

EDWARD GIOBBI: New Sculpture and Painting

I remember my reaction to the paintings Edward Giobbi showed throughout the 1960s in New York as clearly as I remember my attraction to them. It seemed as if Giobbi had looked out on many landscapes at once — brown *campagne* and other rolling hills, seascapes where the water broke up the sunlight into shimmering prisms, skyscapes which modulated gently from blue to white to blue, and the yellow and red scapes which melt inside the eye after one has stared at the sun for too long — and compressed them all into singular experiences. These, then, he whirled around until just before the particularity of the elements had completely disappeared, leaving orbits and haloes of color. Sometimes Giobbi literally built outward, so that these meta-spatial paintings advanced into real space.

Now Giobbi seems to be compressing time. Space is still at issue, too, and continues to be transformed by Giobbi's cataclysmic distillation. But time, at least the time shaped and measured by human culture, is also treated to this fusing and regorging of elements, so that several eras of history — as embodied in artworks and artifacts — collapse into one another and blossom forth commingled in recent (e.g. the *Mycenae* series) and current paintings and drawings, as well as new free-standing work in bronze (or wax to be cast in bronze).

The particular culture with which Giobbi marks and mingles time is Italianate culture. I say "Italianate" rather than "Italian" because Giobbi, engrossed in things Italian to the point where he tries to spend part of each year in or near Rome, is still too open to the variety of world cultures to conjure his imagery only from Italian sources. If a northern European altarpiece or an Eastern Orthodox ikon moves him, its focality or rhythmic verve inflects Giobbi's painting. If an African mask or Iberian figure set something off in Giobbi's mind the way it did in Picasso's, the Graeco-Roman flavor of his bust — and helmet-like sculpture takes on another vital dimension.

But the breadth of cultures which have occupied the Italian peninsula provide the basic range of expressive form and reference for Giobbi's work, more than ever. It is Italian art history, from Etruscan terracotta to Futurist canvas, which Giobbi summarizes in his telescoping of time. The sculptures resound with echoes of imperial Roman portrait busts, Christian votive objects, Michelangelo's heroic distortions of the classic ideal, the high-profile faces of the Popes as sculpted on their tombs (always surprising in their combination of physical precision, even sharpness, and spiritual distance), and the sculpted figures of Boccioni which fracture into planes and trajectories as they move through space or space moves through them. Likewise, the Offida paintings and the studies for the sculptures (all oval, in reference at once direct and ironic to classical portraiture) combine equally strong suggestions of the landscapes and figures in Roman wall paintings, Byzantine mosaic images,

Medician portraiture, the voluptuous landscapes in Titian and Veronese as well as the figural tumult that takes place in their foregrounds, the recessionary spaces and tonal modulations of the Macchiaioli (with vaguer hints of their melancholy metaphysical descendant de Chirico), and most overtly, the "Cubism in motion" of the more restrained, contemplative Futurists, painters like Carra and Soffici who actually began as provincial Cubists and got swept up in the persuasive dynamic of Futurism.

Is this too much for one artist to digest? Does this work merely display Giobbi's appetite or his hubris, and does it threaten to fall apart into pastiche? Not at all. If the work at first glance seems more about Futurism, at second glance more about the Renaissance, at third glance more about something else entirely, it never really addresses only one event or period or style. Giobbi is a synthesizer as skilled as he is sensitive. His skill continues unabated from those paintings I remember from the '60s. His now-muted palette is not a limitation but a conscious decision to forego the rainbow for awhile and study what is so appealing about earth tones and stony grays. His compositions, if more erratic and circumspect, have every bit of that unique orbital vigor of old.

And sculpture? Giobbi is not known as a sculptor. When I went up to Giobbi's studio to preview this work I was surprised to find old works of his in bronze and stone and wood and plaster placed in various prominent spots in and around his studio and in the garden outside. Evidently Giobbi had concentrated on sculpture as much as painting in his student years, both here and in Italy, and throughout the 1950s. The new sculpture has an accomplished and tradition-wise feel to it, not just because Giobbi has a good grasp of sculptural history or the required innate knack for line and volume. Giobbi's return to sculpture now does not introduce a new medium and way of visual reasoning of his work, but merely ends a lengthy hiatus.

I should address the relation, such as it is, between the sculptures and the paintings. And, if the "studies for sculpture" are considered with the Offida pictures as "paintings" (they are in fact drawings on paper mounted on linen), then the relationship is direct, obvious, and uncomplicated. There is a more general relationship, in the persistence of the arcs and ovals interrupted by contrary arcs and planes, all building towards a vigorous, almost contrapuntal imagery as measured as Cubism and as energetic as Futurism and, as product of the *late* 20th Century, commits itself entirely to neither movement. What else need one say, though? How many metaphors must be strung together to establish what our eyes can plainly see? You need only glimpse the studies for sculpture to see clearly how the chunks and loops of the Offida paintings — and, in hindsight, how Giobbi's whole two-dimensional oeuvre — are given physical substance in the sculpture, modifying to fit the demands of three dimensions and the history of sculptural expression.

Enough said. Giobbi knows what he's doing and knows how to balance energy and calculation to create art which holds itself firmly together and also blows to smithereens. Each painting is at the brink of implosion or explosion, and each sculpture at once portrays dignified stasis and militant aggression. In effect, each of Edward Giobbi's works achieves critical mass.

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