

Metamorfosi

The classic is not static. The forms and materials of sculpture that have survived from antiquity, through the Renaissance, Neoclassicism, and through today, have remained potent not because of an unchanging ideal of beauty and value but because they have the potential to change and evolve for new generations. The Metamorphoses of Ovid provided and still provide subjects for authors and artists, narratives of transformation and transubstantiation. An ivory statue turned to flesh, women to trees and flowers, people to stone. The forms and tropes of classical form are not a closed book but a source and a discourse for reuse and reinvention, for metamorphosing.

Sculpting is necessarily an act of transformation. The block is carved away or the bronze is cast. The stones in *Metamorfosi* capture the likewise transformative process of their own histories: congealing, dissolving, eroding, crystallising, stratifying until solidified in unique configurations. These layers and accretions stand as visual metaphors for the accumulation of meanings around antique forms. Each revision and rediscovery adds a new stratum to the old. These do not collapse under the weight of (art) history but find fissures and fractures through which to expand metaphorically and metamorphically through time and space.

Pelletti's sculptures find these fissures. They are not, in his words, portraits of antique and neoclassical models; not facile copies of dead prototypes. Like *Janus Venus*, they look back and forward at once, asking what was vital and beautiful in the ancient and what that offers the present. The closed and perfect stone bodies of antique figures become permeable, fleshly, and open. The crystalline and fragmentary interior structures of Pelletti's marbles evokes the interior of the body: the frayed edges of the antique blending into the even more ancient stone and the frailty of human bodies to find new forms of beauty.

Of the Belvedere Torso, Johann Joachim Winckelmann wrote, 'Just as only the trunk is left over from a magnificent oak tree which has been cut down and stripped of branches and boughs, so sits the image of the hero, abused and mutilated... A first glance will perhaps allow you to see nothing but an unformed stone; but if you are able to penetrate the secrets of art, then you will see a miracle in it.'

In *Metamorfosi*, Pelletti shows is the inchoate, unformed stone and the ideal human body at once, at one. As Michelangelo saw the figure inside the block, here we see inside the block and the figure, the history and the present. The work has transformed and transforms to create a new idea of beauty.

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