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Côte Ouest
West Coast
Number 61, Fall 2002

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9251ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (print)
1923-2551 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Connell, B. (2002). Interview with Ivo Soldini. *Espace Sculpture*, (61), 38–39.



BRENDAN CONNELL

Interview with Ivo Soldini

For several years now the works of the Swiss sculptor Ivo Soldini have been drawing more and more attention throughout Europe, and for good reason. His work is sophisticated, while still maintaining a level of ritual and humanity that does not exclude a large public. Born in Lugano, Switzerland in 1951, Ivo Soldini has been exhibiting his sculptures, paintings and drawings since 1973, the year he graduated from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan. His fame, however, rests primarily on his giant bronze heads, which appear almost masked, and his mummy-like figures, which give the impression of people tied up or constrained. Extremely textured, yet almost sado-masochistically rigid, Soldini's work has continually been referred to as "Romanic" and "Egyptian" and critics are always quick to refer to primitive art movements in their descriptions. The following interview took place in his house/studio, in the small village of Ligornetto, Switzerland – Feb. 15, 2002-02-17.

Brendan Connell: What first made you interested in sculpture?

Ivo Soldini: Well, sculpture is natural, automatic. Even children, using their hands and touching things, make sculpture. Of course, as time goes by, this simple way of touching becomes more elaborate.

Aside from sculpting, you also paint and draw. How are these necessary for your work?

Drawing is a very important basis for sculpture. Drawing is a nice activity, a "poor person's" activity, because you can do it anytime, anywhere, in almost any situation and when there are not a great deal of materials available. Moreover, it is very important as a mental therapy for getting closer to the three-dimensional world of sculpture. Then, drawing also means putting a stop to the thinking process, to dreams, and gives one a sort of everlasting freedom. A man, an artist, who is able to draw is free.

So you consider it essential for a sculptor to know how to draw? Maybe.

Maybe? Maybe, because today, in some places, it is not considered important. For example the conceptual artists often cannot draw, and there are other artists who work with fluorescent tubes, lights and computers. So I cannot give an answer to this question. I can only talk about myself and say that drawing for me has always been very important and that I enjoy it very much. I only regret not having more time to dedicate to drawing.

Bronze is a pretty traditional medium. What attracts you about it?

Bronze allows me to create disequilibrium that other materials don't offer. Maybe I could create these using iron, but it is not my kind of material. For my sculpture I need tension and energy. By working in clay, gesso and earth, and then casting them into bronze, I can create structural disequilibrium that I could not with stone or other heavier materials. My "inclined"

[inclined sculptures] illustrate this. Also, some of the postures of my sculptures have developed slowly over the years, and can only be realised using metal. Moreover, the pleasure in using bronze derives from a sense of delicacy. The ancients worked with earth, but not having the proper ovens, they left it raw. Then the Etruscans arrived, then other people who continued to perfect the art. So metal is important to me as a natural material.

You seem to stick to the most part

to human heads and the human figure. What is this about?

As long as humans are attracted to other humans I'll continue to make human figures. I don't see the reason to make absolute abstractions when a human head is itself already an abstraction. When we isolate particulars, we already have an abstract form. But there is also the fact that I like to observe humans and their movements. As for the head — which can be small, medium or giant — the head is the house of thoughts. It is where the



Ivo SOLDINI, *Inclinato*, 1998.
Aluminum. 270 x 75 x 255 cm.
Studio Fotografico Phototecnica s.r.l.

mystery of thought takes place, and this mystery then passes into the arms and legs, into life. The head by itself could also symbolize the entire body at rest.

Your sculptures remind me a bit of the early Greek votive statues. Is there any historical significance to this, or is it just coincidence?

It could be a coincidence, if we only look at the forms of the figures. But making sculptures is definitely like having a mission. It is not a hobby or just a pleasurable activity. To me it is a mission. My sculpture must include all that I will leave behind me, all that I can leave behind me, because eventually it will have to carry on its own autonomous life — that is, if it will be lucky enough to continue on by itself. I think that any sculptor, whether he lived three-thousand years ago, or will live three-thousand years in the future, if he really believes in what he is doing, already has inside him a linearity — a very long thread that embraces all humanity.

