.

Anne was a great success in the foundry. Artisans whom I have observed over the years to be very reserved, really opened up to her. Her direct and warm manner communicated to them. Her ability to speak Italian was also a bonus. On her last day she gave a party for the foundry, everyone came to it and I could see how much she would be missed.

Helaine Blumenfeld

PVPRBS, Royal British Society of Sculptors



Helaine Blumenfeld and Johannes von Stumm, President of the Royal British Society of Sculptors, at the opening of the RBS exhibition in Pietrasanta, March 2011. photo A. Mercedes.

Introduction by John Merrill

I remember very well the interviews for the 2010 bronze award. I had anticipated a close run contest between the eventual winner (Briony Marshall) and the last candidate we interviewed (Anne Mercedes). I was hugely impressed with Anne's original and exciting ceramics and thought they would look marvellous in bronze. But I, the only non-sculptor on the panel, was wrong. The others were unanimous in the opinion that Anne was not yet ready.

One of the many wonderful aspects to the RBS is that experienced, established and successful sculptors are so willing to advise and encourage those with less experience. I am all too aware of other selection processes where those who are unsuccessful are left dejected, disappointed, and often embittered. Anne was given an explanation as to why she was unsuccessful, advice and encouragement. She heeded that advice and reapplied twelve months later. Much to my delight (and like two previously unsuccessful candidates for the marble sculpting award) she was successful the second time around.

Of course the advice and encouragement does not end there. The awardee is able to count on Helaine Blumenfeld, Adolfo Agolini, Valentina Fogher and many other artists and artisans in Pietrasanta who give their time so generously.

As expected Anne fully grasped the opportunities offered with the award. Her commitment, energy and intellect are apparent to anyone who meets her. I am enormously looking forward to hearing her presentation at the RBS and seeing how her already inspiring ceramic pieces take on a new dimension in bronze.

John Merrill

Trustee, Brian Mercer Charitable Trust

A word from Valentina

I first met Anne by visiting her website and looking at her ceramic pieces. I always loved to see the various solutions of contemporary ceramics and her works seem to present engaging points of view and challenge. I realized in fact that in her works she pays a lot of attention to the diverse textures of the material, with a particular emphasis on the difference between smoothness and roughness, even for the same medium, as if you had to enjoy her pieces first through your hands and then with your eyes.

Therefore it was really interesting to observe how she was exploring this technique new for her and how, with intelligent curiosity for the process itself, she faced the whole bronze casting. Perhaps, even more than the final results themselves, I think she enjoyed this new world of possibilities she had in front of her, adapting little by little the idea she had in her mind to the wax. While she was involved in solving the possible problems related to the building of the necessary scaffolding for her piece, at the same time she had to imagine her work in bronze. It was fascinating to see how aerial one piece could be, floating in the air with the support of a well-built and agile structure. At this point the artist had to learn a lot from the artisans, who, challenged by the form of the sculpture-to-be, constructed a solid but not too intrusive 'cage' to hold the piece. This, on the other hand, could be another visual impediment for the artist, who all throughout the process had to have a very clear vision of what the final piece would become.

Anne worked really hard during the wax making phase, bringing the material sometimes almost to an extreme as she did for her first maquette, which presented a convoluted shape with a multilayered body, generated by a calculated dripping and building of the wax. From that, Anne completely changed, and her new piece, *Volta I*, even if composed of long circumvolutions, was extended and smooth, with a totally different harmony and much more balance. You could see that Anne was able to dominate the medium and had a strong vision behind her gestures, of which you could sense both the strength and



Anne cutting in Marcello Giorgi's studio.

Raimondo, Anne and Alfredo: leaving party at the Fonderia Mariani, with *Revolutionary Process*.





Detail of *Revolutionary Process*.

Valentina Fogher.
photo A.Mercedes



the delicacy. The surface of her work had a textured presence, that she then maintained also for her following piece, *Volta II*. Anne tried also diverse kinds of patinas for her pieces, which could introduce her to another world of choices and explorations: from the first black one, she then moved to a silvery patina, that could offer her many more nuances, accordingly with the peculiar identity of her piece.

She created also other maquettes, that were left aside during the process, because of time reasons, but nevertheless they showed clearly the state of passage from her first ideas to the following ones, where she kept this great presence of a work light but solidly 'rooted' in the surrounding space, which automatically becomes its negative, hollow part by enhancing the positive and material side of it.

I think that Anne's residency conveyed a sense of joy and fulfillment for all the passion, energy and will to learn and understand she put in her work during these months in Pietrasanta. Everything was helpful to reach her goal: a conversation with other artists, a trip to Siena, the hanging laundry out of the Italian windows, minuscule plants among the rocks, and above all people thoughts about human rights and freedom. With her past in Philosophy, Anne could receive the information and then, once digested, elaborate it in her mind. The results are evident in her works, which from a central, energetic nucleus, look for air, space, and freedom.

