

Arnaldo Pomodoro and Beverly Pepper in Todi - 2021

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Arnaldo Pomodoro and Beverly Pepper, two of the most rigorous and inspired contemporary sculptors, have made significant contributions to the history of public art between the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. These two artists, who are represented in the collections of the world's major museums, are linked by parallel career paths.

From Brooklyn, Beverly Pepper went first to Paris and then to Italy, where she settled in 1951 in order to broaden her horizons and refine the vision that would help her develop her concept of a universal and timeless art. In those same years, her contemporary Arnaldo Pomodoro crossed the Atlantic in the opposite direction to work on various projects in the United States, mainly in California. This would allow him to further extend his research into proportion and the relationship between art and its context.

The period from the end of the war to the beginning of the Sixties represented a tumultuous time of transformation in America and Europe, and Arnaldo Pomodoro and Beverly Pepper experienced this in both places. Although the artists came from different backgrounds - Beverly from painting and Arnaldo from goldsmithing - sculpture would become central to their creative development, leading them to a preference for abstract, minimalist compositions and plain geometric forms that demonstrate close attention to interior and exterior space as well as the surrounding environment. They shared an interest in creating *with* the landscape, which they understood as a gigantic canvas, and challenged themselves to leave their mark in works that asked viewers to question the historical memory of place while maintaining a constant dialogue with contemporaneity.

I met Arnaldo Pomodoro at the beginning of the Eighties, just after I had been appointed director of the Italian Cultural Institute of San Francisco, when the exhibition "Invenzioni by Arnaldo Pomodoro" was presented at the University Art Museum of Berkeley (1981). From then on, Arnaldo proved to be a generous and proactive presence, creating a much-needed synergy and truly contributing to the success of the Institute, then in its early days.

During a period of extraordinary growth of Italian culture in North America, Pomodoro, who was already successful in Europe, played a key role through his teaching at Berkeley, Stanford and Mills College as well as through his involvement with university museums, which, at the time, were important centres for ideas and projects central to debate around contemporary art. Teaching in an open academic setting radically different from that of Italy, which was too often static and rooted in the past, had the effect of pushing him closer to the younger generation of Americans who,

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starting at Berkeley in 1964, had begun waging a battle for freedom of expression: an unprecedented fight, a rebellion against the alienating conformity of consumerism, the Vietnam War and authority that was in sync with the Beat Generation. By the Eighties, that ferment hadn't yet begun to wane and it was still possible to run into people like Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso at Lawrence Ferlinghetti's mythic San Francisco bookshop City Lights.

In those years, without renouncing the formal purity that characterized his work – despite the gashes and corrosion within it- Arnaldo continued to acquire new spatial understanding and freedom of expression. The important set design for Luciano Berio's *A-Ronne* at Mills College (1982), the traveling exhibition “Arnaldo Pomodoro: A Quarter Century” (1983-85) or, later on, in Canada, the exhibition of 2RC prints on the theme of the Cuttlefish Bone (Eugenio Montale): “Arnaldo Pomodoro: Dreams” at the Italian Cultural Institute in Toronto (1996) are unforgettable. Environmental works of great impact may still be seen in California as a legacy of his time there, in particular the monumental *Colpo d'ala - Omaggio a Boccioni* (1981-84), for the Water and Power Building in Los Angeles, donated by Italy to the United States on the 40th anniversary of the Marshall Plan in 1988.

In the iron age of contemporary sculpture, in which direct welding and mass-scale production are favored, Pomodoro relies on old, apparently anachronistic, techniques employed in challenging ways in order to produce complex monumental works with almost surgical precision. The hand of the artist is involved in every phase of creation, from his direct tactical contact with the wet clay and the plaster mold to the final step of pouring molten bronze which dissolves and replaces the wax cast entirely. The same approach is seen in Beverly Pepper, who shares with Arnaldo full knowledge of metal and bronze casting, a technique that is often neglected among modern sculptors who tend to prefer industrial production and assembly.

