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Oriano Galloni

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**Ethnic Jewelry
as sculpture**

Reviews



At The Edge Of Antiquity

The Italian sculptor Oriano Galloni's on-going series of dramatic works entitled Silent Soul has a quiet drama about it. His figures not only touch upon his sense of the spirit of the contemporary world, but also connect directly to the world of the Renaissance.

By Ian Findlay



To encounter the art of Italian artist Oriano Galloni is to experience a unique sculptural voice that is touched by the grace of antiquity.

Galloni, who was born in Italy in 1970, is steeped in the ancient artistic traditions of Greece, Rome, and Egypt as well as those of the Renaissance and the robustness of modernist sculpture. This is clearly evident in the works that make up his on-going series *Silent Soul*, a selection of which recently appeared at Koru Contemporary Art, Hong Kong. Such influences have always informed Galloni's dramatic union of Western tradition and contemporary sensibilities, even from his first commissions of almost two decades ago. His unique marriage of styles and techniques, marble and woods, vision and gripping line creates a commanding timelessness about his *oeuvre*. His works engage the intellect and the emotions immediately. The spirit of his art embraces the soul.

The first thing that one experiences among Galloni's elegant, slim figures—'silent souls' as he calls them—is absolute stillness. Each figure has been formed through great skill and exquisite patience: there is nothing extraneous about them. The uncanny meeting of his thin bodies and tight androgynous faces in the marble past and the wood-and-aluminum present is beautifully rendered. The marble faces that speak to the Renaissance are stern, the head coverings are of an age of formality and rigid cultural protocols, but the eyes are uncannily alive and distant. The metal-and-wood bodies speak to the modern world but do so quietly, without the imperious arrogance that one often finds in monumental-inspired art.

A recent exception is the taut, muscular *The Man 2* (2006) where Galloni has drawn the face delicately in pencil on a small cube of marble that passes for the head, something which adds a fresh layer of meaning and interpretation to the work. Galloni pays a great deal of attention to his

heads, all of which, large and small alike, are smooth. The smooth, white marble faces might easily be taken as death masks from another era were it not for Galloni's attention to the eyes and the set of the jaw, which lends each of his faces a sense of determination to overcome any adversity. The veined hands are strong. Galloni's heads are mostly fully formed but in one work, *Silent Soul A3* (2007), the face is emerging from the marble as if it were being

hiding their thoughts. One stands before each figure wondering what thought there is. This is not uncomfortable: rather it is a relaxing, unthreatening experience for observers who appear to engage easily with Galloni's silent souls, much in the same way that one engages with nature and the trees in the forests that inspired Galloni. Figures such as *Silent Soul D1* (2007) and *Silent Soul B* (2006), like most others, seem to demand to be liberated by touch

as nature is touched by us in recognition of its presence, its tough reality and the companionship that nature offers us without question.

Silent Soul: Il Pensiero (2006) is a particularly fine example of both Galloni's skilled figuration and his abstraction through his use of various colored woods. Here the androgynous figure sits tall in its high chair, somewhat aloof from the world, looking as if it is deliberating on some profound problem. The juxtaposition of marble and wood is special here. One feels small beside this figure but one desires to stroke it gently, searching out its humanity, consoling it in its stillness and aloneness perhaps, for it is a very human creation. With *Il Pensiero* Galloni is by turns monumental and delicate, tough and intimate, quietly dramatic and poetic. Although this figure could easily have sprung out of the Renaissance, there is a thoroughly modern emotional depth to it that both surprises and recognizes Galloni's skill.

Galloni's experimentation seeks to display and release human energy, sound, emotion, and the spiritual through

a reinterpretation of traditional figurative sculpture. His paintings, however, reveal figures trapped on paper and canvas. In sculpture and painting Galloni references Western art history—especially Italian—with an ease that adds fresh grace and presence to his creations. In sculpture and painting Galloni innovates at will as he seeks to set his creations free from their earthly prisons to find their identities among the living world of art.



Oriano Galloni, *White Moon*, 2011, assembled marble and steel, 10 meters high. Photographed in the Artist's studio in New York. *Previous page*: **Oriano Galloni**, *The Birth of Mars*, 2010, assembled marble, 5 meter high. All images: Courtesy of the Artist and Koru Contemporary Art, Hong Kong.

released slowly from the stone's tenacious ancient grasp. Galloni knows that within each block of marble a figure is waiting to be freed. In the individuality of his slim figures there is a feeling of alienation from the world, this is especially strong in works such as *Silent Soul: Autumn* (2006) and *Silent Soul D1* (2007).

Galloni's figures look at the world from a great height, the expression on their faces questioning, their eyes distant,

It seems that you wanted to be a sculptor at a very young age. When you were a child looking at sculpture did you see something magical in the process that attracted you?

When I first went to Carrara, the thing that I learned about marble is that there is something very powerful in this white stone. When you are in an old studios that has gone from one generation to another, there is something magical there when you are a child. There is a history of sculpture in Carrara from Roman times. When you think of Florence and Rome and the history of sculpture, you think of the many famous artists from Michelangelo to Henry Moore to Louise Bourgeois and to the unknown artists who have worked in marble from the making of sculpture to the building of cities.