Pietrasanta is looking forward to seeing Anne's new working statements, her multilingual capabilities and her vivid curiosity, which stimulates this international, artistic community.

Valentina Fogher
Pietrasanta Residency Coordinator



A word from Anne

Sculpting is for me just as much a way of thinking as are writing, dreaming, reading, speculating on concepts or walking through different landscapes. In engaging with materials, I make use of their inner logic to put into tangible form what they help me to understand and to feel about the universe and its components. To this process I bring the visions that are forged in my mind not only during working sessions but also during activities such as walking or listening to music. Sculpture is a world of mass, plane, line, weight, space and texture in the same way as music is a world of sound, rhythm, pitch, melody and harmony. To compose a sculpture is to make something entirely self-referential that should be capable of standing by itself. However, the process of making is fed by the whole of my experience, regardless of whether this experience or the making process is clearly conscious or not.

This is the reason why my three-month residency in Pietrasanta has been so meaningful to me. I worked with wonderful people in the Mariani foundry (which many consider to be outstanding in its field, drawing artists from across the Atlantic) and benefited from its extensive resources, supervision of the highest quality, the skills of the *artigiani*, and the unique process it offers of applying a ceramic coating to the wax model. I was also living in a culturally very rich environment, benefiting from the architectural and artistic treasures of Pietrasanta, a library and the Museum of Maquettes (Museo dei Bozzetti) situated next to each other above the Cloisters of Sant'Agostino, the varied landscapes surrounding the town, the Carrara quarries, and the proximity of other cities such as Florence, Lucca, Pisa, San Gimignano, and Siena, all of which I visited several times.





And so I wove my own canvas of natural and cultural materials enriched by my encounters with artists and anonymous people going about their daily business (or demonstrating in the streets), my reading of novels and essays, and my interest in world events. In this respect, Italian politics, the upheaval in the Arab world, the way wealthy countries deal with migration, the earthquakes and tsunami in Japan, not least their impact on our awareness of the dangers of nuclear energy, played a role in the specific way I have been connecting with my constant preoccupations. The maquettes and sculptures I made during my residency are the result of an exploration of the tensions that I witnessed and sensed in my multilayered canvas, combined with the expressive possibilities I discovered while working with wax, knowing that the final work would be cast in bronze, a material strong enough to support unbalanced constructions. Each sculpture is an investigation into a compound of perceptions, emotions and thoughts that I wanted to convey visually. In choosing the photos for this catalogue, my aim was to suggest some of the visual elements that fed my imagination. However, these were so diverse and rich that it was not possible to be exhaustive. I have selected images that were part of my daily life and that, in my opinion, highlight both the significant contradictions and usual themes present within different landscapes and cities.

previous page - top left and center: nets for collecting olives. top right: plants microcosm. bottom left: River Arno in Florence at dawn. bottom center: clouds on the way to foundry. bottom right: line of trees seen from the Artco Studio in Seravezza.
*this page - top left: quarry in Carrara. top center: sky reflected in a puddle in Siena. top right: detail of Simone Martini's *Il Beato Agostino Novello e quattro suoi miracoli*. Pinacoteca of Siena. bottom left and center: women demonstrating in Lucca, February 13th, 2011.*



Pietrasanta

Founded in 1255 by Guiscardo Pietrasanta, a nobleman from Milan and Chief Magistrate of the Republic of Lucca, Pietrasanta became the historical administrative center of the Versilia, a region littered with the remnants of Etruscan, Ligurian- Apuan, Roman and Longobard settlements. Fortified in the 14th century by solid curtain walls, soon Pietrasanta's military significance derived from its strategic location on the Francigena Way. After multifold vicissitudes and conquests by the forces of Pisa, Genoa, and Florence, in 1513 Pietrasanta and its territory passed under the dominion of the State of Florence, and subsequently of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, until the unification of Italy.

Pietrasanta witnessed a long period of political and administrative stability, which gave rise to steady economic and social developments. Its principal sources of wealth were from agriculture, metallurgy (based on the mining activities of the nearby hills), and the excavation and manufacture of marble from the Apuan Alps. From the second half of the fourteen hundreds renewed interest for statuary began to attract important people from the artistic field to Versilia (prior to this the stone cutters of the area were mainly found in Pisa and Carrara). Notable among these was Michelangelo who, in response to the wishes of the Medici family, moved to Pietrasanta in 1518, having previously lodged in Carrara. His presence proved to be decisive, especially in the quarries where he discovered a new, very pure white marble vein (and as a consequence mapped out a new road to reach it). Although his stay was brief, he nevertheless contributed to the renown of an area, which, ever since has been frequented by sculptors looking for marble and negotiating the purchase of blocks.