Beverly's main intent was to produce monumental sculptures with diverse materials (earth, grass, stone, inox steel, Cor-Ten and cast iron) without sacrificing an intimate relationship with the work, and she rigorously oversaw the process down to the smallest detail, from the supervision of casting and grinding, to the manual application of acids to achieve the right finish and the study of light rays hitting the surface. All of this required tools that were not readily available, which Arnaldo and Beverly invented and built themselves in order to execute each step right up to the polishing of the metal. For both artists, polishing to a mirror-like sheen created an intriguing effect of *trompe l'œil*, which operates on more than one level. On one hand, due to the reflection created, it expands and multiplies the individual components of the work and its surroundings; on the other, it dematerializes the weightiness of the bronze, lending a sense of luminous lightness.

The artists first met in Spoleto for the exhibition “Sculture nella città”, organized and curated by Giovanni Carandente in 1962 as part of the 5th edition of the Festival dei Due Mondi. Thus began a friendship built on mutual respect which never waned, described in more detail in the next section of

this catalogue, *Arnaldo and Beverly: Parallel Lives*. Their story is told in images (as seen through the careful eye of Ugo Mulas and others) in *Arnaldo, Beverly and Umbria - a History in Images*, a film on display in the Sala dei Portici in Piazza del Popolo.

On this historic occasion, both artists found themselves for the first time not in a studio but in a factory, the Italsider plant, among workers and heavy machinery: a turning point for the two young sculptors who had to measure themselves against the established artists of the time, from Lucio Fontana to Henry Moore. They created their first volumetric works there, in iron using techniques that had never been used before. Beverly, the only female in the group, was particularly happy to be invited along with fellow Americans Alexander Calder and David Smith, and she was well-aware of the impossibility of such an opportunity for a female artist in the United States in those days.

With the 2021 edition, the Todi Festival of the Arts offers a dialogue between the work of Beverly Pepper and Arnaldo Pomodoro, highlighting the interaction between the two artists and Umbria, between two cultures and two continents. After a long, devastating year of confinement, we would like to stress how art, more than ever, represents both an opportunity for encouragement and a viable means for revitalizing urban centers with a renewed understanding.

Todi has developed its support for contemporary art over a period of many years, highlighting some of the most original Italian artists, from Alighiero Boetti to Piero Dorazio, not to mention promising young artists whose works are usually shown within Palazzo del Popolo. This time, however, the works will be shown in the square and nearby gardens, becoming part of the daily lives of those who inadvertently encounter them. This kind of enchantment will inevitably spark a feeling of wonder in passersby, like that felt in 1979 by those who witnessed Beverly Pepper's *Todi Columns/Quattro Sentinelle* in the same square.

On July 24, 2021 the residents of Todi woke up surprised and astonished to find themselves face to face with the imposing installation of Arnaldo Pomodoro's four *Stele*, seven-meter-tall bronze columns that alter our perception of the medieval square. Nearby, among the trees of the Oberdan Gardens, five mighty scepters - the *Scettri* - had suddenly appeared, reaching for the sky. The magic engendered by the unexpected totemic presence of Arnaldo Pomodoro's works - seen for the first time in Todi - is the result of a well-thought-out plan: the four *Stele* in the town's main square are a real *coup de théâtre* which only a sculptor and expert in set design with knowledge of the recent artistic history of the area could achieve.

On September 26, the curtain will inevitably fall on this spectacular *mise en scène*, leaving only a memory. But while the *Stele* will soon disappear like a dream at the end of summer, the *Scettri* will remain. They represent another aspect of the project: not a brief, but mid-to-long-term installation.

The people of Todi and its visitors will thus have a chance to appreciate Pomodoro's work over time, in dialogue with the sixteen sculptures donated by Beverly Pepper to the Parco della Rocca, an area which the American artist - in a nearly-unprecedented civic gesture - had wished to redevelop, and which the city of Todi has consecrated as Beverly Pepper Park, the only example of a single-artist sculpture park in all of Italy.

Therefore, over the next few years, a public path will be available as a testimony to the two artists' ability to create archaic and contemporary forms that are at once timeless and dynamic, leaving a lasting mark on the collective imagination.

