

**Towards The Within: Universal Language | Urban Lines**  
**An Interview with Franca Marini by Manuel Palomba-Krol**  
The Poetics of Transculture | curated by Tara Mathison  
September 9 - October 30, 2009 | site-specific installation + video  
September 10 | presentation of Urban Lines video

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**Question 1** | According to the minimalist's contention: anonymity enables for its aesthetic experience between the viewer and the artwork to become immediate. Furthermore, this anonymity allows for the artist to remain incognito, thus leaving no trace of the artist within the artwork itself. All the spectator needs to experience is on the surface of the artwork.

- How do you relate to this type of assertions?
- Was anonymity an important factor in selecting the materials for "Universal Language"?

Anonymity in a work of art is a contradiction in terms. If a piece of art is truly anonymous, maybe we should question whether it is or not a work of art. We cannot refuse to conceive art as the expression of the artist's deepest interior dimensions which I believe to be the very characteristic that makes the viewer able to have his/her own "aesthetical experience", though, I would consider it more as an "emotional" rather than an "aesthetical experience". The artist, through the creation of artistic images, is able to speak to the most profound, non-rational side of the viewer who will respond according to his/her own sensibility (experience). An artwork should be able to provoke, arouse emotions and feelings, which are immediate to others.

However, the artist must be able to represent his/her inner world rather than describing it and thus falling into narrative or autobiography. The artist should not approach artistic creation with the personal need to express himself/herself but should rather be driven merely by the urge of creation. This may be the only kind of approach which could lead to the representation of contents which appertain to everyone due to their universal nature. If human beings are able to relate to each other, regardless of race or culture, there may exist a common, primitive experience which belongs to everyone to which art parlays to.

The dilemma regarding minimalism lays on its legacy with conceptual art, as far as it concerns the lack of the creative process. On the other hand, the idea that subjectivity takes art away from being understood by everyone is unfortunately one of the prejudices that have characterized left wing idiosyncrasy.

I was not thinking about anonymity when I chose the materials for the installation. The selection of the materials was determined within a dialectics with the ideation. During the making of the artwork, I was giving shape to the images which were forming: I deliberately modified or transformed the materials, which were the means through which those images could become concrete realizations, according to the creation's needs. For instance, I created the translucent paper, which I used as the main support of the installation.

Nevertheless, the materials I was using sometimes suggested new ideas or modified the path of the artwork creation. The relationship between materials and ideation as well as between form and content certainly is a crucial component for any artwork.

**Question 2** | You previously noted "I was only trying to give shape to those images which were forming..." It is my understanding that these images which you refer to in your argument are formless, whose substance is determined by pure raw emotion.

- Is this correct? If so, once emotions are introduced to the rational structural process and translated into material reality, do you think that the image's subjectivity embedded in your installation would be lost?

The controversy within your installation lies neither in the plastic realization of the images nor in their own autonomous presence but rather with their "presentness"<sup>1</sup> towards the viewer.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, eds., "Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas" (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp.835

As each shape throughout the installation asserts its own individuality, the need for a unified identity spawns an impulsive whirlwind of movement that bestows upon the installation a theatrical demeanor.

The multiple vantage points in which the spectator perceives your installation, together with the constant revolving motion with its whimsical undertones and virtual cadence, allude to a constant progression of meaning that antagonizes any possibility for homogeneity among the different shapes of your installation. The larger the shapes, the greater the need for isolation between the viewer and the artwork. Not only does it make its presence felt, but it might also make the viewer self-conscious of his/her own existence, thus confining the artwork from the viewer. Therefore, rather than achieving an intimate communion, it serves to separate the artwork and the spectator.

- Is there a coherent harmony in terms of the installation's ideation and its physical representation?

I do not think that the "making" of an artwork is rational. The making is part of a process where the artist's ability in using tools, materials, etc., is always accompanied; it always goes along with imagination. The artist constantly discovers something new and unexpected during the making of an art piece. Actually, I believe that a work of art to be such needs to testify a "discovery" which, in order to be achieved requires the artist to be able to "lose" himself/herself. This opposes conceptual art, which denies any sort of creative process so that it does not exist as a "plus" between the artist's initial ideas and the final piece of art.