In the 19th century, the reopening of the excavation sites of Monte Altissimo and the foundation of the School of Fine Arts, stimulated a growth of sculpture-related activities in the region. In the following



above: Kan Yasuda, *Myomu (Chiave del sogno)*, 2003, Carrara marble.

bottom left: Piazza del Duomo, early morning. bottom right: Church in Capezzano Monte and sea in the background.

next page: San Giovanni e Santa Felicita Parish Church, Valdicastello, Pietrasanta.





century, by which time marble was only one of several types of stones available to artists, sculpture became the lynchpin of the local economy. The city's artisans, specializing in the fields of sculpture, architecture, and decoration have achieved national and international fame, receiving very high numbers of commissions.

The Sixties in particular witnessed an important marble revival in sculpture, architecture, and design. Since then Pietrasanta and the Versilia area have been visited by an extraordinary number of major contemporary artists, who come here from all over the world to realize their works. The younger generations of artisans, in addition to continuing their more classical sculptural activity, have applied their world-renowned technical skills to the execution of works reflecting the different trends of contemporary art.

Furthermore, the tight relationship between Pietrasanta and the fields of art and culture is clearly demonstrated by the very intense levels of activity, in terms of temporary exhibitions and events of national and international importance. These are organised all year long in the charming exhibition sites of the "Luigi Russo" Cultural Centre comprising of the Church of Saint Augustine and the wonderful scenario of the nearby Piazza del Duomo. Also one of a kind is the Museo dei Bozzetti, first opened in 1984, which houses a collection of more than 600 maquettes and models, mostly in plaster, of sculptures of more than 300 Italian and foreign artists, who have or continue to work in the city's workshops. Complimentary to the museum is the International Park of Contemporary Sculpture. Formed by monumental works of marble, bronze, and other materials, located in public spaces, it is a magic, outdoors museum trail, which continuously increases and unfolds itself along the streets, squares, roundabouts, and gardens of the entire municipality. These sculptures, appropriately suited to their particular settings, amount to an exceptional artistic and urban heritage, which also pays splendid tribute the close ties between the city and the master sculptors who, by working in Pietrasanta, decided to donate some of their pieces to the city.

Alongside the marble manufacture, bronze foundries rapidly became a permanent feature of Pietrasanta's artistic landscape and significant contributors to the local economy. Beginning at the end of the 19th century, the bronze-casting process has been characterized by the high quality of the specialized artisans, such as the mould-makers, who create plaster models from maquettes and their "negatives" in rubber. In parallel with these there developed the production of mosaic, the latter with important applications in artistic and architectural contexts. In all, there are around 160 companies in Pietrasanta involved in stone-related industries, of which 40 specialised in sculpture and decorative works, as well as 6 mosaic studios, and 8 artistic foundries.

Fonderia Artistica Mariani

Fonderia Artistica Mariani has a long tradition of producing high quality bronzes and a reputation for reliability. The foundry still follows the lost wax casting method used by Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), the most accurate and reliable way of creating sculptures and bronze monuments, improved today by modern technology and machinery.

Adolfo Agolini is the dedicated owner and manager who is hosting the Brian Mercer Bronze Casting Residency. He says: "Ours are the hidden hands which give expression to the artists' inspiration, delivering their sculptures with the unfailing care, devotion, and professionalism. We may only be artisans, but in this workshop masterpieces are born which bear testimony to the prestige of Pietrasanta as a city of art all over the world".





As in the past years, it has been interesting to have with us a member of the RBS. Anne Mercedes demonstrated to be extremely enthusiastic both in the execution of her works and in her learning of the manufacturing techniques.

She committed herself in the creation of works of particular technical difficulty, getting also closer to the use of new materials such as bronzes of silvery coloration.

Her engagement in the different phases has been remarkable by progressively passing from the work in wax to the one of the covering, in order to continue then with the casting.

She was also very much involved with the finishing process.

I believe that for her this has been a useful and productive experience for her career as an artist, which we wish her to be long and satisfactory.

It has been a pleasure also for us to work with her and we hope in the future to be able to continue to collaborate with her and the RBS.

Adolfo Agolini

Director, Fonderia Artistica Mariani



previous page - top: Simone cutting fusion canals on Volta II. bottom: Mauro and Marco pouring out excess of wax from a mould; Enzo skimming bronze before pouring it.

this page - from top left to bottom right: Giuseppe adding fusion canals on Volta I; Nicola supervising fusion and Giuseppe leading movements; Monica and Anna; Cristina Alberti; Adolfo Agolini.





from left to right and top to bottom: Michele working on the patina; Marco reinforcing the ceramic coating on *Volta II* with wire; Ivano coating *Revolutionary Process*; end of lunch break: watching jokes on the Internet; Luca working on *Volta I*; courtyard of the foundry in early morning.

Everyone at the foundry with a work by Hanneke Beaumont (photo Fonderia Artistica Mariani)



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Interview with Anne Mercedes by Valentina Fogher
Bar del Teatro, Pietrasanta, April 23rd 2011



Voyage, 2006, ceramics, 24x25x25 cm.

AES+F exhibition in Piazza del Duomo,
April 2011.



Buongiorno Anne!

