

One page is an idea by Duccio Trassinelli and Demetria Verduci

## The 99 turtles of Florence by Silvano Porcinai

### SLOW ART DAY

CATERINA PACENTI

From nature to the myth, from heraldry to art, from literature to esoteric, from science to superstition, the turtle is animal full of charm and mystery, it has always been considered a symbol of the proverbial slowness, but also prudence and wisdom, strength and longevity, of the passage of time, of force in his indestructible armor as opposed to the softness of the body.

From late greek *ταρταροῦχος*, composed *Τάρταρος*, "Tartar" (mythological place), and *ἔχω*, "living", "act", the turtle according to greek-Roman tradition, symbolizes the universe that manifests.

Slow Art Day, every year, at the same time around the world, creates events related to art and culture in museums, places and spaces, the most varied, not surprisingly has the symbol of a turtle. The presence of this is significant and points to the purpose and meaning of this initiative that is: enjoy and benefit from a few works, 5 maximum, on which to pause, reflect and concentrate, to counteract the general surface mode, hasty, sometimes almost convulsive, to visit the places of art and culture and to see and read the works.

And it is around the idea of this animal, and what can be, and is in the collective imagination of the various cultures and for the individual, which rotates the project of La Macina di San Cresci for the year 2016.

A Florentine artist with his admirable skill and sensitivity towards nature, towards the animal world, to the creatures with their features and behaviors: Silvano Porcinai; a turtle symbol of Slow Art Day; the idea of an installation and an exhibition, an event that tells one of facets of the Silvano's world complex and even - through the animal protagonist - the territory in which we live and the will to live and reread it, savoring it as sipping a glass of the best wine. These are the pillars of a happy marriage.

The installation also takes inspiration from a true story in Florence: the rescue and transfer to Centro Ittiogenico del Trasimeno of 99 turtles, found in the fountains of Florence, later gathered into two pools at the Cascine park waiting of their place in an appropriate environment. The turtles, in this case marine, had



represented a rather unique story, discussed and debated from the perspective of the natural balance, security, education against the abandonment of animals by people who should take care of, and also the great resistance and the adaptability of these animals to the environment.

Hence the number 99, the choice to realize 99. We may therefore say that the 99 turtles of Florence become to La Macina, for Slow Art Day, the 99 turtles by Silvano Porcinai.

The turtle also is not alien to the events, art and imagination - not to go too far - of the Florentine culture and also Senese; from art to folklore, from heraldry to the symbolism, just think: the turtles by Giambologna supporting the obelisk in the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, the Fountain of Bacchus in Boboli by Valerio Cioli, to the district of Tartuca in Siena with its motto: "vis et robur in me Tartuca" and over a hundred turtles depicted in many the halls of the monumental District of Palazzo Vecchio, they have driven on their carapace a sail, accompanied the Latin expression "festina lente", that is "make haste slowly", one of the symbols that the Duca Cosimo I de' Medici took as a personal enterprise.

At national and international level, in art are numerous the examples and references to the turtle: from Bosco di Bomarzo to the Fontana delle Tartarughe in Rome, from the statues of the Buddhist temple Beomeosa to Busan in South Korea to the turtle of the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. And, more recently, by The Blue Turtles by 'Cracking Art group' made of recycled plastic and installed to the Fountain of Aretusa in the island of Ortigia in Siracusa symbol of the G8 about the environment, to The turtles by

Ivan Theimer; from the much-discussed Turtles-iPad by the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang to inaugurate the new pavilion of the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado, to the famous gallery "La Tartaruga" founded by Plinio De Martiis in 1954 in Rome and the famous "signs of the Turtle", works on paper that were made to realize by any artist who exhibited, famous names who linked their name to that of the gallery; to the installation of the French artist Rachid Khimoune under the Eiffel Tower on the occasion of 66th anniversary of the end of World War II.

This event and this installation of Silvano Porcinai, at the Slow Art Day 2016, wants to draw attention to how nature can be and has always been an essential source of inspiration for the man and then to the artist, not only from a formal point of view but also symbolic, of collective imaginary, of story and fantasy, myth and legend, but also to draw the attention on the art and how it is always extraordinarily able to tell us and send us messages and events.

The 99 turtles will be a limited edition, signed by the artist that has designed, but the idea is that the installation last only a few hours; the intent is that they should be around, that someone would take care-as happened for the 99 Florence's turtles so they can inspire, suggest, provoke new emotions, insights and thoughts in those who take it away with itself.



