

Costas Varotsos. Space, time and matter

*Only one aspect of the work is immediate: the apprehension of the gestalt.
The experience of the work necessarily exists in time.
Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2".*

Looking at Costas Varotsos' artistic expression, the concepts of time and space are perceived in indivisible coherence, not only in between them, but also with the matter of his work, which points the viewers to the essence of time and space.

The starting point of this acquisition is the artist's constant intention to bring to the foreground the value of the composition at his sculptural work; space, time and matter are valued together and function in a parallel way as constituents of a sculptural language, which brings into focus the holistic appearance of the work as an experience lived in its very reality, instead of delivering an autonomous object, which is defined by the internal relation between matter, form and concept.

The opening of Varotsos' works to their surrounding space is one of the most significant characteristics of his art, especially for the interventions that the artist proposes for public spaces. All these years, from site to site, the design approach of each work that is placed in situ is handled by the artist on the basis of the historical and cultural stratification of its environment. Varotsos focuses on the perception of history and the understanding of the characteristics of every site; he draws on the expressive values of the space's energy, in order to deliver them again to it, filtered through the genuine image of his work. Through this approach, Varotsos' work seems to "absorb" and to incorporate the real space and time, in order to be intergrated as a natural continuance and a parallel projection to the environment it "inhabits".

If Varotsos' artistic interventions at public spaces are considered as the proof of his attempt for a paradigmatic relationship and association with their site, the artworks that the artist creates indoors –at galleries and museums– could be read as the "evidence" for the formation of this approach. For the artist, every exhibition is dealt as a "laboratory" where the different variations of his artistic language are tested; here, the interior space is considered as a "pure" and concrete material, which allows the artwork's energy to be spread, while the relation between time and matter is revealed by a transparent sculpture, which is filtered through the movement and the stratification of the material, attempting to escape the gravity of its volume and the absolute specification of its form.

By "investing" in the opposition between transparency and opacity, and the stratification of the materials (resins, plastic, plexiglass, glass), Varotsos reveals the architecture of his composition and introduces to his work the concept of the stratification of time itself in the space that surrounds it; he turns his attention to the successive "shapes" of matter, he "transforms" time into space and brings balance between them.

In works made of transparent, malleable materials, Varotsos incorporates space in and out of their frame, while at the same time he extends their surrounding space, attempting to create a visual “clear picture” of the inner energy that spurs their movement. The form becomes undefined, the work obtains depth without being isolated in its volume, and the material seems to expand and to record its course in time, always placed in a real space that is constantly perceived by the viewer. Through the stratification of materials, Varotsos incorporates the sequence of time in the plasticity of matter and records the dynamic parameter of action. In that way, his works avoid the stillness of an enclosed, “pure” sculpture, focusing on the interest in the transformation of the matter by the characteristics of space and time in which they are experienced.

Coming to his glass sculptures, Varotsos uses this fragile and transparent material as a “space vessel”, which allows the light to pass through it, creating “permeable” forms that function like visual filters through which one is able to see the work not only in the space it occupies, but also in relation to its surrounding environment. Through minimalist “archetype” shapes –columns, spirals, pyramids– even when these are defined by a powerful iron or stone frame, the motion of the form is ensured by the stratification of the material, referring to time stratification, by means of one layer of glass covering the other, in the same way as a succeeding moment in time follows a preceding one. This alternation to the layers of the material “breaks” the sculpture’s defined form and counteracts to its limits in relation to space, while the light, which has the ability to transform the appearance of the material, increases the perception of a dynamic aesthetic experience.

Coming to a conclusion, for Varotsos, the meaning of an artwork is not defined by its self-reference, as a self-sufficient object, but by the way it appears as a “natural phenomenon” in its space and creates a discourse with the conditions of its environment. The quest of Varotsos’ work focuses on the impression of its energy, on the recording of the altering tension of its image, which is defined by the opposition between the materials’ transparency and opacity, and their reaction to the environment that the work is formed in and experienced in time. Through this process, the interest in Varotsos’ work is shifted from the external dynamic impression in space to its inner energy, to its ability to project the transformations of matter, to evoke all senses and to express the fluidity of life.

Charis Kanellopoulou
Art historian, exhibition curator