Throughout the summer, guided tours will highlight the various stops on an artistic itinerary winding through the streets of Todi's historic center: each one will offer a dialogue that resonates with historical references.

The *Stele* (2007) is a group of bronze sculptures made using the traditional lost-wax casting technique, masterfully wielded and revived by Pomodoro after his Renaissance predecessor, the great Florentine goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini. These "rectangular column-trunks", inspired by the wind and light of the Yemen desert, cannot help but remind us of *La Colonna del Viaggiatore*, Pomodoro's first three-dimensional sculpture, nearly five meters high, which can still be viewed in Spoleto in Via Trento e Trieste. Of the over one hundred sculptures created for Spoleto in 1962, Pomodoro's is the only one that required a large quantity of molten, poured **iron** to be alternated with sand-casting for the sculpted sections. In terms of verticality, *Colonna* is a radical break from both the earlier two-dimensional *Tavole dei segni* and from his first precious small and mid-sized reliefs in lead and silver.

While the elemental geometric forms of the *Stele* initially appear as minimalist parallelepipeds whose partially polished external surface inspires a kind of Apollonian calm, they also come alive through a palpable, almost Dionysian, internal energy. The imposing, static and symmetrical forms of Brancusi - an artist deeply admired by both Beverly and Arnaldo - are thus fractured and enlivened by a tangible structural dynamism, becoming almost kinetic. The viewer's perception is a dual one: while the work appears monumental and unified from afar, up close, as its internal workings are slowly revealed, it appears intimate and detailed with, mysterious and hidden growths emerging in the carved details of the relief.

In the same way, the enormous monoliths in Cor-Ten steel by Beverly Pepper, which recall both Roman columns and ancient dolmens, require an equally detailed reading of the corrugations and reliefs impressed on their surfaces. This is the radical difference between the environmental sculptures of Arnaldo and Beverly and other major works of American land art, such as those of Richard Serra or Tony Smith, which, despite their grandiosity, don't change with the proximity of the viewer. Like the action painting of Jackson Pollock, Pomodoro and Pepper's aim is to deconstruct the

work in order to reconstruct it in a final *Gestalt*, creating harmony between the human gesture and monumental scale.

On arriving at the Giardini Oberdan, we find a grouping of five sharpened aluminum poles: the *Scettri* (1987-88), produced for Pomodoro's memorable solo exhibition at the 1988 Venice Biennial. This work corresponds with the silver maquette that is now in the permanent collection of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna G. Carandente in Spoleto.

The *Scettri* constitute an important opportunity to reflect on Pomodoro's abstract and symbolic expressiveness and the interpretation he himself offered, calling them "antennas of the future and, at the same time, tribal masks rising up out of a dark wood in order to stand out triumphantly against the horizon of the ocean shores" of his dreams. The vertical movement of the scepters is undoubtedly an invitation to resilience; or rather, as with Shakespeare's King Lear, the non-abdication of one's own responsibilities, standing firm in the face of adversity with the means at one's disposal. As Horace put it: "*et mihi res non me rebus subjungere conor*": "I wish to make things submit to me, not me to them."

The arrangement of Arnaldo Pomodoro's sculptures has been orchestrated in such a way as to allow not only internal resonance between *Stele* and *Scettri*, but also - and above all - greater polyphonic interaction with the works of Beverly scattered around the park, which acts as the vibrant heart of the neighborhood. Here the American artist has created a series of benches in *pietra serena*, or gray sandstone, imagined as potential rest stops for meditation and listening, and for synesthetic appreciation. She personally oversaw the placement of each single piece with the utmost precision until a few months before her passing, in February 2020, at the age of nearly 98. The four *Todi Columns*, or *Sentinelle*, are the main focus, recalling- as she liked to remind us - the slender towers of San Gimignano, transmitting a sense of protection and safety. Similarly, all of Pomodoro's work on display in Todi inspires a sense of resistance, as opposed to surrender; culminating in the tortuous mazes present in the *Labirinto*, the last stop in Todi, a meeting point for the Festival of the Arts and the Todi Festival.

