

Nature in the Abstract: The Sculptures of Vittorio Fumasi



The dissonance of modern life has become the preoccupation of many sculptors in recent years, creating a free-for-all atmosphere in which it is often difficult to make sound critical judgments. The Italian sculptor Vittorio Fumasi, however, has evolved a style at once thoroughly contemporary and celebratory of nature. While others have opted for novelty, Fumasi has found time-honored materials such as bronze, steel, and stone auspiciously suitable for interpreting an eternal subject (although he also works occasionally in brass, aluminum, silver, and gold and has mastered the techniques of micro-casting, sand casting, lost wax, lithography engraving and serigraphy).

That the originality of Fumasi's work is of a higher order than much other recent sculpture becomes immediately obvious in his recent exhibition at Agorà Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

Painters have always had an easier task than sculptors, when it comes to interpreting nature, given their relative freedom to reflect its colors, atmospheric conditions, and qualities of light. Fumasi, however, chooses not to merely imitate or approximate natural things but to embody their movement and their spirit in graceful abstract and semi-abstract forms that appear to soar through space. Birds are a favorite subject and he captures their ethereal beauty most often in polished bronze, the medium that he favors for its brilliance and plasticity.

"Sea Gull" is one of Fumasi's most striking polished bronze sculptures, appearing to capture the water bird in the precise instant that it lifts itself aloft, wings out-spread. Although the piece is abstract and only nominally beholden to avian anatomy, it evokes this perfect moment more dynamically than any accurate rendition of a sea gull could. Indeed, Fumasi's sculpture is a material metaphor, in that evokes in the mind's eye of the viewer, not only the bird, but the water and sky between which it is poised.

Another species of water bird is embodied in the polished bronze piece called "Cormorant". Here, there is less of the sense of a creature hovering between water and sky, since the weight of the piece is supported on three continuous abstract shapes representing its wings and body. This seems entirely in keeping with a somewhat more sedentary species that one usually sees perching around water, rather than soaring through the air. Yet, cormorants do rouse themselves occasionally to swoop down and snatch fish from the water, and Fumasi also gives us a sense of this capability in his emphasis on the generous curves of the bird's wingspan.

Indeed, the gracefully articulated wings provide the main thrust of "Cormorant", flaring up in a manner that creates the sense of a much larger, more formidable species, even while the actual dimensions of this sculpture are slightly smaller than the previously discussed one, "Sea Gull".

Another, much larger avian subject, "Bird 75", captures a streamlined sense of flight with a soaring formal economy that can only be compared to Brancusi, while other exquisitely pared down sculptures such as "Leaf" and "Sea Form" evoke natural subjects with a delicacy and grace that makes Vittorio Fumasi a welcome anomaly in the novelty-ridden realm of contemporary sculpture.

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