

Maddalena Monaldi : The art of making special

by david Sillars in Style and Sound



In her 1997 book of dialogues with artists, 'Conversations Before the End of Time', the American artist and art writer Suzy Gablik expressed the notion that 'making special' has always been a fundamental part of being human, and that 'making special' is the foundation of art.

Growing up in the world's style capital, Milan, and moving to a Glasgow of style and art aspirations, Maddalena Monaldi is one of those people for whom making special is a way of life, as natural as breathing. Under the quirky label of Mad-Dame she produces jewellery and sculpture with a twist; unique pieces fashioned out of recycled materials.

Robert Rauschenberg claimed that if he couldn't find enough bits and pieces to start work by strolling down one New York block he'd simply walk down another. His found-sculpture work is among his finest. Picasso too found sculpture in the bull forms of old bicycle-seats and handlebars. In the 60's and 70's the avant-garde Arte Povera movement explored the re-imagining of commonplace materials as the stuff of art.

Maddalena's work comes out of this tradition that seems in these times of waste and want to be ripe for re-visioning. She finds most of her materials in the back lanes of the west-end and among the detritus of the obsolete, even disposable coffee stirrers are reused.



Per una cosa dell'amore

A dragon made out of ring-pulls and cut up beer cans; lampshades of metallic net and eucalyptus

leaves; rings and necklaces created from wire and beach-glass. There is a tantalising clash of opposites here in the way discarded materials are transformed into bejewelled new forms of life and what is essentially sculpture, is functionalised. Fantastic in every sense.

Where does the inspiration come from?

"Always imagination; movies, books, pictures. Something creates an atmosphere. 'The Great Gatsby', that made me want to make lamps that had that atmosphere. And audio-books, I like to listen to them when I'm working. I'm an audio-book junkie! I just finished Hemingway's 'Movable Feast', that got me into that atmosphere. But science-fiction, vampire stories. All these atmospheres."

And when did it all begin?

"My parents never bought me toys, so I had to make them. Puppets, things like that. Then when I got into dance I stopped for a while."

Over a lunch of insalata mista, black olive tapenade and home-made pesto with farinata di ceci -a gram-flour flat bread that Roman soldiers cooked on their shield's according legend- we discuss yoga and meditation and the part that plays in Maddalena's life.

Training first in contemporary dance working with hip-hop and then teaching Pilates, she later studied Raja Yoga, the 'royal path', of which the more familiar Hatha Yoga of postures and breathing is a part. Yes we've gone totally Weekend Guardian here! Talking yoga over a Mediterranean lunch in the autumn sun in a leafy Glasgow backwater. But why not? The harsh materialism of contemporary life, the crisis of modernity, might be moderated, at least a little, by some form of psycho-spiritual enquiry. That is the world of Jung, a world where the creative speaks from the soul about transformation. Maddalena is also a yoga teacher and her making and teaching are both very much about transformations.

"I started studying yoga at exactly the time I started making again. It opened a channel between a part of my mind I wasn't using and my body. I don't own what I do, it just comes through me."



Maddalena's workbench

And the same spontaneity is there with the choice of materials.

"Shells, pieces of branches, bark, rusted nuts and bolts, broken wing mirrors because they stick together, even though they're broken, you get sort of a wave of light. I go on missions of junk hunting. I love aluminium, I think it's an amazing material. Now I'm getting into pattern. Whatever calls me in, I don't know why, I just pick it up."

I'm particularly taken by one of the newest additions, a Lamp-bird in a cage, it's cheeky and beguiling, you can't help but see it moving and hear it chirp, and I swear I've only had one glass of vino. After it was made Maddalena realised the influence had been Yukio Mishima, the extraordinary Japanese poet and writer who ended his life by ritual suicide (seppuku) in a botched attempt at a somewhat right-wing military coup.



"It was something to do with the Phoenix as a symbol, and the Calibri (Hummingbird) and I wanted it to move, to have the right anatomy."

Looking at it I see the playfulness and charm of Japanese prints and painted screens in which the bird motif is pregnant with meaning. That it should have its own internal light seems absolutely appropriate. As a metaphor for Maddalena's work the Phoenix couldn't be more fitting.

Taking what has been consumed and lost and creating something new and dazzling is what it's all about. In the coming months there will be opportunities to see and buy work so do check out **Mad-Dame 14** on **Facebook** for updates, there you can also find information on Maddalena's yoga classes. And of course we'll have the latest on Maddalena's work here on Style & Sound.

