**Pietro Coletta: Revealing the Invisible**

*Luigi Sansone*

"We can forgive a child who is afraid of the dark.

The real tragedy of life is when a man is afraid of the light."

(Platone)

Pietro Coletta began his artistic journey as a painter in Bari, his hometown. It was only later, after moving to Milan in the late 1960s to attend the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, that his focus shifted to sculpture. However, as we will see, color remained dormant within him for a long time, re-emerging in recent years in his sculptures as patinas, copper and liquid silver brushstrokes, burns, white lead, pigments, and various kinds of metallic threads.

Following travels in Africa and extended stays in India, Coletta became deeply inspired by the cultures he encountered—cultures steeped in traditional wisdom, spirituality, and harmony with nature. These influences merged in his artistic works with his profound understanding of Western modernist art. It is no coincidence that some of his pieces are dedicated to Umberto Boccioni, a leading figure of Futurist painting and sculpture, and Kazimir Malevich, a pioneer of geometric abstraction and the greatest artist of Russian Suprematism.

Coletta, a sculptor known for his essential, minimalist compositions, also deeply influenced by extra-European cultures, has always directed his artistic exploration toward transcendent spaces and atmospheres. His work delves into the origins, nature, and ultimate destinies of humanity. In his studio, removed from external realities and immersed in inner silence, he creates pieces imbued with hidden meanings, seamlessly intertwining his artistic passion with spiritual inquiry.

Coletta’s philosophy aligns perfectly with the thoughts of Kandinsky, who believed that art should express the inner spirituality of the artist through abstract forms and colors.

Coletta himself succinctly articulates his creative vision, shedding light on the emotional depth infused into his works:

“Sculpture is the medium I use to express the deepest and most mysterious part of my being, where intuitions tear through the veil separating me from Totality. In my sculptures, I seek the Soul of matter. Every form of life possesses a Soul; within every form of life, multiple energies are present. Only if I look at the matter in front of me as alive, can I truly connect with its hidden Soul, merge with it, and make the work *alive*.”

The true work of art, in the case of Coletta as well as other artists I have been fortunate enough to meet and engage with closely during my career as an art critic—Salvatore Scarpitta, Angelo Savelli, Salvatore Cuschera, Eliseo Mattiacci, Sandro Martini, Gillo Dorfles—emerges in a mysterious, enigmatic, and, I would even say, mystical way. Once separated from the artist, the work takes on its own personality, becoming an independent entity with its own spiritual breath and tangible life.

The “humble” materials Coletta uses to create his freestanding and wall-mounted sculptures—copper, brass, iron, wood, and stone—have been part of his expressive repertoire for decades. His wall-mounted sculptures, centered around irregular geometric shapes, depart from the classical and conventional frameworks of the rectangle and square. By extending beyond the physical boundaries of these geometric figures, his work breaks free, venturing into space. This is evident in his most recent pieces, *Vibrazioni occulte*, *Vibrazioni dell’inconscio*, and *Compenetrazione*, all created in 2024.

These three sculptures, constructed by assembling two or three wooden panels into irregular polygons, create new and unique spaces. Their diverse forms infuse the compositions with dynamism, challenging the symmetry of classical geometric conventions.

Certain sections of the surfaces in these works are treated with a blowtorch, creating burns that accentuate the dazzling light emerging from the areas left untouched by fire. Additionally, protruding, shiny metallic wires of various materials (copper, brass, steel) intertwine and coil, forming vortices and dynamic spirals that flicker with continuous sparkles and ever-changing vibrations, flowing endlessly before the viewer’s eyes.

The light emanating from these sculptures is not solely physical but also metaphysical—spiritual in its nature, revealing or uncovering a hidden truth that resides in the shadows. Light is both the giver of life and the illuminator of paths. It embodies the synthesis of opposites, being simultaneously corporeal and incorporeal, material and spiritual.

The creative power attributed to light finds a medieval counterpart in the work of philosopher and scientist Roberto Grossatesta, with his so-called Metaphysics of Light. According to this theory, God creates an initial luminous point *(fiat Lux)*, representing corporeality. As light, by its very nature, is self-diffusive, this primordial point expands in all directions, giving rise to the material world.

Light and darkness, fundamental elements in Coletta’s works, are integral aspects of our existence. Darkness, too, is essential, as it allows the light to emerge. What matters is that darkness never gains the upper hand.

Other works by Coletta are composed of layers of lived experience, such as the two pieces titled *Apparizione Ancestrale* (2020). Through these sculptures, the artist invites us to connect with his inner world, filled with images, travel memories, emotions inspired by other cultures, and fantastical realms that transport us to a place beyond the here and now.

In the first sculpture, a wooden panel treated with fire like his earlier works features a protective copper niche at its center—crushed and undulating—housing a wooden figure of an ancestor from the Lobi people, an ethnic group from West Africa deeply connected to ancestral magical-religious rituals.

The second work, more complex in its construction, also incorporates scorched wooden panels. Within a mesh net and a tangle of copper rods forming a theatrical curtain-like veil, a reclining Buddha is partially visible, lying on his right side during his final earthly moments, just before entering Nirvana.

What unites these two pieces is a profound sense of sacredness and mystery. They carry a transcendent message, an invitation to look beyond the material and superficial appearances to reach the Light that pierces through darkness and elevates the spirit.

Contemplating other works by Coletta, such as *Siderale* (1993), *Arco Voltaico* *II* (2011), *Spirale* (2011), and *Saetta* (2012), all included in this exhibition, one realizes that his art is dominated by Light, triumphing over matter—iron, bitumen, and other dense materials.

The artist himself reflects: “I have felt, in response to the ongoing, deeply conflicting events that shroud humanity in a dark and violent turmoil, the necessity to release the hidden part of my unconscious. It’s filled with torment and fears, but above all, with hope—hope for the triumph of Light, a Light that is not a *Mirage*, as I titled one of my recent works.”

The triumph of Light reveals itself upon entering the first chapel on the left of the 15th-century Church of Santa Maria Incoronata in Milan. Here, for several years, Coletta’s *Kairòs* has been installed on the floor—a portal to the beyond connecting the physical world with the spiritual? Or perhaps the sacred tomb of Christ?

This work consists of a large rectangular wooden panel, charred by flame up to a few centimeters from a thick, smaller iron slab placed at its center. Around the entire perimeter of the slab, a luminous, clear area emerges from the natural raw wood, radiating light and energy in all directions.

Through the "Heraclitean fire," Coletta explains, "light is brought forth from the depths of darkness." *Kairòs* exudes a sense of sacredness, emitting vibrations and invisible energies that seem to lift the heavy iron slab, allowing the gaze and mind to transcend, reaching toward cosmic consciousness. As Coletta declares, “Art is the means by which we approach the divine.”

In Coletta's philosophy, the invisible world is far vaster and more real than the visible or material.

The powerful words of Saint Augustine resonate deeply:

“Return to yourself; truth dwells within the inner self.”