How did you decide to apply for this residency in Pietrasanta?

I decided to apply for this residency because for several years I had been wanting to make sculptures in which the aerial aspect would play a real part. This is something I find difficult to achieve with ceramics, my usual medium. I also wanted to explore the possibilities of a material more suitable for outdoors than ceramics. One of my main interests is to suggest movement in a work. Bronze is able to support unbalanced constructions; that is what makes this material so attractive to me. Another very strong reason for me to apply for this residency is the fact that I always learn a lot from others in encounters like these. I thought that working on a daily basis in an environment where I would meet very skilled people and artists working on varied projects would help me widen my range of practice.

And so, you luckily got this residency and you arrived in Pietrasanta, you spent three months in Pietrasanta – which is a long and a very short time. How was your impact with the city?

It was very interesting because I have always been attracted to the fact that the rate of change undergone by things, people and situations varies according to the particular issues at stake. For instance, here we are in this very old city founded in the Middle Ages, and it is obvious that marble and bronze sculpture has been at the core of the city's activities for a very long time. I find that moving. Indeed for me it is moving to think that some of the most important artists of the Rinascimento, as well as others from later times, worked here. You can see that the city has changed in many ways. I could mention, for instance, that some foundries and studios are being closed down; I have noticed the impact of speculation on housing. At this level changes somehow occur slowly; together with these, while I was here, specific events were taking place, both outside Italy, like the revolutions within the Arab world, and, inside Italy, like the commemoration

UNIFICATION OF ITALY AND POLITICS



On February 26th, at midday, all the people that had gathered on Piazza dei Signori in Florence became silent and lifted up their finger in protest against the attempt by the government at getting Italian people in favour of implementing nuclear plants. I arrived on the Piazza right before midday by chance and had to ask someone what it was about. *top right*: Sculpture of philosopher Giordano Bruno who was burnt at the stake for stating that there is infinity of worlds.

of the unification of Italy. It was extremely interesting for me to see how Italians respond to these events. I was touched by the pride they showed in their country and in being Italians. In every country people may disagree on certain topics; however, these topics, the way people connect to them, shape the characteristics of an entity, be it a nation or any other kind of collective entity forged by history. I mean that, within an entity, people may agree or strongly disagree, but the very fact that they are concerned about certain matters, which they discuss or even fight about, is somehow related to the structural identity of that particular entity. This identity is thus maintained at the same time as it evolves. Obviously, in Italy, as elsewhere, not everybody thinks the same way about politics or about how things should move on, but I can sense which particular topics will rouse Italians to action. During the commemoration of the unification of Italy it was very interesting to observe how people decorated their environment; how they decked out their houses and windows. It relates to their strong talent for producing a visual impact, which shows in every detail of every day life as well as in the arts and design field. I also witnessed demonstrations against nuclear energy, well before March 11; against the attitudes of political personalities and their practices; against the position taken by the government of my own country – France – towards migrants from Tunisia. All this is somehow present in my work, albeit in a very abstract and indirect way. Given what different people say about my sculptures, it is clear that a variety of things may be seen in my work. Certainly, my mind was full of these present events and developments – and more – as I worked.

You arrived at the foundry and you found a team of people working for the artists, a team of people even working for one artist, while they are making one piece, and at the same time working together with the artist, trying to understand what he or she wants to create. How was this experience from the wax-room on?

It was new to me. I knew about the existence of such things, but I had never actually worked under conditions where an artist says “I want that” and more or less participates in the process of the work. I have come across different attitudes towards work during my residency; I find it very intriguing. For me it was great



Graffiti in Pisa.

EVERYDAY LIFE STAGED





WAX EXPERIMENTS AND FIRST MAQUETTE



to see what was going on in the various departments. To begin with, I had a quick overall tour, then I progressively spent more time in the individual departments. I started in the wax room, obviously, as that was where I was going to work. I was shown a few things by the *artigiani*, especially by Raimondo. Not being told too much was very good for me, because it meant that I had to find out things for myself and solve my own problems, which is the only way you get to think about the processes and understand the materials and techniques you are using.

At the beginning, I was, as usual, interested in debris. As soon as I saw the discarded pieces of wax that were to be thrown away after preparing a large mould, I thought of doing something with them. From the looks of the *artigiani*, I realized that that was not the right way to go about things! Yet, I was interested in these bits; they seemed to have a life of their own. They were squashed up and sometimes they readily suggested something flying. I collected some of them. However, I decided to work on a series of tests, to see how the wax would respond. To be able to play with it, I needed to understand how it worked. This stems from my training with ceramics. With ceramics one has to take account of possible cracking in the clay, warping during the firing, faults in the glazes, etc. You need to learn how to avoid these problems. However the materials involved in ceramics become even more interesting, from an expressive and sculptural point of view, if you make use of these so-called faults, that is, if you integrate the whole range of what the materials can do in your palette. I accepted the cracking and warping and dunting and breaking as elements of my ceramic sculptural practice, and that is how I developed a personal style. In Pietrasanta, "What does wax do?" was my point of departure. I therefore made a series of experiments with wax in water. I progressively came to make what became *Revolutionary Process*, this first 'whirlpool'. I had been collecting pieces of wax poured into water which were producing these – I don't know what to call them – ... *ripples*, or *eddies*? ... I assembled some of these into a more complex whirlpool and then, when this was cast, I carried on trying to suggest a feeling of unbalance: I set it on its base so that part of it would be lower than the point on which it was standing. And this is really what I find appealing about bronze: you can make things



previous page: *Revolutionary Process* in construction. this page: Adolfo gating it (top) and Massimo soldering it.