### Silvano, la macina, the turtles: how did the event

DEMETRIA VERDUCI

When last winter Silvano was here at San Cresci for the opening of an exhibition, struck by the charm of the place, with his proverbial energy and passion right next to the large olive grindstone, he said: "I would love to do something here ! "and I and Duccio Trassinelli wondered what could be the special value for a show by Silvano Porcinai and what could be an opportunity.

The idea was born and developed in a completely natural way.

The occasion: the SLOW ART DAY!

Slow Art Day is an annual event that takes place simultaneously in about two hundred museums and galleries worldwide. The intent of its founder, Phil Terry, was to dedicate a day to the slow observation of artworks; an opportunity to live an exhibition in a different way.

As a cultural association for four years we participate in this day that becomes a moment of encounter with the artist and reflection about not more than five artworks.

Identified the opportunity came as a result another link: the symbol of the Slow Art Day is a turtle and Silvano has an incredible ability to interpret the animals, making them alive. But, was still missing a tessera to be the event even more symbolic.

I remembered that a few years ago in Florence had happened a fact related to the turtles; I was struck because the abandonment of animals forever hurts. Then the turtles had found a refuge and the episode had ended positively. I had been too impressed with the number of turtles: 99.

It did not take much time to connect Silvano, the turtles and this number 99 that already tasted of "limited edition".

Of course, it could be the 99 turtles of Florence by Silvano Porcinai.

But 99 is a great number! We were afraid that when we talked to Silvano would place some, though justified, difficulties.

He was enthusiastic. We were at a table in a bar in Grassina and while we exposed our idea, he already made sketches of turtles on a squared notebook.

The turtles were taking shape, enveloped on one another, the

designs of shell were already art under the hand of Silvano, and more he was excited, more his enthusiasm overwhelmed us and confirmed that the bond really worked.

Silvano told us that he would make the terracotta turtles; not a single cast, he would raise up one by one the 99 turtles, as well, just like in nature, they would have been wonderfully different from each other.

He began soon to mold them with a manual skill that for an artist is source of creation.

"I've done 30, I brought them to cook at Terrecotte Mital in Impruneta, but now I go a week in Venice," was the brief phone call in a January day.

After some time 49 turtles knocked on our door. "I brought them here, so they can stay in the garden and acquire an air more experienced."

Silvano Porcinai is the true sculptor of our time, if he was not, would be invented, but there is.

Today, Duccio and I, during this artistic journey that has brought us to gain a deeper insight Silvano Porcinai, almost with certainty we can say that if we had asked to create 99 life-size dinosaurs, he would not be pulled back. Silvano has a relationship with the three-dimensional shape that is unique: very narrow, visceral and all that is related to the animal world, mythology, bullfighting fascinates him. Nonetheless he manages a character like Gino Bartali life-sized like a warrior who has walked the streets winning them, while representing him with a bouquet of flowers in hand, he seems like a mythological monster that attacks the climbs of a bicycle race.

As already for another great artist, Marcello Guasti, on the occasion of Slow Art Day 2013, we wanted to make a short video on Silvano, a document to reflect on the artist and man.

It would be simplistic to refer Silvano to a classical interview with the artist; would be his hands to speak, the hands recount the satisfaction of who knows how to create using them.

Borns a turtle, borns an artwork. Duccio met him several times in his studio in Grassina to do the shooting, every time was an

extraordinary experience made up of memories, new impulses, interest.

After some time, with the voice tone that seems a bit grouchy, he called again us: "I made 80, but now I leave for Spain", his other passion.

An artist is great also, or perhaps especially in his human aspects and Silvano is!



**EXHIBITION:**  
Opening Saturday April 9, 2016  
4pm-8pm  
Sunday April 10 : 4pm-8pm

La Macina di San Cresci

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Residenza per Artisti

# The artist talks

*Having Silvano an extraordinary memory and awareness of his path as an artist, who better than he can tell his story, his life, his passions and emotions.*

**Silvano: son of art, but not too much, the first steps in sculpture. A life dedicated to art.**

My father was a sculptor and, contrary to what one might think, was not him who encouraged me, indeed. No one in the family wanted to commence the career as an artist, I still remember my mother who recommended "not go to the studio, you know that your father does not want, go around like everyone else!". In fact, I could not enter in his studio, but sometimes, when he was working in a room in the house or when you did not notice, I stole with my eyes. So when I started the school, I realized that I had a rough idea of everything that is the world of sculpture; I knew how to melt the wax, revive the clay and many other techniques and secrets of the art.

