

## Cristina Almeida and the Sculpture as a Primordial Act through Bonds

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**Abstract:** Cristina Almeida, in her sculptures, shows us that the right of expression sustained in the arts is fruit of the obstinacy in persisting in forms of expression in contemporary times. When dealing with a possible connection between her previous activity as an anesthesiologist and the sculptor, she clarifies that sculpting bodies is like doing poetry. To link is the primordial act of each being, and to each action, the magic, the arts, the memory and the science are nothing but the power to make bonds.

**Key words:** Cristina Almeida, bodies in three-dimensional acts, bonds

### 1. Introduction

Cristina Almeida began working with ceramic sculpture around three years ago (since 2015) and studied with Tânia Correa and Ariadne van der Linde (potters) and sculptor Israel Kislansky. In her sculptures, in three-dimensional acts, she expresses manifestations of our own existence. We can say that we see in her works a certain common anxiety for a greater awareness of our human condition and the consequent need to register it. In works of art, regardless of their specific natures, through founding concepts of these expressions and their construction processes, what persists is a commitment to the human being. At times, we find them taken by the search for a suprahuman permanence and, in others, by the attempt to provide individuals with experiences that establish moments of singularity memorials; to print on the other, opportunities to experience a contemplative sublimity, allowing them to recognize themselves in the beauty of the mysteries of these manifestations. While preparing for her departure from the activity of anesthesiologist, a doctoral professor at the academy, a profession she held for thirty-eight years (38), she celebrated her entrance into art studies, so that she could practice something that always captivated her.

When dealing with a possible connection between her previous activity as anesthesiologist with the sculpture, she clarifies that “in fact, it makes me poetry sculpting bodies. So, somehow, I’m going in the same direction” (Figures 1–4). There is no doubt that her knowledge of the human anatomy helps in the perfection of the anatomical forms that we perceive in her works.

Art was part of her background. From the artistic manifestations, the ballet accompanies her from an early age and many of her works express body movements, moving in a way that makes us create image bonds with ballet. There were in her house, art books, many of philosophy and theater, and some pieces, sculptures. One was a marble figure representing the three graces. On one occasion, as a child, she asked her mother why they were naked. “She answered without taking a breath: because they represent the truth and this is naked. I have not

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forgotten”, says the artist. Much later, in 2017, she elaborates her work “The Three Graces” (Figure 1). Giorgio Agamben (2009) who says that contemporaneity is a “revenant”, where we project a light on the past that makes it come back today, differently. The understanding, from the contemporary production, of the pertinence of an immediate past production. Certainly, this image is a ghost image for Christina. We can say that according to Aby Warburg and Didi-Huberman (2013), they are those images that haunt us, that take us down, that lead us to wish a better comprehension about art and ourselves. Our phantom images may be our absences that result from the interviewees, long-viewed, suggested, almost lost. And they stand there, waiting for redemption.



**Figure 1** Cristina Almeida. *The three graces*. Enameled ceramic, iron and cement (27 × 25 cm). 2017.

Source: Artist's collection.



**Figure 2** Cristina Almeida. *It was not from home, it was from reading. Therefore, she could choose where she wanted to be.* Enameled porcelain and iron (36×36×42 cm), 2017.

Source: Artist's collection



**Figure 3** Cristina Almeida. *Distant balance (The bridge)*. Enameled ceramic and iron (45×17×23 cm), 2017.

Source: Artist's collection.



**Figure 4** Cristina Almeida. *The Winding Road I*. Enameled Ceramic and Iron (28×13×12 cm), 2017

Source: Artist's collection

## 2. Ceramics as Matter and Medium

The artist chose the pottery, because in addition to liking to see the works in the three-dimensional space, she understands that clay handling is the basis for almost all forms of sculpture, be it finished in ceramics, bronze or marble. Many materials fascinate her and she exercises this combination in various works — clay, iron, steel, wood. “It’s more or less like the classic ballet, which stands for almost every form of dance. It is an alphabet, a presentation of letters and their combinations”, says the artist.

She clarifies her predilection for ceramics, saying that contact with natural materials is part of this art form and that clay’s plasticity makes it possible to create shapes with different textures, colors, sizes, resistances, which will be used depending on the intention of the artist in the piece. On the material, she adds that diversity is also rich in dependence on its origin in nature and processes, now with a certain industrialization, that transform the earth into clay and that along with this “earth in the hands”, is still added the handling of the fire, also a process that goes back to the origins. Fire is required for the transformation phase, from clay to ceramics, and later, in the process of enameling, artist and artisan’s option to finish the piece. The ceramics allow an individual work, configuring a universe for the artist: a mini cosmos, in which only the artist and her feelings and intentions are present. The artist basically uses different types of clays and enamels.

The inexorable tenacity with which the right of expression is sustained in the arts is the fruit of this obstinacy of persisting in forms of expression in contemporary times. How to perceive these survivals? And why do they remain so current? The works open our eyes to life, which leads them to make their surroundings, history, memory and human emotions themselves incorporated into their conceptions, making them, at different intensities, active parts of these constructions. “The look advocates visible things”, says Merleau-Ponty (2004) in several of his texts. João A. Frayze-Pereira, in commenting on the philosopher’s thought, explains that he who looks does not see chaos, but things, so that between the body and the thing, between what he sees and what is seen, there is so much harmony in relationships it becomes virtually impossible to say who commands the vision: if things, if the eye.

“There is an adherence of the body to the world that reveals itself in the vision, but it does more clearly when you consider the tact” (Frayze-Pereira, 2005, p. 173). The author goes on saying that in the tactile experience, the one that questions and the one that is questioned are very close. If the hands are able to feel the smooth or rough textures, where does that power come from? The author goes on mentioning that, according to Merleau-Ponty (1971, p. 130), between the tactile exploration and what it shows, between “my movements and what I touch”, there must be some relation of principle, some kinship according to which these movements are not mere

deformations of the body space, but openness to a tactile world.