The exhibition "*Labyr-Into. Dentro il labirinto di Arnaldo Pomodoro*" - installed in the Sala delle Pietre in Palazzo del Popolo - is an homage to his *Labirinto*, a work which he has said represents "a reflection on all of my work: a gesture of re-appropriation and recovery of an artistic career that has lasted throughout the decades of my life and which constitutes a kind of synthesis."

In 1995 - at the height of a long and productive artistic career - Pomodoro, who had spent his entire life inventing and building, created a labyrinth which, is still an ideal work in progress after almost fifteen years of tenacious reworking: it is an ancestral, metaphorical place like the one in Crete, a disorienting tangle of mysterious passages and circuitous traps, potentially lethal for those venturing inside. At the same time, it is the result of a complex symmetrical architecture, revealing the

ingenuity of its creator, the constant yearning for self-discovery and the overcoming of one's limits in a kind of *Streben*, or unstoppable, Goethean tension.

The entire process began in 1995, with the exhibition of the large entranceway in the Galleria Marconi in Milan. Today, one can reach the maze by entering the basement of the ex-Riva Calzoni in Via Solari 35, which was the headquarters of the Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation from 2005 to 2011. *Ingresso al Labirinto* - the complete title of the work – probes the deepest parts of one's being, in search of the inner Minotaur on a path of self-analysis and reflection which inevitably leads to metamorphosis.

Once inside its walls, the path of transformation becomes mandatory in an environment in which past, present and future coexist. They unravel among archaic and cryptic symbols evoking the mythic clay tablets of Gilgamesh: writings that are primordial and enigmatic, yet decipherable in every possible way. All that emerges are a few figurative symbols linked to land and sea, such as a the cuttlefish bone (a nod to his beginnings as a goldsmith) and thick knotted ropes that must be disentangled as in a riddle.

The succession of environments, narrow corridors and portals marks an uneven pathway along the journey of life with real and illusory openings, inevitable trials by fire - an element evoked by the reddish-copper tone of the walls and floor - which we all must pass through in order to cross the finish line of existence.

The key moment, and perhaps the ultimate end, of Arnaldo Pomodoro's voyage of initiation and that of those who follow him into the *Labyrinth* may be identified with Giuseppe Balsamo, the Count of Cagliostro, an alchemist and freethinker who was locked in an inescapable tomb-like cell in the fortress of San Leo until the end of his days. Even if his body was reduced to a wretched pile of bones and dust, swallowed up in the end by the earth after so much suffering, his spirit was never defeated by the workings of death - nor even those of the Inquisition, which managed to break Galileo and condemn Giordano Bruno to be burned at the stake. *La cella di Cagliostro* - at the center of the last room of the Labyrinth - is a hymn to the freedom of the intellect, soaring beyond the realm of the visible towards a light source high above, and appears to suggest the amniotic fluid of an invisible, cosmic womb, ready to give birth to new life.

A fundamental component of the larger cultural undertaking in Todi has been the successful collaboration with the Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation in Milan, which has generously loaned the *Scettri*, one of the artist's most important works. The Foundation, established in 1995, has developed a well-tested program of workshop activities open to a large public, from children to senior citizens. This year, it will cooperate with the Beverly Pepper Project Foundation - in operation since 2018 - focusing in particular on learning through play and the accessibility of art through an innovative

series of workshops created specifically for the event and presented in a designated educational area in the Sala dei Portici in Piazza del Popolo, beneath the medieval arches of the municipal buildings.

Also of prime importance is the unprecedented collaboration with the Todi Festival, which will host a shared multi-media exhibition entitled “*Labyr-Into. Dentro il labirinto di Arnaldo Pomodoro*”. Through this significant shared initiative, the City of Todi will proudly present a multi-faceted cultural program.

