

“Casting a Spell” by Stephen Dean

“ Here’s a sculpture!
From now on sculpture should not be inferior to this.”

*Constantin Brancusi, looking at the perfection
of a propeller in 1912 at the Aerial Locomotion Exposition.*

It might be best to consider Aga Ousseinov’s enigmatic works as a personal universe in perpetual formation, where handmade metamorphoses mislead one’s expectations. His works anchor themselves in a vast and thorough observation of various sculptural states: fossils, Pompeian casts, restored frescoes, industrial objects, and toys. Their existence, allows him (once back in the studio) to tamper with various processes of fabrication: modeling, casting, restoration, reduction, enlargement, erosion, and petrification. In this universe casting can be reversed, forms become molds, structures become drawings, and references morph into legends. More than history, it’s the stories of sculptures that are shuffled in his practice.

Volterra, 1890s. A traveling British archeologist finds a metal poker in the hearth of a tavern. This object will turn out to be the most important artifact of Etruscan bronze sculpture. It had been serving its purpose for over 2,200 years.

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Moscow, 1930s. The Russian army unveils the KV-1, a new deadly tank. The design is reminiscent of Kasimir Malevitch's objects.

Florence, 2004. Yesterday's believers and today's tourists keep on working on the sculptures as they walk on the Renaissance tombs at the church of Santa Croce. Curiosity and faith become a means of erasure.

Aga Ousseinov captures all these moments and their subtleties in order to produce works of a peculiar enchantment, by mixing not genres, but gestures. When you visit the studio, he never stops sculpting while he talks, as if words and plaster were one medium, modeling with the same ease that one draws. It all culminates in the same idea, antagonistic to sculpture: lightness. As we follow the relief and swirls of a bathyscaphe, a camera, a sculpture-making machine, and a windmill, among other objects, we see humor and a skillful touch.

Ousseinov's sense of actuality oscillates between images from collective memory and those created by imagination. A personal device, which enables him to gamble with the weight of history; he travels from Baghdad to Babylon via the moon. The method is acquisitive

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and if a form were to represent his process, it would be a nebula. A gathering made of human technologies, techniques, errors, and attempts, which nourish his talent. His albums are filled with repetitive and vivid visionary drawings. Catalogues of inventions waiting to be reincarnated as sculptures. Drawing is the step where discoveries are appropriated and metamorphosed. All the twisting occurs in these drawings; the sculptures then stem from the albums. And then there's the point when all this compiled data gets toppled by a certain pleasure: The will to animate as many things as possible between the clarity of forms and the magic of the dreams, with materials of the starkest simplicity: plaster, wire, and fantasy

Each sculpture of Aga Ousseinov is a part of his studio: not as a location but as an experimenting principle, it could even be his suitcase: “You go anywhere with a little suitcase, filled with wire and with this cutter, get any gypsum and do a sculpture.” Not long ago we met at a street corner. I asked him how he had arrived. He skillfully imitated with the undulation of his right hand and an odd gesture of his forefinger: a Lincoln town car riding over the city's potholes, driven by a man whose short legs barely reached the brake pedal. He immediately carried on with an anecdote about Méliès, fabricating props and making films with the same compelling passion.

When the stories stop, we are left with his inventions