

AUTARK.

ARON DEMETZ
ROBERT PAN

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AUTARK. ARON DEMETZ – ROBERT PAN **Of the autonomy of matter and the discipline of thought and hand**

In an artistic panorama often dominated by modes of expression ready-made to facilitate their critical classification and make the job of spectators, collectors and members of the art trade easier, Aron Demetz e Robert Pan truly belong to the select few artists who cannot help experimenting constantly and undyingly. Experimentation is the engine that drives their poetics and their approach, involving every aspect of their creation, from conception to design down to the materials and techniques they use to produce their works. Materials, methods and techniques transcend the mere object and technology to become veritable media fuelling poetic and philosophical choices. They are the theme and the fulcrum of the Galleria Doris Ghetta exhibition, a collection of a series of works that bear witness to the value the two artists attribute to art in general and plastic forms in particular: philosophy and thought shaped into form. On their respective paths, which have led them to exhibit internationally in many public and private spaces, they have experimented manically with modes of expression, combining materials and connected techniques with innumerable original dynamics. Using wood – worked in every possible form in all its expressive potential (eroded, scratched, combusted) and significant hybridizations (resins, natural organic materials) – bronze and even marble and its derivatives, Aron Demetz applies technical solutions that are never completely orthodox.

In Robert Pan's painting, abstract appearance is a means for bypassing the artifices of perspective and the easy chromatic sentimentalism to dwell on matter and processes to make it significant; hence his use of resins, processes of corrosion with acids, copper plating, iron oxides and other procedures to achieve given nuances and amplify expression.

Fundamental in both artists is the dialectic between the organic and technology, nature and culture and, above all, the synergy between concept and manual labour.

Taken as a whole, the works on show represent a new stage – in biblical terms, a new station – in Aron Demetz and Robert Pan's pursuit of expressiveness, the two artists sharing the same ethical and experimental approach, while at the same time conserving their own distinct stylistic peculiarities.

The artists would like the title of the exhibition, 'Autark', to be read in all its various acceptations. The first is the derivation of the term borrowed from ancient philosophy – especially cynical and stoical philosophy – referring to the artist's (and sage's) condition of self-sufficiency, his capacity to get by on his own, his arrogation of the right to himself (and also the duty) to follow self-imposed rules not taken (or borne) from others, and his self-liberation from outside influences (including the so-called -isms of the art world). It is thus not only a poetic choice, but also an aesthetic one that has guided Demetz and Pan on their common adventure.

Expanding this acceptance, the two artists chose a guiding template, endowing materials with autonomy of expression and a 'co-authorial' function. This dialogue with matter 'prompts' the paths of form and the techniques needed to achieve it, freeing it from its original dimension and, at the same time, guiding the artists in self-analysis of the creative processes they adopt. The approach is also philosophical, with the artists entrusting themselves to an 'open structure' neither pre-determined nor defined *a priori*, save for the poetic macro-structure which develops according to self-(in)formative, almost fractal processes.

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In this open structure, matter in all its resistance and organic unpredictability (resulting from the existential uncertainty characteristic of Oriental thought) runs off the rails of technical orthodoxy, defining new dynamics with the artist in a constant dialogue and elaborating the final result together. Matter and technique (together with procedural time and the related ontological fortuitousness of the creative process) thus become co-authors and, as such, are exposed, together with their various components and stages, to the eye of the spectator.

This is a metalinguistic process that compels the artists to analyse their own poetic principles and practice as it develops, when it is in action. In this contest, artists attribute similar value to the artistic process and product. It is 'learning by doing' and it raises dialectics to the concept of the work of art as labour, a tiring energy-sapping contrast between *homo faber* and matter.

Some of Demetz's works testify how it is the very technical-productive process of sculpture that suggests the formal dimension – hence signified and signifier – to the artist. Likewise, Robert Pan produces his works (plastic and pictorial) layer by layer, letting the previous suggest the subsequent.

Both artists, as a form of self-discipline, reveal (or hide by alluding to them, thus making them more visible and pregnant) narrative and productive processes as they come into being, laying bare structure and direction, thought and action, which in this specific procedure pursue each other, without hierarchies, in a development though which they feed each other mutually and seamlessly. This process affirms that only through incessant and painstaking labour can wisdom be generated, certifying at the same time that only with the union of thought and hand can knowledge be conserved.

This knowledge is the fruit of the clash-dialogue between the organic energy of the hand and the inorganic energy of matter, fed by attraction and aggressiveness in a common struggle against the immanent inertia of entropy and indifference (a synonym of the predominance of decoration).

The exhibition also bears witness to the artistic creation of Aron Demetz and Robert Pan, a sort of fight against the pervasive shower of images that characterizes our civilization and the *Zeitgeist* in an attempt to produce 'pregnant' images, thought and reflection transformed into form. This approach extends to the strategy that obliges the spectator to assume an active-interpretive stance, freeing him or her from contemplative passivity (or the necessary illustrative pre-text) to which a great deal of contemporary art has accustomed us.

The works contain in their form both the expressive and the procedural-constructional dimensions, asking the spectator to undertake a 'physical' challenge and structure a perceptive-subjective pathway. As the pieces on show demonstrate, the two artists have a ritual relationship with their work in which the primordial sensation of contact with matter fuses the ancestral titanic past with the collective memory, the idea and its synergic growth.