Richard Rezac

Weave

Our noisy, abrasive era enjoys an abundance of artists who designate provocation and sensationalism to be fit ambitions for their work. Rare by comparison are those artists who aspire to turn down the volume and clear away the clutter. Quietude is difficult enough to secure for oneself, much less conjure in another.

Fittingly, conversations about artists of quietude tend to be brief. Usually, they'll go something like this: Observer A declares his appreciation using an uncommonly resolute, I-kid-you-not tone. Respondent B concurs. A moment of silence follows while A and B savor their relief at having located an aesthetic achievement they needn't debate. Wordlessness then billows like cream in coffee while each negotiates the strata of private response which, suddenly, involuntarily, have welled up inside. The art has done its job, instilling – insisting upon, really – a dignified response to its own dignity.

More than once I've experienced this kind of exchange with a fellow artist about Richard Rezac's sculptures. Why? What accounts for it? Certainly, authoritative displays of craftsmanship always command respect. Hand-fashioned from natural materials, these abstract forms – bony plaster-coated stalagmites, hovering chandeliers of cherry wood, slender wall-mounted antennae of nickel-plated bronze, myriad shapes that stretch and curl, rise, accrete – fairly glow with assured gracefulness, elegance of form and surface both. Yet terms such as "graceful" and "elegant" can just as well be applied to machine-rolled sheets of steel or mass-produced plastic bowls. These qualities aren't the limit of Rezac's achievement. They don't explain why strolling among an installation of his art can have rather the same effect on one's blood pressure as a walk in a garden. However integral gracefulness and elegance may be to the artist's method, they are aspects of a syntax. Something contiguous with both qualities but arguably more elemental than either is brought to life in his structures.

To grasp something of the mysterious force's character, look to the work's genesis. Each sculpture originates in a drawing. Starting out as formal investigations of abstract shapes, they then evolve as the artist, proceeding in an intuitive way enhanced by knowledge born of a passion for art history, distorts and reassembles them until, in his words, "something personal emerges, something suggestive, something that gives the abstraction a symbolic credence."

Of what are the shapes symbolic? When is a particular abstraction deemed sufficiently suggestive? Best to begin by noting what they don't resemble. They don't directly refer to the domains of either nature or commerce. They are not social ideograms. The forms are never instantly recognizable. And although haiku succinct, they are never minimalist simple.

Examine the evidence. Consistently, the meticulous drawings and rigorous sculptures establish subtle interdependencies of curve and angle. Never is one engaged alone, discreet though the presence of the other may be. The curvilinear – emblematic of biology, of nature – and the angular – emblematic of the man-made, of artifice – are always wed.

Of significance, here, is the artist's insight that the union is not one of opposites. Curve and angle each are synecdochic of a single discipline: geometry. An underlying harmony is at work. Yet, since the act of joining two discrete entities doesn't cause them to entirely abandon their own identities, another agent is equally active in these pieces. Consider this simple image: water droplets hanging from a twig. Droplets and twig form a continuous contour, an unbroken topology. But internally – what drama! Seduced by gravity, the fickle droplets pull away, while the twig proudly holds to its stodgier identity as anchor. Even this modest and temporary betrothal contains, necessarily, some internal tension that is no less natural than harmony.

Rezac is drawn to the dynamic interdependency of harmony and tension as abstraction. He harnesses it to produce sculptures that have, in his words, "an inner reason for being, an active core."

Once contenders have been identified via the drawing process, translating them into three-dimensional objects is a reasonably straightforward affair. As occurs in any studio, there's a certain amount of trial and error, but tinkering is kept to a minimum. Although each work enjoys an individuated ambition, strategies do recur. Chief among them is to pair opposites or contrasts: planar, open forms and solid, dense ones; hard substances and soft; simplicity and complexity; silhouette and volume. A work may be designed to waver between symmetry and asymmetry. A form will project itself away from a source, like a rocket struggling against gravity's pull. An organic squib is repeated, with small changes in scale; both repetition and scale-shifts introduce order, and since order is one more faithful agent of geometry here the worlds of curve and angle are joined with especially subtle adhesive. Steadily the repertoire of techniques expands, each of them eventually secreting a sturdy three-dimensional shell. The finished entity most often retains the coloration of the natural materials. Paint, when added, is intended to reinforce and underscore the formal discovery, never to obscure or compete with it.

Haiku succinct but never minimalist simple, each sculpture expresses a multiplicity of events. Harmony. Tension. And something more: harmony and tension co-existing in a state of equilibrium. Magically, one plus one is made to yield three. Artworks send subliminal signals, we receive them: Rezac's sculptures, eminently approachable, human-scale, warm, induce in us a corresponding feeling of equilibrium. This is one reason for the calm we feel when around them, I think. Another has to do with the fact that geometry, generator of these rosettes, these jetties, these frozen fountains, is a cosmological amino acid. Manipulable tool and dimensionless universal cipher both, geometry symbolizes at once that which is within the reach of our understanding and that which lays forever beyond it. These sculptures pulse, consequently, with a question old as mathematics: Does their artistry consist in establishing bonds between the world of the curve and the world of the angle, or rather in revealing unions that occurred before history and only await discovery?

Considering the forces housed in these works, it'd be peculiar, really, if we didn't find ourselves growing quiet in their presence.

David Robbins