



Marc Didou



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Silvia Casini

The Naughton Gallery at Queen's 2007

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Published on the occasion of an exhibition at The Naughton Gallery at Queen's, Belfast
19 October - 1 December 2007

Photography	Alain Le Nouail
Design	Darragh Neely (Consultants in Design)
Reproduction	CDS
Print	CDS

ISBN 9780853899235

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Front Cover *Teschio-Alfabeto (2007)*



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Acknowledgments

I owe a lot to numerous people and friends for encouragement with this exhibition but, in particular, I would like to thank Shan McAnena, Curator of the Naughton Gallery at Queen's, for her professional and enthusiastic support.

Giovanni Battista Martini gave me his precious advice throughout this year.

I wish to thank Des O'Rawe for his insightful lectures on cinema and visual arts.

I am also grateful to all administrative and academic staff in Film and Visual Studies Department at Queen's University, Belfast.

Finally, thanks to Marc, Judith and Dora who made me feel at home in Brittany with their warmth and smiles.

Silvia Casini, curator of the exhibition.

Magnetic Attractions

Sculpture, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Cinema.

Un objet est mort quand le regard vivant qui se posait sur lui a disparu.¹

I

Around the coastline of Brittany, boats are constantly swept by the alternation between high and low tides. One moment you see boats floating proudly in the water - boats made for sailing, fishing, confronting the sea - but soon after, they appear as relics left inclined on the sand, free of their function as boats, like the farmer's shoes in van Gogh's painting *Pair of Shoes* (1885). This perceptual shift is not gradual, but happens as an unexpected revelation. There is a point at which the viewer oscillates between two perceptions, two states of things: boats in the sea or boats on the shore, in the no-man's land, experiencing liminality. The boats do not stand still; they move, too, along with the viewer's perception. The illusion of movement is real: like cinema, it has the reality of illusions.

Cinema is not confined to the darkened theatre, nor to the film projected on a big screen at the end of the room, nor to the celluloid on which reality is impressed, nor to a story to be told: 'If we eliminate projection, the camera, the film and even the viewer, what remains is light and length. Cinema without any technical device is deconstructed to its basic elements which do not constitute, however, its essence' (Michaud, 2006, p. 27). Film does not fulfill all of cinema's potentialities, because

it is only one of the possible applications of cinema. Similarly, sculpture is not only a process of manipulation, the modelling and working of materials to transform them into objects placed within a three-dimensional space; it is not a close work, but the organisation of temporal processes in the space. To install screens, projectors or moving elements with a sculpture does not mean that a sculpture is cinematic, any more than a film portraying sculptures is a sculptural film.

In the sculptures of the Breton artist Marc Didou, reflected images coexist with marble, bronze, and wood. Material and immaterial are intertwined, one with the other. In this exhibition, sculpture shows its lines of attraction with Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and cinema – even though neither MRI nor cinema are visible as technical apparatuses. These lines of attraction are suspension, capture, release, physical impression, and energy.² MRI lives an *afterlife* which remains unknown within the scientific laboratory where images are read and used for diagnostic and research purposes. MRI is set free from its original 'archive' - the scientific laboratory - and made accessible to the public not in the form of images to be read but as sculptures to engage with.

II

Two specular bronze heads form the sculpture *Eco/Echo* placed in the semicircular space outside the main entrance to Queen's University Belfast. *Eco* has Galileo behind it, a marble statue of the man of science, thoughtful, his gaze looking downward. The universes of science and art can interact with one another because they are at a distance from one another. The statue of Galileo asks us to look down to see the components of

the earth, to its mechanisms. *Eco* looks ahead, moving towards the outside by means of its cry. For viewers who approach them without being able to determine which is the original and which is the reflection, one head seems to be the reflection of the other. As soon as viewers move closer to *Eco*, its material quality gains predominance to let the form and the contours dissolve slowly. Viewers no longer see two specular heads, only bronze dissolving layers and an open mouth. The materiality of *Eco* is experienced through a haptic vision: that is, a gaze closer to the sense of touch, a vision that lingers on the object seen. Forms of haptic vision are not born with the digital age nor do they imply any link with virtual reality or prosthetic devices to enhance vision. Optic and haptic visions are usually employed in our everyday life: optic vision is required in order to make sense of the position of the seen object within the environment and in relation to us. By contrast, haptic vision is similar to an attentive close-up which pauses on the object, letting it merge with our vision.³