The boldness with which Arnaldo Pomodoro and Beverly Pepper challenge open spaces, through geometric forms that seem to exist in a dimension that hovers between past and present, between immanence and transcendence, is a testament to their six decades of artistic production in Umbria. Beverly, in particular, working in an era in which many artists considered monumental art an untenable compromise, fearlessly challenged every commonly held view. Fortunately, her talent - like that of Arnaldo Pomodoro - was met with the crucial support of patrons, and both were able to forge ahead unimpeded. Rather than limiting themselves to creating single, large-scale sculptures of impeccable craftsmanship, with time both were able to produce the environmental works they desired, for the public to enjoy, motivated by a constant sense of restlessness and boundless curiosity for an art form which they understood to be not merely a decorative or rhetorical celebration, but a social and human commitment.

We may conclude that Arnaldo Pomodoro is truly a Daedalus of our time. His visionary works, including the *Cimitero di Urbino* (1973), which regrettably remains only a project, the *Sala delle Armi* (1998-2000) in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan, or the organic architectural sculpture *Carapace* (2005-2012) in Bevagna are examples of total works in which sculpture and architecture become one with the environment. In the same way, the mature works of Beverly Pepper, such as the *Amphisculptures/Anfisculture* (1974-2018), inspired by landscape artist Pietro Porcinai, and the evocative *Sol / Ombra* (1987-1994) in Barcelona, created in the context of the urban renewal of the Catalan city, may be seen as a harmonious provocation in the realm of landscape architecture.

It is in the spirit of accessibility that the 2021 Festival of the Arts comes together, as Todi returns to in-person cultural experiences, offering a point of departure for an extraordinary artistic program. For this occasion, two of the most intense and innovative contemporary sculptors have been brought together on the largest stage in Umbria, in an event that will be truly transformative for the city and the region.

Arnaldo Pomodoro

Arnaldo Pomodoro was born in the Romagna region of Italy in 1926 and raised and educated in the town of Pesaro. He moved to Milan in 1954 in order to live and work.

During the 1950s he produced works in high-relief, out of which emerged a unique and never before seen “writing” in sculpture that was interpreted differently by major critics. In the early 1960s, he began working with three-dimensional forms and conducted research on solid geometric forms: spheres, discs, pyramids, cones, columns, cubes – strictly in polished bronze – which he lacerated, corroded and deeply gashed with the intention of disrupting their perfection and unveiling the mystery within. The formal contrast between the polished perfection of a geometric form and the chaotic complexity of its interior would become a constant in Pomodoro’s later work.

In 1967, a sphere three-and-a-half meters in diameter was commissioned for the Montréal Expo, which is now exhibited in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome. It marked the transition to larger forms, and was also the first of many works to find a home in highly evocative public spaces of symbolic importance: in the public squares of many cities (Milan, Copenhagen, Brisbane, Los Angeles, Darmstadt), in front of Trinity College at the University of Dublin, at Mills College in California, in the Cortile della Pigna at the Vatican Museums, in front of the United Nations in New York, in the Parisian headquarters of UNESCO, in the Pepsi Cola sculpture parks in Purchase and at the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, not far from New York City.

The artist’s environmental works are numerous: from the *Progetto per il Cimitero di Urbino* in 1973, which he imagined would be carved into the hills of Urbino but which was never produced due to local constraints, to the *Moto terreno solare*, a long concrete mural made for the Simposio di Minoa in Marsala, Sicily; and from the *Sala d’Armi* for the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan to the *Ingresso nel labirinto* environment, which is dedicated to the Epic of Gilgamesh, and the *Carapace*, at the Lunelli family winery in Bevagna.

Over the years, numerous memorable retrospectives have consecrated Pomodoro as one of the most important contemporary artists. Travelling exhibitions have followed one another in Europe, the United States, Australia and Japan.

Since the beginning of his career, Pomodoro has been involved in set design, creating “spectacular machines” for various plays from Greek tragedy to dramatic productions, and from contemporary theater to musicals. He has also taught in the art departments of American universities such as Stanford University, the University of California Berkley and Mills College.

He has received numerous prizes and has been widely acclaimed: he received the Sculpture Prize at the Biennials of São Paulo (1963) and Venice (1964); the 1990 *Praemium Imperiale* for Sculpture of the Japan Art Association and the *Lifetime Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award* from the International Sculpture Center of San Francisco (2008). In 1992, Trinity College University of

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Dublin awarded him an honorary degree in Letters, and in 2001, he received another one in Architectural Engineering from the University of Ancona.