The fact that, as you stated, my installation makes its presence felt; it does not appear to me to be a negative factor. An art installation has to have a real presence in space and to enhance it with meanings. I do not believe that should prevent the viewer from relating to it. How it will affect the viewer shall depend on the viewer's own sensibility. Moreover, the fact that an installation modifies the space inhabited by the viewer should be a force point, rather than a deterrent in the creation of a relationship between the artwork and the viewer. Furthermore, in this specific installation we may like to consider the viewer's movement as well. The viewer is "invited" by the configuration of the installation itself to move around it without any predetermination of fixed course.

**Question 3** | You allude to the fact that "art is a work in progress" and that the process of creating an artwork is intrinsically related to the non-conscious mind.

- Do you deny chance as part of this process? How do you handle casualties in your work?

I believe that we should not confuse what is determined by the non-conscious mind with casualties. Casualties may happen, though in most cases they are determined—by the creative process. When they are merely accidents due, for instance, by technical problems, etc., it is up to the artist to make the decision whether to accept them or not.

Often casualties are instead "surprises". They are determined, rather than by chance, by the fact that the artist in the making of the artwork is in touch with the inner part of himself/ herself which are not undermined by the rational mind. The introduction of "casualty" in the process of art making can be dated back to Dadaism. The decontextualization of objects chosen randomly in order to make an artwork was an expedient to compensate for the artist's impotence to eliminate rationality from the creative process. This is a practice which persists to these days.

**Question 4** | According to Robert Morgan's *The Transformation of Desire: A New Installation by Franca Marini* essay, your work "was constructed on the basis of a carefully calculated inspiration". To my understanding that suggests a sort of impasse from an unconscious emotional state towards the rational constraints of consciousness. Mr. Morgan adds: "the mental effort contained within Marini's work - - which is as much emotional as it is conceptual - - is what sustains our memory of Universal Language as a holistic intentional object".

- Do the words "calculated inspiration," "conceptual," "temporal," and "intentional holistic object," undermine what should have been for the viewer an immediate aesthetical experience?

- What would you describe as the objecthood of your installation? Why did you choose *Universal Language* as the title of your installation?

Mr. Morgan may instead refer to my attempt of creating a piece of art which precisely and as exactly as possible, could represent an inner image; "carefully calculated" could not strictly refer to neither rationality nor consciousness. In the process of art - making a role is certainly played by the consciousness as well, which, though, has to be at the service of the non-consciousness. I agree with Robert Morgan when he says that in the realization of *Universal Language* there is also a conceptual mental effort as there is certainly the intention to represent ideas and deep thoughts.

I cannot agree with his assertion if with “conceptual” he refers to that mental attitude which in fact denies the creative process. Universal Language can be defined as a "holistic intentional object" in the sense that, in its creation, there is intentionality even if it is not strictly conscious. I refuse the concept of art as free expression tout court. I do not think that intentionality could necessarily undermine the viewer's "immediate aesthetic experience". It all depends on the nature of such intentionality.

Regarding the installation's objecthood, I believe that, besides the initial intentions and ideas I started working with, there could be a much deeper content which, in order to be revealed, may require a deep analysis and a sort of detachment from the whole experience which I have not realized yet.

The title *Universal Language* alludes to the capacity of images to be universally understood as opposed to language, especially to written languages, which specifically refers to a distinctive country and culture. Thus, the word language in the title refers to the “language of images”.

I solved the relationship between writing and image, which is what I intended to develop since my initial proposal, visually rather than conceptually. The five shapes which surround the entire circle of the gallery are run through interplay of twines and ropes which is a play of lines that is the means used worldwide to create languages. Therefore, the play of lines could represent writing, a universal language which marks a huge parchment of the world.

**Question 5** | If art is a process in which consciousness is at the behest of the mind's unconscious hiatus, could we then assume that the rationality behind *Universal Language*'s physical realization attests merely to its plastic existence?

- As the artwork evolves throughout its physical development from its initial inception, do you think that the artist should avoid visualizing the "inner image" as an unmitigated mental fixation? Otherwise, the artwork itself would negate the process through which it was conceived. Thus, rendering the artwork nothing short of an episode of bittersweet mental masturbation whose primary value relates solely to the artist's intent for self - gratification. Do you agree?
- How do you prevent from falling into the entanglements of Conceptual Art?

Besides attesting the artwork's plastic existence, the consciousness makes the artwork's physical existence possible. That is what distinguishes artistic images from dreams, the latter created during the sleep status where consciousness is absent. As for inner image, I refer neither to the initial ideas and intentions with which the artist may approach the art - making, nor to the “artist's initial inception”. An inner image is instead the final result of the artistic process in which the non-consciousness has to be present and play a fundamental role.

