**Sculpture by Armen Agop: Observing the Invisible**

- Claire Barbuti

**Did you grow up in an artistic environment?**

I grew up in Egypt, so inevitably I was surrounded by ancient Egyptian art. At the same time my father was a steel engraver and produced prototypes for metal. So, I can say that I was surrounded by an immense number of mini reliefs or sculptures in steel. But, the natural environment — the desert and the limitless horizon — has always fascinated me. I believe it was in the desert, where seams to be nothing, that’s where I learned to see.

**How did you come to sculpture?**

Like any kid I enjoyed drawing and painting from a very young age. I soon discovered plasticine and clay, and I just kept on playing with lines, color and form. I never stopped, it was very instinctive, I never understood why the others stopped. I think artists are the ones who can’t ignore their instinct.

**What relationship do you have with the stone? What fascinates you about her?**

I have a very intimate and obsessive relation with granite. We compliment each other. Granite is an ancient material which is not accustom to change very often or fast, its hardness and compactness require time. The slowness of the process gives me time to discover what I really want to share with the material. What fascinates me is its dignity, the internal compressed energy. Any piece of granite that you may see in nature stands with a certain pride, it’s the character of the granite.

As its presence dominates the surrounding space, so to interfere in such an honorable part of nature is a big responsibility, (granite doesn’t concede easily). My questions is: what sculpture would be worthy of transforming the nature of such a character?

**How do your Armenian origins feel in your work?**

Like many Armenians of my generation in the diaspora I grew up with the world “Koyadevel” echoing, which has a complex meaning, to exist and to endure, only existing is not enough.

That meaning developed a personal significance to me being surrounded by the eternal sculptures of Egypt. I guess in some way the characteristics of granite feeds the Armenian dream of my generation. I am not interested in short term.

**You were born in Egypt, you live in Italy ... A multiculturalism that feeds your work?**

I have to say, Egypt is a great place for a sculptor to be born. The richness of both cultures and their diversity, gave me an open mindedness and flexibility in perceiving the world in various ways. I think different cultures are simply different ways of perceiving the world and accordingly different ways of interacting with it.

Italy and Egypt had a very significant role in human civilization. It is interesting to see what continues to touch us and understand what can radiate a positive energy even after the reason for its creation has passed. Observing the surviving values and the disappearance of the secondary ones has helped me to filter and recognize what I really want to give priority to in what I do now.

**Have you ever been to Armenia? Stone has an important place ..**

I went to Armenia for the first time as a teenager, and later I wanted to study sculpture there. It was still Soviet Armenia, but I applied and I’m still waiting for an answer.

I still remember the surprise I felt when I entered the churches that were carved in the mountains. The internal energy of the mountain had a special mysticalness, you don’t see the mountain from outside the same way once you’ve been inside. And that helped me search for the internal energy in sculpture more than its external one.

**This collective exhibition at the Institut des Cultures d'Islam questions the perception of the world of the night. What relationship do you have with this world?**

I believe the darkness of the night awakens our insight. The night, for me, is a chance to observe the invisible. The night is the infinite source of the unknown and mystery. When darkness meets silence it’s a magical moment.

Over time, my working practice became more meditative. The solitude and quietness of the night is ideal for a meditative process.

**What is the story of the work you are presenting? What do you want to convey through this work?**

I have been working for many years on a series called, Sufic, and the Sufic Triptych II is simply a presence of 3 round forms, very similar in size, color, and composition, with only a line ending up in a point which comes out of the form. The deference between them is their relation with the surrounding space and how they rise against the gravity. It is an attempt to share the result of a meditative practice with the public in a contemporary art context without a message or narrative. Its just an invitation to observe and perceive.

**Are you currently working on other projects?**

I am working on a series of paintings and drawings that are a prolongation of the meditative practice started with granite. In these paintings I am developing an ascetic approach which is focusing on the essential, through a slow process that gives priority to the duration of time.

Now I am preparing for a solo exhibition in Dubai, at Meem gallery and in Abu Dhabi Art fair. The exhibition presents a body of meditative works, entitled “Mantra” which will include some of these latest paintings and drawings alongside the sculptures.