

Daphne, 1961

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The two-meter-high *Daphne* statue from the year 1961 represents a high point in the sculptural work of Emil Cimiotti. Not just because it is one of the larger pieces in the artist's oeuvre, but also and above all because it manifests, in an especially exemplary way, Cimiotti's sculptural production. The work was commissioned by the Cologne patron and collector Gustav Stein, who also specified the theme from Greek mythology. The Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (Book 1, 452-567) relates the story of the nymph, Daphne. Struck by Cupid's golden arrow, the sun god Apollo burned with a violent love for Daphne. But she, struck by an arrow with the opposite effect, repels Apollo's courtship. In flight from the lovesick Apollo, Daphne begs her father, the River God Peneios: "Help me, my father. [...] Change the body that is too pleasing." Whereupon torpor seizes her limbs and she is transformed into a laurel tree (Greek *dáphn* = laurel, bay leaf). The myth has been repeatedly taken up and portrayed in painting as in sculpture. Famous is Gian Lorenzo Ber-

nini's marble group from 1622-1624, *Apollo and Daphne*, in the Villa Borghese in Rome. In the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, many artists, among them Renée Sintenis, Julio González, Henri Laurens, Hans Arp, Gerhard Marcks, Gerson Fehrenbach, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Markus Lüpertz, took the Daphne story as their subject.¹

The Daphne myth stands for the theme of metamorphosis, which is tailor-made for Emil Cimiotti, since his art is always about the elementary natural processes of becoming and fading away, about permanent change and transformation, about the transitory and the fleeting. Thus in 1960 Albert Schulze Vellinghausen made the fitting observation that Cimiotti's works inspired "the suggestive illusion that they were scooped out of boundless movement."² And Eduard Trier stated the following year that "the metamorphoses that change from human to vegetative forms" was Cimiotti's leitmotif, which assumes the charge of a "transitory sculpture."³

Cimiotti was influenced by Willi Baumeister, whose encouragement at the Stuttgart Academy prompted him to find his way to abstraction. Baumeister's 1947 book—*Das Unbekannte in der Kunst/The Unknown in Art*, which he wrote during World War II—had the impact of a revelation for Cimiotti and the young generation of artists. Under the impression of Goethe's theory of metamorphosis, Baumeister's thinking evolved to find that the principle of metamorphosis was the basis for the life processes of nature as well as for all artistic-depictive enterprises. The book ends with the words: "Art as a simile for flowing metamorphosis becomes art = nature's manifest form."⁴

The commission by Gustav Stein was a challenge and a welcome opportunity for Emil Cimiotti to accomplish a life-size work for the first time. He had up to then fabricated around fifty sculptures using the lost-wax method, a technique that the artist has used since 1955 and still uses today. The artist worked intensely on the project for months, testified to by three bronze studies.⁵ In the end, however, he pursued a completely different approach from the models in order to implement the large figure. The issue to him was certainly not at all to illustrate the myth. *Daphne* was shown in 1970 at the World's Fair in Osaka and in 1998 acquired by the sculpture collection of Dresden's State Art Collection.⁶

Above a conically tapered foot, the corpus of the statue rises up, slightly bent to one side; its irregular contour approaches that of an ovoid. From the mighty form jut large globules with openings. The perforations in the malleable skin allow in- and through-sights; you can actually in places see through the hollow form. Smaller, partly perforated semi-forms like eyelets, which recall leaves or fingers, detach themselves from the modeled shell and reach out in all directions. The bronze skin is rough and cracked, generating a rich play of light and shadow along the surface. The sculpture's bio-amorphous vocabulary opens up a field of associations whose breadth mirrors the complexity and the ambiguity of the statue. We could imagine something terrestrial just as much as cumulus clouds, volcanic rock just as much as a tree. It almost seems as if the figure pulsates, as if it had been gaseously billowed out from inside, as if it changes its form continually in the wind. Stylistically the sculpture falls in line with Cimiotti's Informel early work.⁷ The artist, as Christa Lichtenstern has shown, "does not proceed from the story of the myth, but from the formal impulses of his work in which the *Daphne* theme, as he understood it, was latent in many bronzes. [...] He has *Daphne* rise up in a reference field of earth and tree associations. [...] Cimiotti thus arrived at a *Daphne* concept that, corresponding to his general transitory vocabulary of forms, sets the theme of metamorphosis as a processual event, expressed according to his own means of portrayal".⁸

1 Cf. Gerhard-Marcks-Stiftung Bremen (ed.), *Daphne. Mythos und Metamorphose*, exh. cat. Bremen 2009/10, Bremen 2009. Markus Lüpertz — Durs Grünbein, *Daphne — Metamorphose einer Figur*, exh. cat. Bad Homburg v. d. Höhe/Bedburg-Hau 2005/06, Cologne, 2005.

2 Albert Schulze Vellinghausen, "Cimiottis Bronzen" in: *Blätter und Bilder*, No. 8, May-June 1960, p. 37.

3 Eduard Trier, "Emil Cimiotti" in: *Junge Künstler 61/62. 5 Monographien deutscher Künstler der Gegenwart*, Cologne 1961, pp. 59-76, here p. 62 and p. 64.

4 Willi Baumeister, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst*, Stuttgart 1947, p. 175. Cf. on the reception history of Goethe's metamorphosis theory Christa Lichtenstern: *Metamorphose in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 2: *Metamorphose. Vom Mythos zum Prozeßdenken. Ovid-Rezeption — Surrealistische Ästhetik — Verwandlungsthematik der Nachkriegskunst*, Weinheim 1992.

5 Cf. Dieter Brusberg (ed.), *Emil Cimiotti. Werkverzeichnis der Plastiken 1955 bis 1977*, Hannover 1978 (*Brusberg Dokumente* 10), p. 64, No. 51-53 (»Studie zur *Daphne* I-III«) and p. 65, No. 54 (»*Daphne*«).

6 Cf. Heiner Protzmann, "Metamorphische Plastik — die 'Daphne' von Emil Cimiotti (1961)" in: *Dresdener Kunstblätter* 42, 1998, No. 5, pp. 172-175. Idem., "Skulpturensammlung" in: *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden* 27, 1998/99, pp. 173-177, here p. 173f.

7 For a survey of Cimiotti's works see Christoph Zuschlag, "Emil Cimiotti — Das plastische und zeichnerische Werk" in: Theo Bergenthal/Joachim Stracke (ed.), *Emil Cimiotti*, Heidelberg 2005, pp. 7-17.

8 Christa Lichtenstern, *Ossip Zadkine (1890-1967). Der Bildhauer und seine Ikonographie*, Berlin 1980 (*Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst*; 8), p. 182.