Anne presenting a large uncast maquette to Johannes von Stumm, President of the RBS, during his visit to the foundry. *bottom*: Same maquette at an early stage.



that are completely unbalanced. Then I started another series of tests with wax poured onto a marble board: I placed the bits I obtained onto curved surfaces to give them a shape before the wax cooled down completely. I played with them, assembling them in parallel or perpendicular planes. I made a small series of structures, quite complex, and when I saw it was working and my ideas about movement were developing, I decided to work directly in a bigger size. I started working on a piece which has ended up 65 cm in height. I worked from the last piece I had made. That is something I do very often. I begin a new sculpture following the need to improve something I could not really achieve in the previous one. At the beginning I tried to keep the same structure, but very quickly, because of the difference in size and because of the fact that when you pour the wax you cannot control it completely – which I like – I ended up with a totally different structure. At the end of the morning I heard about the tsunami in Japan. It struck me – not having known anything about it until then, – that what I had started could be seen as a kind of wave. Without consciously fixing on this, I went on with my work. For days and days we were flooded with information, or else I kept looking for it as I have friends in Japan and I was really anxious about what was going on.

In fact, this idea of huge waves and revolutionary processes, whether natural or political, fed my mind throughout the whole of my residency. And that is how these pieces that suggest movement, water, explosion, came about.

... it is fantastic, it is a fantastic process, because it is unpredictable, it is something that really you feel and it comes naturally out. And as you say, unconsciously, you just are a recipient of whatever is happening in the world and you convey it through your hands in the piece. So it is very interesting...

There is a kind of back and forth between my thinking, what I see, and what I feel when I am at work... all of it gets connected together, a bit like fusion itself, like the casting of the bronze. Many things come together in the process of melting the metal and pouring it into the mould. I feel I work a bit in this way. There is a flow that I don't quite control; however at some point I try to construct it, to give it a shape. I was interested in movement well be-

WAX MAKING: SMALL COMPLEX SCULPTURES







fore deciding to apply for the residency, but the environment and the events led me to embody movement in the particular sculptures that are the result of my three-month stay in Pietrasanta.

Well, this is why you are an artist... You are able to do it. But when I came to see you at the foundry I was impressed also not only by your pieces, but the solutions that the artigiani found to put the structure together, so the pieces then would stay up...

I wanted to build something fragile and intricate, and saw I needed to integrate the structure in the building process. So I began to add some coils of wax that were not intended as a permanent part of the structure, but as some sort of scaffolding. I progressively used bamboo canes as other supports. Raimondo and Alfredo understood what I was getting at, so they helped me out, built a metallic structure for *Volta I* and *II* and I learned a lot from their very skilled approach.

It was very nice, it was really impressive to see this whole structure, it looked as a piece as it was, completely abstract, a different piece, interesting. But then you continued on working even as an artisan yourself, recently...

I tried, because to know how to make something makes you aware of the problems peculiar to the materials you use; it gets you to find solutions while you develop new ideas. Materials, tools, and techniques are not only "things" you use as though they were your servants. I don't think our thinking, as human beings, is a process separated from the rest of reality and that it transcends it: I am absolutely convinced that our thinking, our ideas, are on the same "plane" of Reality as the materials, which have their own logic, their own rationality. We are able to invent new ideas because our process of thinking is interwoven with the whole rationality of Reality, of "what is". This is where my education and practice in philosophy and literature play a role in my artistic practice: I know why I am interested in materials and why it is essential for me to listen to them, to understand what they can or cannot do. This interest is best understood within an intellectual context in which materials and ideas are the same "thing", apprehended from different points of view. Following very carefully the whole casting process, noting how to remove





and cut away all the canals, and how to grind, all that was important in coming to understand not only how I could make things, but also how I think. Therefore, it was essential for me to carry out some of the tasks that are usually done by the artigiani, because it helped me think and invent. Doing part of the finishing myself made me realize that it is a much longer process than I was aware of, because for instance where you have a junction with the canal, the surface becomes smooth, so you need restore the texture of the model: if you have something very textured, which is the case with my work, you have to work very hard. It took me ages. Then I saw Massimo using his tools and I was struck by how quickly and skillfully he did it, whereas when I had first watched him at work (before having a go), I had not appreciated the difficulty of the task – apart from the fact that working in such noisy conditions with all the vibrations in your body is terrible.