He and I have always been very different. My father lived in a simpler way than me, between the studio and home, I have always had the need to travel, to see; He was the classic sculptor of marble, stone, his figures have static and monumental posture, I always liked model, make detailed figures, moves and dynamic. He was talented and severe, he did not even see my works, he told me that I was not capable, I was denied, however, he telling me one thing, which I later realized was sacrosanct: "if in you have a student who is good, if you want to ruin him, always tell he's good and nice, and you have already ruined. " I recognize that he was right, we must persevere, improve, without ever fitted to the head. And so I did.

When my father passed away, I began with the real sculpture, I began here, in his studio, I was 22 years old. I remember one day, while I was working, I heard a big noise coming from outside, it was a huge swarm of bees that had found an empty hive under the pergola, and so came to take possession of this new "home"; I have held many years the swarm with its hive, where it was. It was as a sign well-wishing that life had not ended, that this studio was ongoing.

The sculpture took me right away, it was exciting, unlike other subjects, such as mathematics that I would not fit in my head, I soon realized to be very worn, already in elementary school. It was during the years the Institute of Porta Romana that I began to make molded, to work the material. I remember that for a whole year, the teachers asked us to make a plan with a leaf, a plan with geometric figures or with volumes, I tried to use that method when I became a teacher, but the students told me: "I have already done it one, I've already made the leaf ". I felt like to slap them for their lack of humility in not understanding the importance and usefulness of perseverance in a subject.

Before the death of my father I was afraid even to show what I was doing, he would not I become a sculptor, but a goldsmith; because he have had a hard career as sculptor. In part I satisfied him. After attending the Art Institute, I worked for many years as a goldsmith, I devoted myself to this job that gave me a living, earning money, and basically I liked, however in parallel I cultivated with my passion for sculpture. I started early to invest some savings to buy the material and small castings, which I was fortunate to sell soon and, during the years when I did the teacher, I devoted Saturday evenings, Sundays and every spare moment to sculpture, always in solitude. I believe that loneliness has encouraged me to study the sculpture; I consider to be a happy loner, not a sad and gloomy lonely.

I have always been a great frequenter of museums and doing 'gorging' of art history books, everything gave me incentives in the direction of the sculpture.

In short, no one wanted I did the sculptor, but I went against everyone because that was the only thing that gratified me, gave me satisfaction, I saw that I improved, I felt a bit 'like on a pedestal and, with hindsight, the goldsmiths over the years have all gone "in his legs straight" and I, by the sculptor, I have instead a life of satisfaction. I did well not to listen to anybody!

I taught for many years in Tuscany: Florence, Siena, Pistoia, Grosseto. In Grosseto was a good experience, there were projects, new things to think about and carry on, it was exciting for all of us professors. The students told me who they are enchanted to see "blend" my hands while correcting their works.

There are professors with a good dialectics, who can dissect each topic, in my opinion I was not very good at this. With regard to the teacher-student relationship, I read a Leonardo's thought; he says that to learn are necessary the student and the teacher, both silent, and the student has to look, weigh, the gestures of the teacher.

You cannot do it at the school, but in a studio with a single student, I think is a good thing. However, I believe that I was better as a sculptor than a professor.

The sculptor's career is not easy made only of satisfaction, there are difficulties; in the time I will overcome many, the experience helps to solve the technical difficulties. Now when I start a work I can have a good result without any thoughts, corrections, without having to redo the drawings to clarify ideas, without losing too much time.

As for the other problems, sometimes I had some crises, lasted at most a few months, but every time I was aware that I started to sculpt. The last time happened last year; from October I began again to work in April, I did nothing, but inside I thought and thought to new works or subject, gave the "mental tweaks" to the sculptures I had in mind to do. Another difficulty for artists is to live of their work. I have



never been greedy for money, but it is important to sell the works, it's necessary to be able to move forward, and as far as I'm concerned, the money is required even to be able to get around, with the bicycle; no money to appear, not that; It must be modest and humble, I think, to give everything in the work. My whole life has been dedicated to the art.

