

Oliver (Pennsylvania 1941- ) is a singular observer of the relationships that exist, occult for many of us, between the form, the material, and the spirit.

He himself makes these relationships visible in this exhibition, to take us across the bridge between forms etched for paper to forms sculpted in steel. The flatness of the paper does not impede our ability to give credence to the possibility of volume, which is inherent as an idea and is in the flesh as the steel. The final form is, in both instances, the result of a permanent symbiosis in the work of *Oliver*, which lets us participate in a beautiful dialogue as a discourse between spatial dimensions.

The exhibition *bridge between the paper and the steel* is based on a didactic proposal that Oliver developed some years ago in a course of Plastic and Visual Education that I gave (2005) at the primary school La Candelaria of Benalgabón. At that time Oliver was making his early steps in steel sculpture. In a brilliant discourse with slides projected as support material, he discussed the implications of his graphic work and its design as being the origins of the themes and forms extended to steel, or in other words, how his etchings became transformed into sculptures.

His essential motif was then (which still persists today) the confrontation --- as a formalist collision --- between the obscure mass, robust and angular of a bull, against the sensual curved shapes, almost transparent of a woman, indeed not far from the Minotaur, a theme of many prints by Picasso (one may see the Suite Vollard). This confrontation is to be understood as a relationship between two antagonistic beings, always in the process of advancing by experienced and synthesized drawing in which, at times, the bull is only an angle and the woman a curve. All of which Oliver accomplished by establishing between both, the beast and femininity, not a bloody and mythic combat, but instead through the continuous exercise of drawing, as a subtle contact (necessarily a bond) of understanding and mutual penetration. All as an eroticism of form.

Following a precise script, from the projects and compositions taking form in the prints, Oliver elaborated a determined number of elements that materialized in these forms, : half circles, rectangles, parallels, bands, angles and other linear landscapes. These drawings, usually layouts with a rigorous geometry, like patterns of an exquisite tailor, are reminiscent of those designs found in schools of engineering or architectural design, except that these do not integrate into the idea of a suit (although they can elegantly dress empty space) nor the notion of a mannequin, but instead express a Being in motion. The patterns go to the metal shop where, having been adjusted by draftsmanship, they are cut with precision, one by one, into sheets of steel to be later assembled, welded, and ground in the studio.

Sculpture, like printmaking, is a *discipline child* of draftsmanship. Oliver is an artist who draws and draws. His etchings are rehearsed again and again on hundreds of little scraps of paper that form together like clouds where one dies and another lives. But all are observed with an intense curiosity, almost an etymology, to discover within them a distinct trace, a vital sign that permits the one to exist and to overcome the death of many others. The drawings that ultimately survive do it with such intensity that they have lived various lives, in the miracle of metaphors-is or transfiguration, from the sketch to the drawing and then to the metal plate, which in turn passes the image to paper through the process of etching and printing, and from that image to become metal once again, reborn in steel. In these first sculptures (the first --- "courtship" --- from 1999) with profound honesty and modesty, Oliver shows the creative process as it is, the interplay and possibilities of images on paper to resolve volumetric problems that are presented with the same shapes

in three dimensions, once having materialized and amplified the echo of his drawing in the spatial resonance of steel.

Technically, drawing an etching is made by an incision, something added to or taken away from a support, which is to say, it is in relief. Although that incision can be considered to be apparently imperceptible, in practice it holds a tiny amount of ink, in effect, the three dimensions exist when making an etching. For Oliver, the process to change from prints to sculpture began when he observed that, in addition to the physical work of “getting in” to erode or mark the metal plate, his drawn shapes were expressing a vocation to be sculpted. The problems presented in drawing, in the print, do not always have a solution in two dimensions. In some etchings, a volumetric intention was identified in the planar elements, needing not only ink and texture but also the light and shade of a dynamic chiaroscuro. The dynamics were provoked by the torque of bands or the undulation of stripes on the ground. Certain of these elements required changes in the dominate position of the drawing : within or beyond, behind or in front, hidden or visible, all as one event upon the surface of paper, now in question by the visual trap of spatial movement.

What is to be done with this impulse? How to incorporate this spontaneous dialogue within the body of one’s own work? The artist becomes aware of what is happening, often beyond the limits of one’s own control, it is accepted with determination to provide order and to give a direction to the flow of one’s acts. For Oliver, art is thought in action, and drawing is the calligraphy of this mental process. In art, it is not always the mind that tells the hand but it can be the hand at work informing the mind.

Nonetheless, a strategy is necessary to accomplish such an adaption : from planar to volumetric, from paper to steel, from brush to chisel, Oliver imposes the challenge to dominate, or at the least, to learn — which is no small thing — the procedures, the skill with tools and the concepts, to elevate and control this insurrection in his own domains for the highest level of results.

The experience and wisdom of this great artist, whose seasoned alliance between a belief in the work and confidence in intuition, illustrates a passage that is arduous and complex. As if the way and the task had always been known, with all his creative energy, Oliver profoundly trusts the formal relationships of his aesthetic resources, once guided by the planar experience of the print to then sculpt in steel, consolidating one imagery that becomes revealed to us as fully in one medium as in the other, a work that explores human relationships in a poetic way, inheriting from great contemporary sculptors — above all Eduardo Chillida — constructing and elevating the bridges, passage ways, and catwalks with an awareness that brings us to the place where art dwells.