

# what's contemporary

## CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUE IN SCULPTURE: ANDREA SALA

Posted by Saulo Madrid on Saturday, February 4, 2012



An architect once said to me that painting – or any piece that resides in a gallery or museum, for that matter – was less relevant than architecture in Contemporary Society. Her statement appalled me because I felt she forgot the paramount influence painting and sculpture have had on her craft. The way linear perspective changed painting during the renaissance and gave birth to Leonardo's Last Supper. I wanted to point out to her how Malevich and Kandinsky's geometrical forms influenced modern architecture. Instead, I stayed quiet and wondered about the contemporary desire to declare some art forms more relevant than others. We seem to forget that they are in a constant dialogue. The way the fashion cycle has influenced the production of many contemporary artists. However, there are artists who do not follow the insane production cycle and truly produce work in dialogue with other disciplines. This is precisely what I found in Andrea Sala's sculptural work. Sala is an Italian sculptor/designer who shares his time between Milan and Montreal. He has presented work at the Kaleidoscope space in Milan and exhibited art in a Commercial Street shop window in London; a clever play on installation as high-end consumerism product. He is influenced by architecture, painting, and design. His approach seemed incredibly relevant and contemporary. His work evokes his erudition in the many disciplines that influence in his work. The complexity, yet playfulness makes his pieces appear effortless.

My first encounter with Andrea Sala's work was at the Molinari foundation in Montreal. When I entered the building, I saw only familiar face: Sala. He greeted me and gave me a tour of his work. My first response to him was that it seemed as if Molinari's paintings had jumped out of the canvas into the gallery space as contemporary sculptures. It was a dialogue between a modernist painter and a contemporary sculptor. Andrea explained that he sees his pieces in three dimensions occupying the space, "a painting does not have to be suspended on a wall." He later told me that his passion is the dialogue between him, the artist and the space he is working with. This is well articulated in his work. He employs many of the shapes and colors of Molinari's painting and creates colorful geometrical and minimalistic pieces in which he uses a variety of materials. He uses wood as a functional part of the sculptures. He melts plexiglass into a fluid form hanging off the wood panels, a little like the melted watch of Salvador Dali; the result is playful and delightfully delicate.

After this initial encounter, we sat down the day before his departure to Milan at a favorite spot, La Buvette Chez Simone. In this small bistro we discussed his process, and what inspires him. I asked him if he considers himself an artisan, or if he sees himself as a designer. He responded that he is a designer who sculpts. I tried to understand the difference by asking him about the etymology of the word "design." We spoke about the difference of the word "dessin" or "dessein" in French and the Italian "disegno," to the Latin "designo". The fact that Sala is fluent in French, English and Italian made the conversation more insightful, and allowed us to play with semantics in order to understand his visual

repertoire. In English, I believe the nuance between "dessin" and "dessein" does not exist. We use the word "design" to describe almost anything; it has become so ubiquitous in contemporary culture that we think of McCondos, and McArt in mass production when we speak of design. The word design in French, Italian, or Latin has a dual function. The first is the drawing, and the line, "dessin." The second, "dessein", is the intention of executing something with a purpose. Andrea Sala is one of the rare sculptors and designers who works with conceptual intention and designs an art piece with extreme precision to the line. Sala explained that he starts by drawing on paper, "with no technology." Subsequently, he makes a model with the proportions, "but not the real size." He then speaks to the artisans to see what is possible for each piece. He works like a conductor or film director with the materials he chooses. Andrea explained that in those dialogues he tries to keep his conceptual idea as pure as possible. If an artisan tells him it is impossible to produce a piece in this color, he will engage with him to have it produced as he designed it. He does not like to leave it to chance to determine the final product of his design.

His "dessein" or purpose as an artist is a perpetual dialogue with other artists that have influenced him. He told me that early in his career he dealt with one artist at a time. It was like he was responding to the visual spectrum of a particular artist. Now, analogously to his experience in using a multiplicity of materials, he converses with many artists to create his work. As he has grown as an artist, his repertoire of material has grown with his ability to engage with different architectural spaces, architects, and artists. Curiously, when I asked Sala what was the most profound difference between living in Montreal and Milan, he responded candidly that Home Dépot had changed his life. I laughed. He explained that it was the availability of materials that was not the case in Italy that changed his perspective of working in North America and in Europe.

My conversation with Andrea Sala and his artistic output is a clear example of how pieces in a museum or in a gallery are still relevant in contemporary culture.