You were very young when you received your first commissions in Germany [Janine] and Italy [Icaro 2], at the beginning of the 1990s. Works such as these were tall, monumental works. Janine was more than two meters and Icaro 2 was 20 feet high. What was the importance of these works for you then?

I was very young and classical and a little academic. When I look back at that time, the work was perhaps a little introverted. Probably, at that moment, it was a neo-Platonic time in life. I loved the idea of the neo-Platonic, that you are in a cave and you can see only the opening. The reality is really behind you.

Even though your work was large then, and remains elongated, but slimmer, it was intimate.

Yes. I think that is important that people know that each of my works is unique. Each of my works is a single shot of my life. I don't like the idea of editions.

Your series of works under the collective heading Silent Soul, which has been an ongoing project since 1998, does indeed suggest something of the power of silence. There is also that important feeling of intimacy. How did this series emerge?

The idea behind *Silent Soul* was photosynthesis. I was working in a German forest many years ago. When the old trees began to move, I felt that there was a beautiful sensation of the sound following me. Wood can really absorb everything in the world, and change bad energy into good energy. I feel this. And I try to translate in my language of sculpture what I feel about

the purity of the trees and the forest and inside every human being. The tree is a metaphor. My sculpture is my line. The line is my sculpture.

There is a beautiful combination and balance of materials—marble, wood, stone, granite, aluminum—in your sculptures, which is particularly strong in the works that make up Silent Soul. How did such combinations come about?

The anatomical parts of my sculpture are white Carrara marble. I feel this material is perfect for translating the human body, particularly the skin. The rest can be wood and aluminum and stainless steel or stone

or granite. I use European and African woods. There is a powerful feeling of energy in old wood.

Your sculptures have a unique and imposing presence. Silent Soul: Il Pensiero (2006) [see cover], is an excellent example of this. The vast majority of your works in recent years have been tall, slim, and elegant. Why is this form important to you?

I like the idea and the feeling that I have of the simple and pure energy of the spirituality of human beings and nature. What I am really looking for in my work is the spirituality of humanity, which is represented by the slimmness of the human



Above left: Oriano Galloni, *My cat loves the Moon*, 2007, 274 cm high. **Above center:** Oriano Galloni, *Silent Soul / Autunno*, 2006, wood and white Carrara marble, 212 x 15 x 11 cm. **Above right:** Oriano Galloni, *Silent Soul A3*, 2007, wood and white Carrara marble, 213 x 10 x 6 cm.

form. There is also the concept of the natural materials of wood and marble coming together. This is important to me. I like organic materials. I like the colors of the woods that I use and the mixture of the woods and the marble. Putting together the woods and their colors is like playing with colors as if in abstract painting. I fix the various woods by gluing.

Although your works are stripped down, there are surprising and beautiful details. The tiny pairs of feet, for example, on which your works are balanced, are perhaps the most striking.

The little feet represent the spiritual part that stays in our reality and our spirituality. With the feet we start the process of purification that eventually rises to the top of my sculptures that are white marble. The white heads at the top of my sculptures represent the purification of the mind and the spirit. I speak here of the spiritual and not the religious.

There is a very drawn feel to some of your pieces. Do you feel that a sculptor should be able to draw well?

The secret of the sculpture is the drawing. The drawing is the sculpture.

Is there a difference between drawing by a sculptor and that of a painter?

Yes. I think that for a painter it is about light on the canvas. For a sculptor it is about black and white.

How do you begin a sculpture? Do you have models or detailed drawings?

I don't use models or sketching for my work. I sketch and paint for pleasure only. For a sculpture, I start it in my head. I know the line that I want but it changes because everyday is different, everyday the line grows. You have everything in that line on that day—the good mood and the bad mood, the summer and the winter.

Dramatic monumental figures such as *White Moon* (2011) and *Birth of Mars* (2011) seem somehow distant from the world, like the ancient Greek gods looking down on the mortal world in an attitude of superiority. There is also here a sense



Oriano Galloni, *The Man #2* (detail), 2006, aluminum and pencil on white Carrara marble 160 x 5.5 x 8 cm.

of Greek and Egyptian influences.

This is another aspect of the *Silent Soul* project. An evolution you might say, which one might see fully in a few years. They are all marble works because for this project I am trying to use different Carrara marble, black and white. In the future I may think of using different colors of marble, which emphasizes the organic nature and power of marble. I love the natural spirituality of this material. What is important for me in the future is to place the *White Moon* in different parts of the world. It is very powerful and pure and architectural in nature, this work.

On one level your figures seem to have emerged from a classical world. What classical sculptural periods have been most important to you?

