

# HE WAS AN ANARCHIST

Martina Simeti

The space of life was not different from the space of work. No real boundaries between the two. Just as for the days of the week. Sundays were of different texture because of football matches or the Formula 1 race on TV, but otherwise the days of the week looked the same at our place. Outside a different rhythm reigned. Milan was empty and melancholic because many (the wealthy) people would leave the city on Fridays to rest in their secondary homes on the Alpine lakes. That was one of the many things that started making a child feel different, in addition to not being baptised (in Italy). No *dragées*, “You will have a present when you get your period” mother would say.

Games would alternate with work. Ping-pong every day, and poker at night, with whiskey when my father’s friends show up. I grew up playing ping-pong. Never learned poker. Soundtrack: David Bowie, Eric Clapton, Chuck Berry. When I was 18, Turi had to leave the studio in Viale Bligny, where my mother and I lived in a separate apartment. The end of an era in my lifetime.

The new studio had a pool table, but I never bothered to learn to play it. It had a bedroom for me which I never used. I was 19 and I needed to leave home, to move way, just the way he had done before me.

Turi was born in Alcamo, a true periphery. Strongly inspired to become an artist, he started hunting for himself. After traveling around Europe he landed in Rome. It made sense in the 1950s. Then he moved to Milan in the 1960s, and it made even more sense, considering the type of quest he was pursuing.

Paintings in the back of a car and on the road to Germany and Switzerland to look for opportunities. Hanging with the same folk: him, Castellani, Bonalumi... but with the latter the friendship broke when Turi was petting in the back of a car with a blonde.

He was a self-made man. Strategising was not his thing. Very far from the current mood of the art world. “Times were different back then.” So true. People disagreed, they argued. Loud voices and abundant cigarette’s smoke. I would go in the crowded kitchen where people would debate (my mom had a noisy laughter) and say “Shhhh please... I have to go to school tomorrow!”

Turi’s career can provide many hints when thinking about the “system” (could it be labelled like that, back then?). Or simply the relationship between actors such artists and gallerists. Given his stubbornness I cannot say to which extent he would have welcomed advice but since I have opened my art gallery I think a lot of some visionary projects that he kept inside a drawer and never realised. He was an anarchist, says my partner Abdourahman Waberi, they are similar in that respect. Not caring for supposed and constructed rules, not wanting to play games. Strong characters in different ways. And he was such a strong character: how would somebody work within the constraints of such an obsessive revisitation of the oval shape and motif otherwise?

*Turi Simeti with his wife Carla Ortelli, their daughter Martina and dog named Safi.*



*The Pyramid of Silence* is such an example. It was conceived for a show called *Il Nuovo Paesaggio: Interventi plastici e sonori nel paesaggio urbano e naturale* within the 14th Triennale di Milano. Turi was invited with several other Italian artists to realise a sculpture in the urban and natural landscape of different Italian locations. It was 1968. The project never took place because of budgetary cuts, and the idea of a pyramid was left behind... A pyramid 4 meters high and each base side 4 meters large made of a metallic mesh with a very thick woof, through which only a feeble light would filter. A small opening arch-shaped allowing access to the inside (having to lean down to access like in a church); one person at a time. The word “silence” engraved on the floor. Not a monument to silence, but a space where a person isolated from the surrounding would concentrate on the possibility of a complete absence of sound. “At the base of this project there’s not a purpose, but the attempt to urge a consciousness raising, the problem in fact is to imagine a world in which there’s space for silence, too” Turi wrote.

What actually took place was a performative project that had to do with a silent engine. In 1971, La Bertesca gallery invited him to do a show in Genoa. When the gallerist proposed something different, Turi considered the idea of the glider, which he had imagined as another possibility for the 1968 Triennale. “I began to look for one. I found and bought one that had ‘crashed’ and was partially damaged. It was old and with the wings it was one piece, so to move it we had to cut off the wings to then put them back on again. To put it in order I was able to get the loan of a studio, given that I lived on the fourth floor and couldn’t take it up there. I found a small warehouse where I could work and after having repaired and painted it blue, I then exhibited the glider in the gallery for a couple of days,” from the 2nd to the 4th of March 1971. On the 5th of March, in the presence of Francesco Masnata, the founder of La Bertesca gallery, bystanders and photographers, Simeti started to destroy the glider reducing it to pieces with a large and heavy baseball bat.

A lot has been written on this destructive act, its “eternal tension between Eros and the End”, according to Lea Vergine. Some have seen continuity, and some other discontinuity, with Simeti’s extroflexed canvases. These projects are pivotal to gather a full perspective on Turi’s work. Francesco Masnata provided a space and a time for Turi to measure himself and play with his vision and his quest on silence.

And this is precisely what gallerists should do.



*“Mom & Dad”, a set of six glasses by artistic duo Ducati Monroe — Andrea Sala and Diego Perrone.  
Below; white canvas by Turi Simeti and Maralunga armchair by Vico Magistretti.*



## LO STUDIO CASA DI TURI SIMETI Via Pier Lombardo 23, Milano







*Bronze sculpture "Omaggio all'ovale"  
and a collage of wood on canvas  
from 1963 by Turi Simeti.  
Right; sweetener dispensers by  
Essila Burello Paraiso.*







*Metal sculpture by Andrea Sala.  
Below; wooden sculpture by Rino Crivelli.*



*Small portable sculptures by Turi Simeti.*



*Blue-painted metal cans filled with the remainings of the glider destroyed  
by Turi Simeti in 1971.*







*Sculpture sink by Sicilian sculptor Angelo Barone. Right; a wooden dish from Casamance, a chair from Mali and a briefcase containing a bottle of Maggi seasoning "I Know No Weekend (Ich kenne kein Weekend)" from Weekend 1971–72 by Joseph Beuys. Below; work by Essila Burello Paraiso.*

