**In the Studio**

Pietrasanta, Italy

*Image:* How has your religious and cultural background contributed to your work?

*Armen Agop:* Growing up in Cairo, Egypt (the land where monotheism was born and developed a unique heritage), in an Armenian family, I wondered from an early age about our beliefs, dreams, and how to perceive the universe. The cultural differences between my family’s life and traditions and those of the culture outside led me to continually question values, and that led to a deeper search for the essential and the profound. It made me think about the fundamental needs of human beings.

Witnessing the monumental gods of ancient Egyptian art, which still hold a kind of sacredness even after their religious significance has faded, led me to research inner scale, to think about monumentality as something beyond merely size.

*Image:* Are there any questions you struggle with over and over?

*AA:* I used to ask myself why humans go through sacrifices and insist on creating things that no one asked for or cares about. But not anymore. I realize that, in my case at least, it is simply an instinctive drive to *do*, and that’s my way of being. When I am working, I am simply existing. By understanding that, I came to believe that art is beyond meaning. It transcends the individual and goes beyond you and me.

*Image:* How has your work changed in the past decade?

*AA:* What has changed is the way I understand myself. I have more awareness of the simplicity of my instinctive drive. And then my way of working has become a more and more meditative process.

*Image:* What influenced you most in your formation as an artist?

*AA:* Nature itself and the power of place. It was in the desert, where there appears to be nothing, that I learned to see. The dunes slowly transform in an endless communication between wind and sand. The lines on the crests of the dunes sharpen and mellow as the landscape continuously shifts. Rather than boredom, there is a sense of deep familiarity, of existing and preexisting through time. It is a familiarity not only with the landscape but with ourselves, with our capacity to unite with the changing universe inside and outside of us.

*Image:* Do you notice people respond differently to your work in different countries and settings?

*AA:* Every culture reflects itself in what they do and in how they see. In the east, my work is attributed to Zen. In Scandinavia they see it according to their pure design aesthetics. Art unveils a hidden part of ourselves and revives the way we want to see the world. I think the silence in the work allows the viewer to exhale their inner world in the perceiving process.

*Image:* Do you have a particular ritual when working in your studio, whether straightforwardly religious or not?

*AA:* I don’t work; I either play or pray. I play until I come to something I believe in and can’t stop pursuing obsessively. When you play or pray, you can’t do either for someone else. You must play and pray for yourself. I believe that all art is playing seriously.

 *Featured image: Armen Agop in his studio by Patricia Franceschetti.*

**Armen Agop** is an Egyptian-Armenian artist based in Pietrasanta, Italy. Working primarily in black granite, he is known for abstract, minimalist sculptures that explore the tension between movement and stillness as well as the timelessness of art.