I prevent getting caught into conceptualism by looking for and accepting a constant transformation of the work without a preconceived image of the end result of such progression.

**Question 6** | *Universal Language*'s tendency for a dialectical relationship among the installation, the viewer and the surrounding architecture becomes apparent as it strives towards a social apotheosis reminiscent of the ideals set forth by earlier artists such as Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Constructivists and also of the elementary forms favored by Kazimir Malevich and the Suprematists.

Not only does the use of ephemeral materials in your installation emphasize that *Universal Language* inhabits the same temporal space as the viewer but it may also allude to certain anti-form idiosyncrasies found in Eva Hesse's Post- Minimalist works.

- What aspect of *Universal Language* would you relate (if any) with these artists?

Both Russian Constructivism and Suprematism, even if they started off from opposite premises, they reached similar positions in regards to the meaning and content of art. Both art movements denied what is the fundamental meaning of art, which is the representation of non-conscious images which, even if "inner", should be generated through the contact experience with others. Malevich, taking to the extremes his concept of "pure plastic sensibility", reached absolute abstraction, which indeed denied any content to art. His search for a universal art led to the draining of any human content. Tatlin reached similar results through the exaltation of technology and the reduction of art to applied arts.

In spite of the refusal of a descriptive, consolatory form of art, they did not succeed in the creation of an art form that could have an effective power of transformation.

The usage of ephemeral and hand - crafted materials could relate *Universal Language* to Eva Hesse's work. Her references to the human body certainly imply a form of art imbued with contents, which distance her research from Minimalism, even though seriality remains the main structural element of her work. Repetition, not only refers to preconceived ideas, but it is the antithesis of a process of transformation as well.

**Question 7** | It appears that both *Universal Language* and *Urban Lines* share a common ground in their thematic content as well as in regards to the dynamics involved in visual experience. Both seem to reciprocate each other in a delicate synergy of language and images whose primary assertion conveys the emotional inducement of universality.

- How would you describe the subtle progression from *Urban Lines* to *Universal Language*?
- Why are you so preoccupied with the journey towards universality?

*Universal Language* is a site-specific installation and so its construction was influenced and inspired by the physical space it was created for. The creation of the *Urban Lines* video instead, was totally free from any similar concern as it obviously could be viewed in any screening room. The different mediums alone determine a difference between these two creations and very likely also in their content. *Urban Lines* sequences editing with a distinctive start, development, and end, creates a very complex pure visual construction with a defined form enriched by a sonorous composition. In *Universal Language*, the contents representation and the concern for the space it would inhabit determine the specific construction of the work itself. In one word, I would define *Universal Language* as more "conceptual" than *Urban Lines*.

What could represent a progression from *Urban Lines* to *Universal Language* is the involvement of the physical space as a crucial element in the ideation of the artwork. However, it is interesting to think that *Universal Language* will cease to exist once it is removed from the place it was born for, just as video art images are only perceivable when projected onto a screen. Such a characteristic could subtly relate site-specific works with video art. My journey into universality may be my own personal search into the essence of human nature, my attempt to comprehend what makes communication possible worldwide.

**Question 8** | The musical treatment palpable throughout *Urban Lines* seems to act more as a exhilarating soundscape in lieu of a musical narrative of cinematographic appeal. Even though the music was adapted from the images, it would be inadequate to perceive both the music and the images as irrevocably synchronized in unyielding complicity. The freedom offered by the incessant visual dynamism revealed in *Urban Lines*, allows for the music to divest itself of any tonal constraints or tonic epicenter. Thus, urging the listener/viewer to actively pursue an experience where perception and emotions can coincide in a disintegrated virtual reality.

- When selecting the music, did you consider the possibility that this type of atonal/electronic music might exasperate the viewer's perception of your video?
- Moreover, was your initial intention to create a vociferous musical articulation for this artwork? Could this be misleading for the viewer?
- Why would you consider the music in *Urban Lines* to be a proper audible representation of the visual images?

The main characteristic of this kind of music is its non-narrative quality, though, as it divests itself from musical deconstruction, it indeed has a form. The video's construction is based on such similar premises as well. Moreover, I was seeking a kind of music, which would not merely describe the dynamics of the sequences but could instead become a means of emotional power with a life force of its own. Certainly, the result is a sonorous composition, which does not work as musical backing but rather becomes a powerful presence. It requires the viewer's active involvement and his/her capacity to engage in a status of resonance with the dynamics created by the dialectics between music and images in movement.