So then you decided about the patina and that was a difficult choice...

Yes... because initially, when I put together the first piece that had been cast, *Revolutionary Process*, I planned to give it a silvery finish. Only after it was cast and ready to receive a patina did I discover that the recipe for that kind of patina is toxic. It is no longer allowed to be made. In order to get the silvery effect I wanted I should have had the sculpture cast in alpaca or in white bronze, which we did for the next two sculptures, but at that stage I did not know that. That is



how, sitting next to Michele in the patina department, I asked him to make a black background and try blue and green patches. I did not like the first results and I quickly gave up, because I found it strange to ask somebody to try things instead of experimenting myself. I am aware I might need to change my approach here, as inevitably most of the work in the foundry is carried out by the *artigiani*. The result on *Revolutionary Process* is maybe too black, too uniform. So I don't know what I am going to do. I've heard that some artists remove some of the patina; others take the piece out of the foundry after the sandblasting stage and then do things to it with paint and pastels. I might go back to this piece and try other things. I had various interesting reactions to it, for instance Helaine Blumenfeld found it too black, Hanneke Beaumont said it was very strong. It is so different from my initial intention that I think it is worth waiting before making any changes. The truth is that I would have liked to experiment with patina. For me that is an area of frustration, since color is very important to me. I really would like to be able to do it by myself: just to be in the patina department, have the instruments and products to try by myself. I would like to use some small bits of discarded bronze elements and make my own little palette, as I once did with ceramics. I cannot even get the names of the products they use...

... it is a secret...

I am not sure it is a secret. I don't see the point in hiding all that ... Well I see it but I don't agree



left: Michele doing the patina on *Revolutionary Process*.

next page, left: *Volta I* at an early stage. right: Anne working on *Volta II*.

with the approach to life and humankind that lies behind it.

I completely understand you, because I did a bit of firing: it is such a magical world and then the results are not always, but mostly, unexpected depending on the temperature, and everything, so every time it is new and every time you have a thing that you might like or not. I think that this whole process of making a piece in bronze is extremely fascinating, because you go from one difficulty, which is the wax, and the consistency of the wax, including the structure, the scaffolding, to the next step, and then removing all of these structures; finally you have your piece, that looks ugly, because you still have to make the final product, and then you have this whole broad vastness of pigments that you can use with the patina. So you really go through so many things in your mind. And if you have more than one piece made at the same time, you have your mind divided: you have one problem for one piece, and then the other one is already at the end. So I think it is a very moving process for your mind, to keep your attention always alive. I think it is very compelling as a residency, what do you think?

Yes, I do agree with that, it is very much so. I think I would like to investigate further this patina area, because form and colors are not different things. It is very important to keep in mind the patina while building a piece, and the more you know about what is feasible and how to get it, the better.



I am also very pleased to have tried another metal besides bronze. I was told I could get a silvery effect using alpaca. Alpaca is a copper alloy with nickel and zinc. In the end, they used “white bronze”, which is not alpaca but a slightly different and more complex alloy. I was told at the foundry that it contains a lot of aluminium, some manganese, and a variety of other metals. I read that it is an alloy of copper, tin and zinc. As with patinas, I feel I am left in a fog. That is very good, it makes me curious. I'll find out. Luca struggled to weld it, I want to understand why.

These pieces are not yet completely brushed. They have been sandblasted and colour shows only on the areas that have been ground; so, I still have to rely on my imagination to see the completed piece. I am not sure that what I'm imagining is what I will get next week. But anyway, it was very important to go through this stage of trying another metal. It made me more attentive to what was going on in the foundry, when other artists were using other alloys.

Do you think you have been influenced by other artists' choices?

While working, at the beginning, I came across an artist that I didn't know beforehand – Yves Dana. He was not in Pietrasanta, but there were books about him in the studio. The impact of his work and of the interviews about it were so strong that for one week I was completely obsessed by it. I would decide to make something and then one of his sculptures would start to interpose itself. So I put these books aside. I kept working on my own ideas while walking in the morning and reading other books on different sculptors in the library in the evening, and it progressively went well. It was also interesting to witness the assembling of very large sculptures, because this is still beyond my scope, and to discuss matters with artists currently working in the foundry. For instance, Hanneke Beaumont told me about her first experiments with wax. Once, as she was passing by, she asked a question about how I was doing something; it helped me realize there was

