

Monuments on the Moves

What of fame? Everybody knows your name: never again are you alone.

Tupac Shakur (1971 - 1996), American rapper

A figure in cement with its head down and its hands together behind its back. The subdued, but at the same time celebratory pose of the sculpture is nearly overwhelmed by the monumental and dynamic curves of Frank Gehry's Marta Museum in the town of Herford in Germany. A glacial pathos evoked by its material, cement, which the artist had deliberately used to remind one of the rapper's natural habitat: the street. Tupac is a famous figure of hip hop and rap music and is considered to be one of the pillars of this type of music. His lyrics deal with racism, alienation and of street violence which was the cause of his premature death at the age of 25.

A life which was as brief as it was intense is reflected in a simplicity which acquires the language of monumental statuesque culture of the XIX century in which the best known figures were portrayed in their most common expressions. Experimenting with a monumental approach on a contemporary myth, hero of hip hop, demonstrates Paolo Chiasera's ability, in this work as in all his artistic experience, to connect elements which are opposite to each other, at first sight. A fundamental elements that distinguishes the monumental character of Chiasera's work from standard traditional sculptorial art: the high cylindrical base, several metres high, on which the figure rests, distorts the normal perspectives that otherwise characterise the monument. The noticeable high elevation requires the visitor to view it at a particular angle of observation when looked at close up or forces the visitor to another point of observation. Such a forced distortion creates a distance between the observer and the work of art that in turns creates a clash between the familiar pose and the hieratical position on the top of the column, as if he were a hermit isolated from the rest of the world. The moment becomes a nexus between art and music. Chiasera eliminates the barrier between art and music, between sculpture and rap using a traditional element such as a statue allows us to see Tupac in a new light adding value that means of mass communication, cannot define. The act of defining a more popular discipline with a monument, developing this action in the field of contemporary art, opens new channels in modern art. The first and main such channel is the "re appropriation" of the monument to open a channel of communication with the broader public. The artist, in this case, attempts to resolve the problem of communication between art and the world outside the museum by viewing art in a different way. There are two fundamental elements of Chiasera's work: the

monumental nature of a sculpture placed five meters high, and the incredible fame of the subject. Tupac does not become a hero just by standing in front of a contemporary art museum; Tupac becomes the key for the access to the museum because of the different interpretation. Those who see the monument recognizing its significance, connects it directly to the museum and views it as a work of art thus widening the confines of the potential space to be found in art. This allows one different interpretations of art and it should be viewed as part of the need to broaden the scene for the art that is represented by the artist and by the museum. At a time in which reference points are changing, a monument does not have the same significance it had in the past. This is happening at a time in which the image is subject to overexposure. The value of the memory contained within the communication code of the monument does not manifest itself in an older tradition. The theme of the monument today is increasingly subject to attention because of the symbolic value which reflects the crisis of contemporary society that does not identify with the elements that normally represent it.

The crisis of the monument is parallel to a change of social and political identity that is part of a process of transformation of the representation. The use of new media by the media organizations themselves has significantly increased the representative force of the image, but at the same time it inflates it via its de-materialisation. Contemporary society seeks to represent monumentality in a fragmented and immaterial dimension as if there were an apparent de-monumentalising consciousness in our times. During the past decades we have seen monuments decline in the name of a new “democratic universalism”. The demise of the monument, and its absence, should symbolize the freedom of our era. The almost innumerable statues dedicated to Lenin, Marx and all those who represented Socialist Realism that were more or less well known, were swiftly eliminated. A more recent image concerns Saddam Hussein’s statue seen through the media as a symbol for the fall of the regime. Not only was the action of removing the monument used to confirm the fall of the regime, but the image of the *de-monumentalisation* was used as an *anti monument* to the previous regime thereby starting a counter process by the media. The monument is a recurring element for Chiasera. It is found very often in his work in other ways. It is not just the monument as a reminder or rescuer from a galloping collective amnesia, but also as a methodological element for a different kind of visibility. The work called “The Following Day” is monumental particularly because of its proportions. A large portrait of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s face, displayed sunken in the countryside of the Italian region of Romagna, reminding one of the singularity of the heads of the Easter Islands, that suddenly explodes, destroying itself. In this work

we find two elements of the monument: the celebratory one and the destructive one. In reality, by creating and then destroying, Chiasera uses two meanings of the *monument*. The monument as physical representation, and the symbolic value of its destruction that becomes the work of art in question because of a process driven by the media. In addition to the monument, we find in the work of the artist also a celebratory aspect, particularly when compared with the past. As if to identify with great artists in the history of art, he dedicates a trilogy to the three figures from different periods in his work. *The Trilogy: Vincent, Cornelius, Pieter*. Three artists that, apart from having in common the same place of origin, are connected by the constant construction of a situation that is parallel to reality. *The Trilogy: Vincent Cornelius, Pieter* is, as often is the case in Chiasera's work, a process that develops in different times, modality, traces and techniques, opening doors to a constant generative process. The imaginary is the dominant element in the work, just as the facts and the successions of stories and elements that appear are visionary. In the end, a myth can only generate another myth. Another important element in Chiasera's work is the relationship with history as clearly expressed in the *Young Dictator's Village*, a project that shows the apotheosis of horror generated by hate, all described through an exaggerated caricature like form of the scenes and of the characters. The history and the memory of the history itself via the nearly oneiric interpretation that transforms details and elaborates the scene in a constant succession of "coups de théâtre". This work has also in itself a monumental character maybe dedicated to the absurd and its unforeseeable dynamics. The scenery plays a fundamental role in this video as in many of Chiasera's works. His works can be immersed in peripheral locations, on the outskirts of a city or in the countryside, in places which, for their common and anti monumental look could be anywhere as in the double projection *The Wall 2002*. This comprised a palindromic image in which the artist runs towards an imaginary centre and behind him the images slide across as if the screen were sliding horizontally. Other times one can find well known and important venues such as museums and other famous places. Only thanks to a good dose of absurdity, Chiasera's monuments do not become a symbolic representation of the moment in history remaining independent as works of art. The whole becomes a concentrate of very different elements: history and tradition with the present and the unforeseeable future; the identity of a territory with the abstract expression of space; different languages that divide society are mixed compared to the point of finding unbelievable symbiotic relationships. All this shows the strength that is enclosed behind a continuously evolving way of conceiving a monument.