

# De Laurentiis

Petro De Laurentiis is born in 1920 at Roccasalegna (Chieti). He studied in Chieti and in Rome. He lives and works in Rome since 1940. He teaches plastic art at the Faculty of Architecture of Rome since 1946. He exhibited for the first time at Chieti in 1939 in an inter-regional exhibition, in which he won a prize.

He has worked at the realization of a great number of public and private buildings also of considerable dimensions.

He has held five one-man shows (1956, '58, '59, '63, '64) that represent different cycles of his production.

Some works of his are in public galleries and in private collections.

He has won some important concourses of sculpture.

Many famous Italian and foreign critics have written on his works in books, magazines and newspapers.

**Pietro De Laurentiis**, like many modern sculptors, is insistent that his forms are not meant to depict anything in the usual sense. Whether working in colored drawings or in three dimensions, he is really giving shape to the intangibles of his own mind. A Freudian critic might be able to find some sexual significance in the repetition of male and female symbols but the work is not sensual. A philosopher could no doubt work out reflections of our destruction-dominated age in his fragile towers but there is no sense of doom in them.

Such analyses are essentially arid because they leave out of account the very individual personality that has shaped these forms, a personality that displays a powerful sense of plastic and visual values in combination with an often playful sense of the absurd, even the humorous. And, even in their abstraction, his works still maintain contact with their Italian roots.

What does De Laurentiis intend his sculpture to « mean », asks the perennial gallery goer. Well, the question is wrongly worded for the meaning here is the sculpture itself. One of his towering black and white objects « means » that if you stack certain forms in a certain way and color them in a certain way (that neither you nor I would have thought of), then you have created a very individual beauty that is valid on its own terms without having to resemble the butcher's beautiful daughter or Alexander's horse (though both of them may have helped him to create the piece).

A fan of Ray Bradbury might well imagine that this is the way buildings would look on that delicate, cultured Mars the writer created in his own mind for they have the same sensitivity and there is certainly a strong architectural sense in both the drawings and the sculpture. It is not architecture as we know it nor would it work for mundane earthy purposes but as idea, as mental projection it works perfectly.

Again a student of Italian theater could certainly study these highly-colored drawings and think that he had found a modern restatement of some of the values of *commedia dell'arte*, Harlequin struggling to express himself in contemporary terms. The black and white motif, for example, gains a life of its own though it is not at variance with the form it covers. Like Harlequin's costume it seems a disguise for an intention that we do not at first grasp, that we suspect of knavishness or trickery, until we discover that it is merely a device to emphasize the meaning of the whole pattern, form and color.

A critic can (possibly) explain why a work of art has value and meaning and he can show how the artist has consciously or unconsciously succeeded in making a valid statement. But he cannot create the empathy with the work that is necessary before the reasons are added. You do not say that because De Laurentiis knows how to balance space with form in a new juxtaposition you like his work. You admit you like the work and then say because...

The because, the reason for liking De Laurentiis's sculpture and drawing are as many and as varied as his colors and shapes. He knows, for example, how to cleverly manipulate the space around his forms so they are not separate but contiguous. He knows that we are not looking for answers in sculpture these days but questions. He knows how to make angular curves that lead us gently through the entire work. And he has shown the gift of creating works of art that are not only enjoyable now but that will continue to be satisfying as long as we care to look.

KEN WLASCHIN

"IL BILICO", Roma, Ottobre, 1964,  
catalogo della mostra