There is kinship between the hands and the world, and the same can be said about the vision. Merleau-Ponty (1971, p. 131) reads as follows: “It is imperative that the one who looks is not, himself, foreign to the world he sees”. Therefore, the vision is palpation by the eye, the touch is vision by the hands and it is not possible to replace one by the other. If something says “*something*”, it does so by organizing its sensitive aspects, which are equivalent to one another in a system of mutual references. However, it should not be understood that these references are explicit and that they are only perceived as being fully determined. In other words, if every sensible aspect shows the “thing”, this one, finding itself in all of them, nevertheless, does not end in any of them.

In short, the senses communicate, the look, the touch, and all other senses are jointly powers of the same body integrated into a single action and paradoxically this occurs because the body is one. In other words, there is between body and thing, between my perceptual acts and the configurations of things, communication and reciprocity in an expressive network of the sensible. However, the author warns, other aspects must be considered, because the artist not only creates and expresses an idea, but still awakens experiences that will be rooted in other consciousnesses. And if the work is successful, it will have the power to convey itself. The artist builds an image; we must expect this image to live to the others. How does the artist intend to do so that the image she makes works up for others? Using the body?

### 3. Bodies as an Expression of Ideas

What stand out in Cristina’s works are the bodies. The bodies that burn in our pupils, are the bodies that make us want more. In art, the body has long been a theme. From the marks of hands in caves to the tombs of pharaohs, the body is present throughout the history of art and yet is always renewed. There are many artists who use the body to express themselves. Frayze-Pereira (2005, p. 177) warns that if there is a symbolic thing that links each sensitive quality to others, one cannot forget that, embraced to the thing, lies the body. The body, “this strange object that uses its own parts as a symbolic general of the world and by which we can attend to this world and find it a meaning” (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 274).

If life and work communicate, according to Merleau-Ponty (2004), it is in the course of Cristina Almeida that we find what the work demanded from the life of its author. Cristina has always studied a lot, medicine was her formation, and the human body is her territory. Her dedication to studies has always been intense and how could it not be, for someone with her profile, who considers an academic training in the world of arts so important. The contact with the academy opens universes of many ways of art and refines the artist's look, as well as constant contact with books and information. Another issue that she considers important is to have contact with professionals in the area of the arts. As I monitored her working process, I was reminded of a remark made by Elyseu Visconti in an interview, which was communicated by Raul Antelo (2017) in a conference called “*Why is Visconti’s ‘Male Nude sitting with a Stick’ a modern painting?*” (not press).

What is lacking for today’s generations is the anguish of humility, of impotence in the face of the problems of the painting that seem simple and are incredibly complex. They are quickly satisfied with what they do, and they judge themselves to be masters in their youth when they should be convinced that even through old age, even to the death, they will be humble apprentices (Visconti apud Pedrosa, 1950).

Besides studying the technique a lot and being surprised that the “cat leap” (that thing that makes all the difference and that is learned in practice) is hardly taught, it is perceived that this one studies much more than

many students in the academic banks in art schools. Their process starts most often from a lived experience or experimented feelings. Nevertheless, sometimes the desire for creation is born from an observation, a face, a gesture, a song, a place. Another important factor are the colors, in which she chooses blue, as the preferred color in her sculptural incursions, emphasizing to be more monochromatic.

As we are talking about bodies, we go to Jean Luc Nancy (2012), which stipulates several clues about the body in 58 fragments. In fragment 15, we highlight:

The body is like an envelope: it serves then to contain what is to be developed. The development is endless. The finite body contains infinity, which is neither soul nor spirit, but the development of the body (Nancy, 2012, p. 45).

In fragment 16, Jean-Luc Nancy adds:

The body is a prison or a god. It does not have half. Or else the half is a mincemeat, an anatomy, a sketch, and none of it results in body. The body is a corpse or it is glorious. What the corpse and the body of glory share is the still radiant splendor: it is definitely the statue. The body is consumed in the statue (Nancy, 2012, p. 45).

In Cristina's sculptures, we can see bodies consumed and transformed into statues, in radiant mobile splendor. Although, equally, we perceive developments of finite bodies that contain the infinite, like an envelope that serves to contain what was developed. "[...] The image is little: rest or fissure. An accident of time that makes it momentarily visible or readable" (Didi-Huberman, 2011, pp. 86–87).

Cristina's work has led us to think of several of Jean Luc-Nancy's fragments, however, I have selected fragment 27 as a possible closure. He says:

Bodies intersect, rub against each other, clench, clasp or strike: they exchange so many signs, calls, warnings, that no definite meaning can be exhausted. Bodies make sense from the ultra-sense. They are a passing of the meaning. Therefore, a body only seems to lose its meaning when it is dead, fixed. Hence perhaps we interpret the body as the tomb of the soul. In fact, the bodies do not stop moving. Death fixes the motion that is allowed to be arrested and gives up moving. The body is the moving of the soul (Nancy, 2012, p. 48).

#### 4. Conclusion

Cristina Almeida transforms the perception of the forms of the world, as she conceives them, in a palpable piece, in which her restless soul does not stop to move and in it is reflected. It reports that each of the interlocutors, who interacts with the piece, transports it to his imaginary, and in it imprints his own feelings, creating bonds. In art, we know, binding is the primordial act of each being, and with each action, the magic, the arts, the memory and the science are nothing but the power to make bonds. Giordano Bruno (2012) already affirmed that things and men weave relations and bonds with each other. What stands out in this process is that in such a short time working in the arts, Cristina already understood this and her works and her process confirm her sculpture as a primordial act through bonds.

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