Grande Radar

Primary Maker
Arnaldo Pomodoro

Date
1963

Medium
Cast bronze

Dimensions
100 x 74 x 38 in. (254 x 188 x 96.5 cm)

Credit Line
Gift of Debra and Robert N. Mayer from the Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan Collection

Object number
1983.46

Type
Sculpture

During his first trip to the United States in 1959, Arnaldo Pomodoro saw Constantin Brancusi's visionary sculptures for the first time at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He subsequently established a lifelong goal to undermine the smooth curves and surfaces found in Brancusi's work. Pomodoro once said to his friend, poet, and critic Francesco Leonetti, “The perfection of Brancusi was so beautiful and mysterious…at a certain moment I said to myself, really this perfection of the form in our time is inappropriate; it has to be destroyed. For me, the ‘destruction’ element in form was my most important discovery, and the most authentic both in terms of myself and my times.”[1] Indeed, one of the most striking elements of Pomodoro's Grande Radar is the drastic contrast between the even, bronze material of the body and the dense, brown, inscription-like marks in the center of both sides of the sculpture. The intricate nodes, teeth, foils, and threads seemingly carved into the material all contribute to the calculated destruction of Brancusi's flawless surfaces. The original bronze color in these irregular areas is obscured by a matte dark brown patina to suggest a disconnection within the work. The jagged marks look anything but inviting to audiences compared to the surrounding golden frame, and perfection is certainly not the first thought to come to mind. (end of short text) These complex relief textures found in Pomodoro's sculptures have often been interpreted by critics as systems of undecipherable writing,[2] resembling imitations of ancient sacred stones and tablets.[3]

Bronze is one of the most popular materials used in traditional sculpture-making, dating back to 2500 B.C.
Combined with the fact that a number of Pomodoro’s early works take the forms of tall columns reminiscent of the ancient obelisks in Egypt and Rome, it’s reasonable to assume that the artist has an interest in primal culture. Pomodoro, however, has refuted these claims and labels his textures instead as ciphers hinting at futuristic communication.[5] In contrast to the ancient characteristics perceived by many critics, Pomodoro actually pays homage to technological innovations of the mid-20th century. Both the title and the flat, curved shape of Grande Radar, as well as the rest of the radar shape series, which Pomodoro created from 1962 to 1963,[6] originate from radar technology that had rapidly advanced in the 1930s and 1940s. The world saw abundant demand for such progress especially after World War II began in 1939. Radars acted as eyes for both the Allies and the Axis powers in spotting enemy airplanes, ships, and submarines, and their ability to navigate aircrafts, direct gunfire, and recognize hostile advances before attacks were launched was a vital factor in winning the war. Research and development groups for radar technology became prevalent in Pomodoro’s home country after it joined the Allies in 1943, resulting in plenty of exposure for the emerging artist. Radar technology continued to grow and develop post-war, often taking the form of curved parabolic dishes or uniform rectangular scaffolds. Pomodoro’s other works in the radar series explore these two shapes; Radar n. 1 is essentially a curved rectangular prism while the other four radar sculptures all resemble satellite dishes. Grande Radar, which means “large radar” in Italian, is the largest and final sculpture in the series. It most closely resembles Radar n. 1, though the curvature is in the horizontal direction rather than the vertical, as it was in Radar n. 1. Despite his acknowledgement of radar technology, Pomodoro maintains his destructive impulse. On each radar shape, he presents a conflict of bronze body and jagged relief carvings. Like all pieces in this series, Grande Radar looks as if it’s crumbling apart at the intersections of the two distinct areas. We often see technology-inspired forms coming apart in Pomodoro’s other sculptures as well. He explains that he strives to “capture [a] sense of foreboding, of a certain anxiety about the course of events at that time in our history…to suggest that the misuse of our technology could destroy mankind.”[7]

Correspondingly, radars and rapid progress in other modern technology caused World War II to become one of the deadliest wars in history. Pomodoro further addresses the dark side of technology via the size and arrangement of Grande Radar. The sculpture stands at a height of over eight feet, dwarfing any human observer viewing it in close proximity. Once produced, it exists autonomously and can no longer be easily moved or altered by the artist himself. In its current state, Grande Radar wields much more power than its human creator. Additionally, the very sides of the curved radar partially obstruct the viewer’s