**The natural, infinite source of inspiration: Silvano and his real and imaginary animals.**

The animal world has always been for me a fantastic universe, fascinating and mysterious from which to draw. I know him quite well, having grown up in the countryside. I was lucky in this sense, instead of "socializing", as once said you were doing, I went, even alone, along the rivers, the forests, to catch fish, look for nests, to catch the hedgehog, I was attracted by the

the earth and its creatures. I never had any fear of animals, I fear most is the man who at times is just stupid.

I've always been a sculptor of animals, still remember the first little sculpture that I sold, was a magpie resting on a rock, I was 25 years old. Then I made roosters, wild boars, goats, owls.

I am fascinated by the beauty and the character of the animals. I made St. Peter's fish and wild boar skulls, inventing the Banquets of the Argonauts, when I lived in Grosseto; I made so many, I liked the subject although it has not had a great fortune. I make real animals but also fantastic as the series of Chimeras.

However, perhaps the work in which more apparent my love and interest in the animal world is *La Lavandaia*, in the main square of the Grassina town. The monument was commissioned to me several

years ago, and because I grown up in Grassina was not difficult to imagine the scene of the woman who washed clothes. The subject was already established, but in the base of the monument went wild, inserting a large variety of animals—snakes, frogs, praying mantises—and one, in particular, that reminds me of the beginning of my career as a sculptor: the crab.

I was nineteen at the time of my thesis; finished the school at Porta Romana, I spent a year drawing crabs, so much so that I still remember exactly how they are made, to the smallest detail. Near my house was a river full of crabs, I went there and I took them, males and females, the females in the morning left out all small crabs—who are inside the mother's abdomen, side by side, as many "little panzers"—through a large plaque under the "belly", then in the evening, or to the question whether, put

them in, until they were big and self-sufficient. When I made *La Lavandaia* no longer had these drawings, but I went to memory so much was sharp memories.

However the animal that fascinates me most is definitely the horse, is what I find aesthetically more beautiful, more elegant, more proportionate and what I most loved. My curiosity about this animal comes from when I was little, from the stories of my father who often spoke of the horses he had when he was at war in Africa. The passion was fed over time thanks to the numerous fairs and exhibitions equine in Verona and Citta di Castello where I began to attend over the years. I learned later to mount the horse, when I was fifty, I learned for practice to stay in it. I had two horses: the first was pretty tame, the other more character.

Many times I represented in the clay this animal, which for centuries has been man's companion in the job, in the war, in the transport, in everything. I dealt often with the theme of the horse and man: from knight to San Martino. I still remember when I made the horse Brandano, who died during the Palio, the owner had cremated him, as in antiquity, and held a box with his ashes at home.

## The love for the bike

I always liked the bike, when I was a boy, it was a real medium that could make a difference.

I remember that I went everywhere by bike, to Greve, to Pontassieve, to Sesto; who have not the bike or who not used was bound to Grassina and surroundings. It was a way to see other places, or to venture out. I never liked the "home" life, the routine, not for me. Sometimes I saw women, housewives, and I thought: What they lose to stay always at home, who knows if some girl among them would have the desire to hop on a bike and go to see the world !? In the past outside of own country was often considered an unknown world.

I remember that in a day and a half I was leaving from Grassina and arrived in Rome, I stopped the night in Viterbo and from there I was leaving to arrive in the morning, always keeping in mind the images of the works that I already knew through the books and that I saw in museums of Rome. The bicycle always gives me that sense of freedom and I feel the need occasionally to mount on your bike and go.

The hard work of sculpture has never scared me, I've never heard, I'm used to hard work, cycling is very hard, I've been everywhere, I turned Spain into far and wide. When I go cycling are the moments of greater lucidity and inspiration for the sculpture, invested from all that oxygen the brain works with an incredible lightness and I think of new subjects, new compositions, new figures, sometimes I carry in my mind for years some ideas before coming to their achievement.



# The artist talks

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I have made and sold many works inspired by bullfighting, but above all, being part of a bullfighting club, I rewarded with the prize Emotion with my sculptures, about fifteen of the greatest bullfighters of Spain; they come in Milan to receive the award, they come as "shrinking violet" - as Garberi said - not

cocky and exuberant as you might imagine. Among them are those most educated, cultured, and the most humble, but inside the arena it's necessary courage, to win, to avoid suffering the animal's fear.