In 1995, the Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation was founded with the aim of guaranteeing the preservation and promotion of his works, fulfilling the visionary idea of creating an inventive, almost experimental space for the study and comparison of the themes of contemporary art, with the goal of involving people and communities throughout the world.

For more information on the artist and his work we recommend consulting his *Catalogue Raisonné online*.

Beverly Pepper

Beverly Stoll Pepper was born in Brooklyn in 1922. She studied graphic design, photography and industrial design at the Art Students' League of Brooklyn and, beginning in the 1940s, at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. While in Europe, she visited Rome, where she met the journalist and writer Curtis Bill Pepper, who would become her husband. Her first one-woman exhibition was presented by Carlo Levi at the Galleria dello Zodiaco in Rome, in 1952. In those years, she frequented the artists Achille Perilli, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio and Giulio Turcato of the Gruppo Forma1, and established numerous relationships within the Roman cultural milieu. In 1960, after a trip to Angkor Wat in Cambodia, her artistic language changed dramatically. She grew closer to sculpture and began creating small works in wood and clay. Her first exhibition as a sculptor was in 1961, in New York and at Galleria Pogliani in Rome, with a critical text by Giulio Carlo Argan.

In 1962, she participated in the exhibition *Sculture nella Città*, part of the 5th Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto. The artist produced various medium- and large-scale works at the Italsider factory in Piombino, an experience which would mark her definitive shift to metalworking. Between 1967 and 1969, she began to experiment freely with interactive and environmental projects using grass, sand and hay. Her first environmental project, *Dallas Land Canal and Hillside*, was produced in Dallas between 1971 and 1975. In 1971, she was invited by the city of Rome to exhibit a selection of sculptures in inox steel in Piazza Margana. In 1972, she participated in the 34th Venice Biennial and, in the same year, moved definitively to Todi, where she built an atelier-factory on her own property. Between 1974 and 1976, she created one of her first *amphisculptures*, an original work of land art, in New Jersey, and in 1977 she showed at *Documenta 6* in Kassel, Germany. In 1998, she mounted a retrospective of her work at Forte Belvedere. Among the environmental works of note: the *Todi Columns* (1979), installed in Piazza del Popolo in Todi; *Spazio Teatro Celle* (Pistoia) – *Omaggio a Pietro Porcinai* – (1987-92); the *Narni Columns* (1991) in Narni (Terni); *Palingenesis* (1993-94) in Zurich; *Sol y Ombra Park* (1987-92) in Barcelona; the *Manhattan Sentinels* (1993-96) in Federal

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Plaza, NYC; *Departure, for My Grandmother* (1999-2005) in Vilnius, Lithuania; and *Brufa Broken Circle* (2011) in the Brufa sculpture park (Perugia). In 2014, the artist exhibited her work *Circle* at the Ara Pacis Museum in Rome. Among her final works of land art are *Amphisculpture*, a 3000 m² open-air theater, the largest in central Italy, created and donated by Beverly Pepper to the city of L'Aquila in 2018; *Beverly Pepper Park* in Todi, an open-air museum including sixteen works on permanent display donated by the artist to the City of Todi in 2019; and *Anfiteatro Panicale*, in the heart of the eponymous Umbrian town near Lake Trasimeno, which will be inaugurated in 2021. The numerous honors bestowed on the artist include: the *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres* in 1999 ; the *Legends Awards* and *Alumni Achievement Awards*, awarded by the Pratt Institute of Brooklyn in 2003 and 2007, respectively; honorary citizenship of the City of Todi in 2009; and the Lifetime Achievement Award, conferred by the International Sculpture Center of New York in 2013. In 2018, the Beverly Pepper Project Foundation was instituted, providing public services in the field of culture and contemporary art - with particular attention to the accurate representation and conservation of the artist's work - and organizing regular exhibitions and cultural events to that end. Beverly Pepper died in Todi on February 5, 2020 in her studio-residence.

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