The texture of your work is similar to that of Giacometti, who lived in this area. Has his work had much of an influence on you?

Giacometti has probably influenced many artists, but one has also to consider those who influenced Giacometti. There are many books that explain this process. He used to make very flat forms, figures, up until the 1930s.

Then he realized that even when finishing these figures, textures, the sculptures were still unfinished. So he quit making them smooth. I believe that instead of looking at an analogy with Giacometti, one should look for it with the world we are living in — a world where everything that has been made is never really finished. It remains fragmented, so an artist sensitive towards this aspect will find out that all things are always moving and changing, and that the structure of the world itself is also continually changing. — Just think about this table at which we are

sitting. It is made up of a myriad of atoms, which are continually in motion. And we ourselves are made up of atoms. Maybe it seems pretentious, but I cannot finish my works, I leave them like this, and I am glad if others feel this aspect. Maybe they can finish my sculptures themselves, maybe with their thoughts... Maybe. In the future, — who knows! There is often one original idea which continues throughout your life. In a way there aren't any changes. There are these artists who change their own style, but I don't really know what to say about it. Giacometti changed his own style, from surrealism to a more important style.

Yes, if Giacometti had died when he was young, when he was still a surrealist artist, maybe he would not be particularly well known. That's true. It is very interesting. Probably the first works of any artist, aside from those few who are absolute geniuses, are never completely original. They need sev-

eral passages in life, in existence. I believe it is necessary to live life, to make mistakes, to make different things, then maybe, slowly, there is this thread that gives you linearity.

What you say about the possibility of your sculptures being finished by other people, with their own thoughts, is interesting.

Yes, in fact sometimes I happen to have several projects going on at once in different places, and I end up abandoning a work here or there. Then, after ten days or a month, I see it again, and it is as if somebody else had finished it. Sometimes I find it interesting, or maybe I end up destroying it. — If you are always very near to your own work, you don't always realize what you are doing any more, so giving yourself a break is also necessary. — And who knows, maybe there really is someone else who finishes up the sculptures, at a mental, energetic level. ←

REBECCA ROBERTS

Ana Rewakowicz Uniblow Outfits

On first encounter, Ana Rewakowicz's *Uniblow Outfits* is so ordinary that it's a little boring. In the Ballroom Gallery of the Khyber Centre for the Arts, a Halifax artist-run centre, Rewakowicz has set up a simple model of a conventional retail space. Two one-piece latex suits hang on shiny metal stands in the centre of the room, their matching shoes below them on the floor. They are loosely flanked by an inflated latex sofa and a freestanding silver changing-booth, curtained in red.

Rewakowicz draws viewers' attention to her latex suits in much the same way that clothing stores create customers. She employs what she calls "fantasy projections" and "desire strategies," borrowed from the fashion and advertising industries. Photographs of similar installations in other cities line the walls, featuring smiling gallery-goers encased in

the latex suits, some reclining on the sofa. Tags attached to the suits invite viewers to try them on.

Using strategies of retail sales and advertising, Rewakowicz positions visitors to the installation as potential consumers of a pleasurable experience. Not surprisingly, those who fall for it are disappointed. The suits are constructed of two layers of rubber latex, between which air may be pumped. They look loose and comfortable because the outer layer, before inflation, hangs limply. But the inner layer stretches tightly around the body of its wearer, who must put the suit on over clothing, and who immediately starts to sweat. Thus constricted, his or her first task is to attach a hand pump to the suit and inflate the hood, which expands to fit tightly over the head and around the face, impairing hearing and raising body temperature significantly. Second, the wearer must slip on the shoe/pumps and, sweating profusely, must walk around the gallery to inflate the suit. Inflation may take up to ten minutes, and it is an arduous process of



ANA REWAKOWICZ, *Uniblow Outfits*, 2002. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.