

## AN IDEOGRAMMIC METHOD

A line painted against a field will move the eye of the viewer, not necessarily along its length, but certainly across the field. In contrast, we will stay with a painted (or sculpted) shape until we believe we understand what is in it, until we are wholly baffled by it, or until it begins to rhyme with other forms. Those rhymes may be quite simply visual - a cello and the body of a woman or the seat of a bicycle and the head of a bull.

Or the shapes they refer us to may be the forms of emotion itself, like the black ovals in Robert Motherwell's Elegies to the Spanish Republic.

Then the experience of form is never truly sequential. Most any artwork may be described through the series of focal points it presents us, from brightness to darkness or left to right, from top to bottom or the center out. But our experience of a work's strongest forms is always "associative." We associate the shape before us with the images that have preceded it. And when it is most satisfying, this memory-filled process occurs irrespective of the abstract or representational nature of the artist's work. Gabriel Verderi has set for himself the task of analyzing images that carry with them, not only a personal history for the artist and the viewer, but also a prehistory that may be a culture wide. And, to paraphrase the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, in the presence of such modern and developed images we start musing on primitiveness."

Verderi built his earlier "ideograms" on the concrete and squared form of a simple chair, in part because it is a common shape - and therefore somehow "primitive." From the beginning, however, his project has been to re-value this image analytically as a form which, by its practical nature, dictates to us. As we either conform our bodies to the angles of a chair or slouch to defy them, we acknowledge our relationship to its form, and it is this acknowledgement of relatedness that Verderi's constructions are after. His chairs become recognizable by their relation to an imagined figure (or, ideally, to our own bodies). The sculptural elements in these works attempt to involve the viewer physically while their painterly elements darken the images and make them inviolable. In this way, Verderi seeks to balance the viewer's immediacy to the image with his or her analytical distance from it. Chairs are everyday forms and as such can be primary presences. But they are also unquestionably static and thus can very quickly circumscribe analysis, as well as memory. In response to these limitations, Verderi has in recent years been led to find other, no less simple, forms which might take the viewer's analytical experience of the recognizable even further. For the time presents in this exhibit, the ladder proved to be that image - and for good reason. Its resonance is stronger than that of the chair: its mythical weight as the tree where passage between worlds is possible seems to bury the image within a cultural memory. And the enticement of the ladder's length, which we might climb either up or down, introduces a more dynamic element to the artist's project: its resonance as a visual part of "primitive" communities and its unity with the western concept of work add to the psychological power of its simple lines. By examining the rungs and uprights separately while maintaining the incline that is integral to our experience of ladders, many of the works in this exhibit raise questions of verticality.

In a few, the uprights have become standards of scale that re-orient these questions to us, personally. And Verderi's use of mirrors, not only involves the viewer in the recoupling of the separated elements into the ladders they came from, but also superimposes his or her image on the reconstruction itself. The result of all this is the viewer's personal involvement with what I suppose we should call an archetype - the strongest works in this show are dark bundles of cultural relations invoked by purely visual assertions that take us to personal places we must eventually define for ourselves.

At some point, the vertical elements of Verderi's ladders began to join at the ends, while the rungs grew into curves that imply closed cylinders. The cones that this metamorphosis created at the ends of the cylinders have now begun to fatten into circles, which the artist has leaned against the wall - like ladders. Through these changes, the binary questions of vertical and horizontal become three-dimensional constructions that promise to develop as examinations of inside and outside, perhaps of wholeness itself.

Like written Chinese characters, Verderi's most affective constructions are able to generate concepts by the conjoining of simple forms. Applying a painter's art of structural illusion to the sculptural project of relating a form to the real experience of the viewer, the artist has embarked on an essentially symbolist endeavor.

But in the process of developing a means to represent an idea graphically he has reduced his images to their essential elements. These simple forms, of course, rhyme with the still minimal wholes they were once part of.

But beyond this, each primary element has the capacity to generate further references and to raise separate questions of movement and its direction.

In the context of climbing, a cone becomes a spiral.

The patterns of spacing between the rungs are nearly mathematical; in fact, each element, no matter how expressionistic, has a rhythmic function within the whole.

These bundles of resonance seek to set in motion an associativeness that moves the viewer both into and beyond an individual work.

In short, Verderi's project has become a perhaps meditative attempt to reach the art of thinking with images rather than with words.

Frederick Ramey  
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