a better way to achieve it. She was very subtle and non-intrusive in her approach. Later on I closely observed the patinas of her pieces and saw there was much more to get out of it than I had. An artist who had a strong impact on me is Helaine Blumenfeld. As a member of the jury that selected me for this residency, she paid me several visits at the foundry, and she also invited me to her studio. She is a great artist, and on top of that she is extremely generous: she really shows interest in what you are making. She makes positive comments and asks questions in a way that helps you assess if you are showing what you intend to show. I think it is a genuine skill to have such a strong personality, such a body of work behind you, and at the same time to hold back any remark that might inhibit somebody who is still exploring a new field. Thanks to her response to my first 6 maquettes one day I found I had the confidence to start a more ambitious work. Recently she arrived one morning and saw the piece that became *Volta II*. She has a great eye, she sees immediately what is interesting and what does not work. Unusually for her, she said straight away: "It is very interesting but this bit here does not work. It creates something unbalanced that does not work". This struck me, because I had been struggling with this elongated piece of wax for two days and was still not happy with it. I could see it did not work, but I was clinging to the idea of adding something at the bottom with the precise intention of breaking what seemed to me its too easy harmony. I could see my attempt was not working and yet I was not ready to let it go... I was also surprised that Helaine made a comment like this. It was an important moment for what it revealed: she knew I could withstand criticism. I resisted, explaining I had





left: Volta I in progress.

above: Volta II at two different stages seen from two different angles.





left: Marzio after the fusion process. previous page: Enzo casting Volta I. White bronze has a distinct pink colour when in fusion.

not yet found the right place for this bit but it was required by the sculpture itself. After she left I thought: "Come on, it is true that something is wrong here". I discarded the bit and tried other things. Only when the piece was finished did I discover why I had wanted to create the unbalanced feeling that was not visually relevant. That was thanks to Raimondo's comments. When he saw it ready in its "ferretti" he said: "I don't know that many artists who could build such a structure out of wax" – that was the milk and honey. "It reminds me of a stylised rose". That was a shock. I had known that the rose was there, and it is not what I had intended to make! Then I thought: "So what? A rose is there, encapsulated in your sculpture, you obviously made something that from a certain angle can suggest a rose; there are also waves, possibly a jelly fish, and all these "things" that are not really things and you cannot name, related to your obsession with parallel and perpendicular planes; everybody will see different things in it and that's exactly how it should be." There was also a lot of interaction with the artists I met at the foundry, at the Sem Foundation, at the Arkad Foundation in Seravezza, during openings, but I don't think that I was influenced by any one artist specifically. It is more like the way cells are fed by all nutrients in the body. It actually was like that, it was very, very good.



this page: Anne working on Volta II, photo Laurence Garfield. next page: Volta I in process and finished.



And how did you see the RBS show: was that a surprise to see this exhibition?

In a way yes. I was struck by the very high standards, which are difficult to attain when you have so many different artists together, I think, I don't remember how many there were ...

25...

25 is a big number. I was really pleased that so many different artists could be together and enhance each other's work and, of course, the quality of both the setting and the curator played a very important role. Yes, I was very impressed, and I think that the RBS policy of selecting artists who do not live in the UK as Members is farsighted. It enriches and strengthens the Society. I am very impressed by the range of artists that the selection committee has built up, and by the efforts made, under the supervision of Johannes von Stumm, to support emerging artists by giving them the opportunity to exhibit. Johannes came from London and attended the opening of the exhibition. On this occasion he and Lisa Howard paid me a visit at the foundry: it was very stimulating to have the opportunity to introduce to them my work, which was still in progress.

And then you just had a glimpse of how to enlarge a sculpture...

Yes. Because I wanted my piece to be completely finished by the end of my residency, I didn't work very long at Marcello's studio. I watched Liber begin to prepare an armature for the enlargement of a piece by Botero. I didn't follow the whole process, but seeing the very start of it made me aware of the difficulty of placing the model on the board on which the larger piece was to be built. He spent nearly two days just levelling it properly. At the same time, in the other room, four or five of Dashi's assistants were making this absolutely huge, fantastic horse for an exhibition in London next autumn. It was interesting to see these different tasks going on and to understand the method of construction. I saw Marcello's work, the rendering of the presence of this people he makes and the quality of his finishes. I watched Roberta starting her 80cm high

Inger Sannes, ARBS, *Vela*, 2011, marble 60x36x32 cm



Julia Vance, ARBS, *To*, 2011, marble



Helaine Blumenfeld, OBE PVPRBS FRBS, *Espirit II*, 2011, bronze, and *Struggle*, 2011, marble



piece and adding pieces of clay to the structure. So even though I didn't work with clay in this way here, it was important to see how it is done. When I will make bigger sculptures, I will do it with clay after making small maquettes either in clay or wax. It is impossible to enlarge my intricate wax maquettes and make one mould of them. If I want to make large sculptures similar to *Volta I* and *II*, I need to make the different components out of clay, get them cast separately, and then weld them together. Now I am aware of the technique, I can use it. When I will need some more advice and help, I'll ask for it. I also watched Lorenzo and Giovanna make moulds.

Do you think you will come back?

Yes, definitely.

... to explore more...

... to explore more, and to have pieces made... Once I get back to England, it could be helpful to work as an assistant for an artist who works on large scale projects. I am sure I will come back to Pietrasanta and specifically to the Mariani foundry. The Agolinis offered me excellent working conditions and I got on well with the staff. I feel very comfortable in this place and I am very grateful to Adolfo, Nicola and the whole team for being introduced to the world of bronze sculptures in a way that allowed me to achieve so much in three months.