When the bullfighters enter the arena always have a great fear, they spend hours and hours to focus, in which Slim deal; the day fighting, said Belmonte, his beard begins longer and longer. I like the end of the bullfighters, ended careers, they go to live alone, in a mountain range, in a campaign; perhaps because I associate it to my art, alone in my studio.

In Spain I could "fight small cows", you must know how to "play" and control emotions, because they come at you; it is not so pleasant the animal feeling, however small, that comes to you. Once I was chased by two bulls, fortunately one had an injury to its leg, I knew it would be tripped and fell sooner or later, but the fear was stronger, I slipped away. Another time I was rather the mesh of a cow's ranch in San José de Malcocinado and, at one point, appeared a Sementales, which corresponds to the stallion for the horses, who, annoyed, half a meter away from me, on the other hand the mesh began giving warheads with horns on the ground, and flew splinters, stones and dust.

Many times I have represented the subjects of bullfighting, bulls and bullfighters; once even tried to group several works of this kind in a show I did in Greve in Chianti, in the Museo di San Francesco, where I arranged many sculptures on two large red bullfighter capes that I had put on the altar of the oratory. It was one of those shows that was not successful and feedback, but you must also do the shows not successfully, and then come the ones that give you the most satisfaction, in this way you have to take the sculptor's life.



12. *Alcorno del banderillero*, 1999. Bronzo, cm. 45 x 20 x 21.

## Silvano Porcinai, a life at the art's service

### CATERINA PACENTI

If the stereotype of the artist is that of a man who lives to make art much to forget what time it is; to be so far away from technology, the media, the mass media, how close to poetry, to culture, to nature, to the pleasures of life, then Silvano is a true artist, in the lifestyle and above all in the spirit.

The art seems to be the only one needed, the only constant need that he has always felt, the only real and instinctive reason for a lifetime. At this in fact he has dedicated his sleepless nights, his hard-working days of hectic and enthusiastic activities. And sometimes, when fatigue and frustration seemed to have gained the upper hand, his creative nature prompted him, stronger than before, to overcome every moment, every pain, every disappointment.

His temperament, his character and his love for sculpture can be felt in every space: the studio, the garden, the house that become, seamless, a gallery, a sort of Wunderkammer where coexist nature, objects of the most varied; a chamber of wonders that over the years has become the equivalent of a full

life made of great passions, rich and lived without limits, without regard to the labels and conventions.

It is precisely for these reasons that those who loves Silvano, loves him as he is, and who observes with curiosity and critically his art, finds strongly in it the unique and singular personality of Silvano artist, but above all Silvano man. The strength of his work is disruptive, as he is, the expression is believable, true, the shape is moved, full of folds and facets, the volumes clear and determined, sometimes slender; everything has a naturalness and a truthfulness that are not only the result of an undeniable and extraordinary technical capabilities, ease of execution and ideational and a vivid imagination and imagination, but also a sensitivity to the object and to nature which is perhaps always been his most faithful muse.

Sincere his love for art and sculpture, great his passion, enthusiasm and emotion in shaping the dirt, to be, under his hands, sublime form; textural forms of ethereal forms.

## About the artist

Silvano Porcinai born in Grassina in 1950, where he lives and works. He graduated at the Art Institute of Florence section Goldsmith. Son of art - father Giulio Porcinai was a sculptor and teacher of sculpture at the same Institute - he began to devote himself to sculpture at the age of eleven years and in 1971 working as a goldsmith. Then he was a professor of sculpture and modeled at different art schools of Tuscany: Florence, Pistoia, Grosseto and Siena.

After his first solo exhibition in Florence at the Donatello Group in 1977, and participation in the first (1975) and second (1977) Rassegna di Scultura dantesca contemporanea and the first (1978) and second (1980) Sculpture Biennale at Stia (Arezzo), a rising career led him to expose: in Venice, Paris, Padua, Florence, Milan, Miami, New York, Geneva, Bologna, London, Impruneta, Greve in



Arezzo, Pisa and to participate in 2012 at Venice Biennale.

He is Vatican member of the Academy of Medal's Art, of the Donatello Group and the Antica compagnia del paiolo, Emeritus of the Academy of Arts of Drawing in Florence, sculpture class. On behalf of the Club Taurino of Milan, of which is a member, he annually makes the *Emocion* Award, which is handed to the winners of Ferie, the big tour taurico. Recently one of his bronze sculpture was placed in Kyoto in Japan.

His works are in numerous collections and public and private spaces.

