

Raphaël Zarka: in the studio

Showing a set of works produced here in SP, the French sculptor tells us about his process



I define my work as documentary sculpture – my sculptures might look abstract, but most of the time they have an object of reference of pre-existing objects. My dream would be to produce the kinds of sculptures Katarzyna Kobro produced, but there's no point – we're not in the '30s anymore, and I'm not a Constructivist. So how could I produce abstract geometric artworks in the year 2013, with all the history of Constructivism, of Concretism here in Brazil, and of Minimalism and all these things? Even if you feel geometry is your main language, you have to ask: what can I add and how can I work with this?

'The solution I found for myself is to become like a collector or an archaeologist – looking for forms,

constructions and structures from the past, to see how they could live in the present.

'There's a very long tradition of representation of geometrical objects in painting. I was looking at a book of Renaissance art and I found a painting by Antonello da Messina, *St. Jerome in His Study* [1475]. It has these curves, these angles, these stairs, and I realised these were the type of works that I would like to do. What I realised I could do as a way of getting closer to Kobro as a sculptor was to lift the piece by Antonello da Messina out of the painting. To build it to the scale of one of Kobro's sculptures, and to install it.

‘After my studies at art school, I realised that in my first works [“The Shape of Rest”, a series of photographs of “found” sculptures], I was basically, in skateboarding vocabulary, looking for spots. One of the specificities of skateboarding is that it doesn’t invent its spaces: it finds them, looking for right angles, where you jump on and slide on the edge of the curb or the bench, or whatever. The other side, more linked to surfing, is looking for curves.

‘For me, that’s really important in the vocabulary of spaces: finding the curve, and the right angle elements. Finding sculpture that I wish I could have done if I was as intelligent as the world. Because with all your habits, your taste and your limitations, you think of producing certain types of objects, but not others. And then you go somewhere, and there’s an object there that is already produced, and which is interesting.

‘Photography is important for me because of its documentary process, and because it can turn objects that were never meant to be artworks, into artworks. I mean, that’s not new, but it is a useful tool for someone who thinks of himself as a sculptor.

‘Industry made these objects to be wave breakers, for example [indicates images of large concrete objects on a beach, from the series ‘The Shape of Rest’]. But the way this is installed, with special light on a particular day, it turns into a beautiful monument. This

[indicating another image] is another a wave breaker, an experimental one. This one was a monorail for an experimental train in France.

‘Years ago, I was in a painter’s studio – a friend of mine was finishing his work, and I started playing with these wedges he had. They’re called keys, painters use them to stretch the canvas. It was like a jigsaw puzzle – first it was very simple, but then I tried to “complexify” it in 3D. And I arrived at this shape. I really like it because of its mystery – it’s something to resolve, and for me, this one is a shape that didn’t previously exist. Or at least, I haven’t found it elsewhere so far. It’s called Form with a Key, or in French, *Forme à Clé* (see image above).

‘For the last year, I’ve been mixing this form with the series of enlarged beams, until I kind of crossed the two into a series of works called “The Prismatic”, and those are the works I’ve made for my show here in Brazil. I’ve been doing the drawings here at [Vila Madalena’s] *Ateliê Fidalga*, during my residency, but I’ve also been working at a workshop in a small town called Louveira, an hour from SP, in the studio of a Brazilian sculptor called Hugo França. When I first met him, we discussed what wood he uses, how rare or common it can be, and what might be suitable for my work. In France, I use oak, but it’s very expensive and hard to get here. I ended up using jatobá [Brazilian cherry, or *Hymenaea courbaril*] – it’s not too rare, like oak, and it’s very strong.’