You need to digest all of this now...

Yes! I have other big projects going on in ceramics, so probably during the three months ahead of me I won't have time to digest this completely... When I stop moving around with so much going on, I will be able to think about all of it. Probably around August or September. So far, it all feels very good.

... you will wake up and ... But thank you Anne, grazie!

Grazie a te Valentina!

left: Roberta starting a maquette; *centre:* Liber soldering an extra element to support a heavy lump of clay. *right:* Dashi Namdakov's assistant working on the enlargement of a maquette.







ANNE MERCEDES

1965 - Born in Paris, France.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011

"Parcours", Espace Diamono, 12th Parcours Céramique Carougeois, Carouge, Switzerland.

"Anne Mercedes / Nick Turvey: Brian Mercer Residencies 2010", Royal British Society of Sculptors, London.

"Rien ne se perd, rien ne se crée", Galerie XXI, Paris, France.

2008

"Henk Wolvers / Anne Mercedes", Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Brussels, Belgium.

"Shedding landscapes", Apple House Gallery, Guldagergaard, Skaelskor, Denmark.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2011

«S'imbriquen», La Maladrerie / Ecole d'Art du Beauvaisis/Allonne Brick Factory, Beauvais, France.

«Metamorphosis», RBS Public Series 2011, Royal British Society of Sculptors, London, UK.

«Porcelain another way», Galeria Zskła i Ceramiki, Wrocław, Poland.

2010

"Circuit Céramique aux Arts Décoratifs : la scène française contemporaine", Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

"European Ceramic Context 2010 », Bornholm Kunstmuseum, Gudhjem, Denmark.

2009

"Ceramics of Europe", Westerwald Prize 2009, Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany.

UK guest artist at "Adventures of the fire, World Contemporary Ceramics", 5th CEBIKO, Icheon, Korea.

2008

"XXth International Biennial of Contemporary Ceramics", Musée Magnelli, Vallauris, France.

"Network Project", Danish Museum for Ceramic Art, Grimmerhus, Middelfart, Denmark.

2007

"Step even closer", London West Gallery, UK.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Musée National de la Céramique, Sèvres, France.

Museum of Wałbrzych, Poland.

World Ceramic Exhibition Foundation, Icheon, Korea.

International Ceramics Research Center (Guldagergaard), Skaelskor, Denmark.

Media, Art and Design School, University of Westminster, London.

PUBLICATIONS (selection)

- *XXXIV International symposium Porcelain another way*, Wrocław, Pologne, 2011

- *Circuit céramique aux Arts Décoratifs : la scène française contemporaine*, F.Bodet, Edition Les ArtsDécoratifs, Paris, 2010.

- *European Ceramic Context 2010*, Susanne Joker Johnsen, Published by Bornholms Kunstmuseum, ISBN 978-8789059-86-0.

- Collaboration to *Wall Pieces*, main author Dominique Bivar Segurado, A&C Black, London & New York, 2009.

- 12. Westerwaldpreis 2009, Keramik Europas, Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany, 2009.

- *Adventures of the fire, World Contemporary Ceramics*, World Ceramic Exposition Foundation, Icheon, South Korea, 2009.

- *Céramique Contemporaine, Biennale Internationale Vallauris 2008*, Somogy éditions d'art, Paris, 2008.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Royal British Society of Sculptors, associate member (ARBS)

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

2007

Ceramics BA Hons, University of Westminster, London.

1988

Agrégée de Philosophie.

1986

MA in Philosophy (Distinction). University of Paris I - Sorbonne.

AWARDS AND GRANTS

2010

Brian Mercer Bronze Residency Award: 3 months residency at Fonderia Mariani, Pietrasanta, Italy.

2008

"Artist in residence" award II, International Ceramics Research Center (Guldagergaard), Denmark.

UK Crafts Potters Charitable Grant to participate in Network Project, Denmark.

2007

"Project Network" award, International Ceramics Research Center (Guldagergaard), Denmark.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (Selection)

2011

Residency, Allonne Brick Factory, project «S'imbriquen», Ecole d'art du Beauvaisis, Beauvais, France.

Brian Mercer 2010 Bronze Residency, Fonderie Mariani, Pietrasanta, Italy.

2010

Symposium "Porcelain another way", Lapp Insulators Factory, Jedlina Zdroj, Poland.

2009 - 2010

Assistant at Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris, France.

2008

Residencies at Guldagergaard, International Ceramics Research Centre, Denmark.



*previous pages: Volta I, 2011, white bronze, 71x62x68 cm and Volta II, white bronze, 62x68x66 cm. photo Erio Forli
left: Revolutionary Process, 2011, bronze, 48x55x40 cm. photo Anne Mercedes
p.48: Revolutionary process. photo Anne Mercedes.*



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