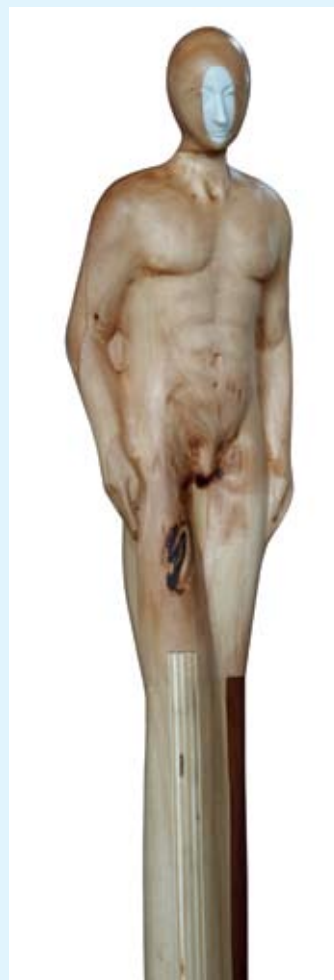
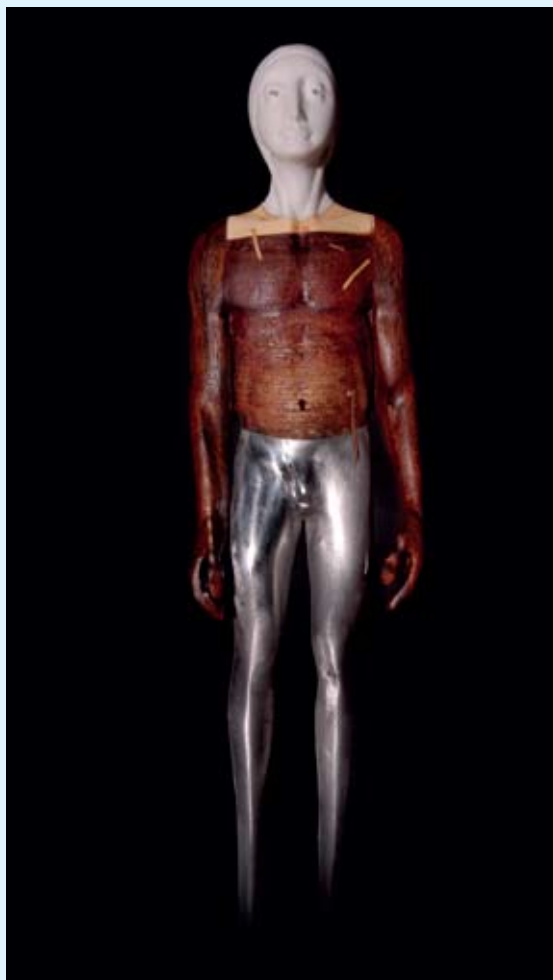
It is classical Greek period, because I like the Greek idea of god and man. I want to use old concepts to express my contemporary language of sculpture.

Which sculptors and architects have inspired you?

The Renaissance sculptors and painters as well as contemporary architects like Frank Gehry.

You went to South Africa in 1995. What influence did this visit have on your painting and sculpture?

I went there by accident. Everything seemed rough and strong. There I really



Above left: Oriano Galloni, *Silent Soul D1* (detail), 2007, aluminum, wood and white Carrara marble 196 x 9 x 6.5 cm. Above right: Oriano Galloni, *Silent Soul B*, 2006, wood and white Carrara marble, 196 x 16 x 29 cm.



Oriano Galloni, **Box of Saturn**, 2010, oil, cotton on canvas, 60 x 50 cm.



Oriano Galloni, **The Bird Woman and the Cow Man are in Love**, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm.

began to feel Africa. I began to feel the emotion of art through nature and the light. I began to feel the power of color and the energy of the light.

Are you very disciplined in your work?

I work on number of pieces at the same time. I can work on five to six pieces at the same time because sculpture is very physical. I have to move about as everything around me is noisy, dusty, and dirty.

Do you discard work with which you are unhappy?

Everyday is different and I feel different about my work. What I can say is that when a work is finished, it is finished. I don't go back to it.

Painting is clearly important to you. There is a different sense of intimacy in your small paintings.

Yes, it is. I paint in my New York studio. For me painting is like a little walk somewhere else.

You were based in Carrara for some time. Why did you move to New York?

I moved to New York because I think that it is the place to be for art. You have



Oriano Galloni, **Parallel Sensations**, 2010, acrylic on plastic, 68 x 33 cm.

every kind of people there and so much art. But I work between Carrara and my studio in New York, for a few months in each place. In Carrara I do my marble work and in New York I have a studio in which I prefer to paint.

What does it mean to you to be a sculptor in the 21st century? What is the biggest challenge as a sculptor in the digital age?

Keeping one's feet on the ground. The reality of making sculpture is that you live in dust and noise and tough physical conditions. Sculpture is hard physical work. There is grinding and the noisy reality of cutting a block of marble. And then there are the market realities for the sculptor. The making of art is tough. It may be romantic to some people but the reality is much different. There is the contradiction between the dream of art and the reality of making it. It is expensive, not just materials but tools and moving works from one place to another.

But it is fun, too. Sculpture and digital art are two different worlds of expression. There are artists who use music, the pen, the computer, video, the brush, and the voice, and so on, to express themselves. But there is only one key that is a different way of expressing oneself. I use the chisel simply to express a concept. It is fun. It should be fun. Right? Δ