Eco translates the data produced by Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) into a corporeal, tangible reality. Introduced to clinical practice in the 1980s, MRI stems from the investigation of the property of both the protons and neutrons inside the atomic nuclei to move with a 'spin' or angular momentum and become magnetic.⁴ It is an electromagnetic technique that realigns hydrogen nuclei in the body. It exploits the property of these atoms to move when they are inserted within a bigger magnetic field and to align themselves according to a specific frequency which depends on that field. When atoms are stimulated by a radio frequency impulse they are energised. Once the impulse ends the vector Magni rotates perpendicularly to the wave

producing a resonance. The magnetic field causes these atoms to emit an electric current which is translated into numbers and then into an image of the scanned area by a computer. MRI and its functional version fMRI are specially used for researching the structure and cognitive functions of the brain, respectively.

MRI belongs to a broader history of image-generating techniques that range from the camera obscura, through to photography, chronophotography, radiography and computer tomography (CT), located at the interface of science and art. These techniques initially dealt with the representation of the outside world, then with the investigation of the body in movement, and ultimately with the exploration of the body and brain's interior. The greatest majority of artists who work with MRI are interested in it due to the overlapping discourses of MRI and issues such as the perception of the human body, surveillance, identity and power. By contrast, Marc Didou is not interested in interrogating any of the issues mentioned above. None of Didou's sculptures are born out of a working collaboration with scientists, nor out of one of the so-called 'artist in residence' or 'artist in the lab' projects. Didou does not use MRI as a penetrating device which makes the body transparent to our gaze, rather, he tests the aesthetic possibilities of MRI. Similar to Marey's chronophotography, MRI represents the fulfilment of one of the potentialities of the image that cinema had begun to explore at the beginning of its history and soon left adrift, a potentiality for what the image was and might again become; images set free from the obligation to represent, narrate and portray.

Since the 1980s, Didou's research has focused on sculpture rather than on painting - the canvas is never

white nor empty as it is loaded with cliché that the hand of the artist struggles to avoid - and, in particular, on the manual and industrial welding and processing of iron as his former large-scale installations clearly demonstrate. Iron still functions as the common thread in his art but not merely as a material - marble and wood are used too - but as the guiding principle which regulates the experience of the sculpture by the viewer: the heart of MRI is a powerful magnet which is transformed into lines of attraction that attract and simultaneously repel the onlooker. In *Eco* the abstract quality of the images produced by MRI gains a physicality which is suddenly brought into question by the viewer's movements. The materiality collapses to reveal its 'precarious' status and to become again a mere succession of layers. It seems as if these ghostlike images are the very composition of our bodies: an infinite number of leaves like layers of skin laid one on top of the other. The succession of layers is transferred to *Eco*, creating a rhythm which, like an echo, reminds us of the cadence of the MRI scanning itself.

The first encounter with MRI happens through sound and not through images; these are only later reconstructed by technicians and radiologists. The 'voice' of MRI consists of loud noises and intense vibrations produced by forces resulting from rapidly switched magnetic gradients interacting with the main magnetic field, in turn causing minute expansions and contractions of the coil itself. The result is a sonorous vision. *Eco*'s voice becomes audible thanks to the movement of the bronze layers which is enacted by the body of the viewer. *Eco* is a face whose physiognomy is made up by imperceptible movements which become sounds, rather than by the organs like the mouth, the ears, the nose, the eyes: 'I am an acoustic being like crystal, metal and many other substances'

(Merleau-Ponty, 1979). A face is only apparently still and immobile. The birth of expression happens in between the folds of facial movements: flesh becomes sonorous. From the cavity of the mouth an echo resonates: the bronze flesh becomes expression, an embodied voice. Like all cavities *Eco*'s mouth starts a play of resonance with the fullness of the bronze layers.

III

The blackened gallery unfolds like a film strip marked by three illuminated poses: three sculptures lined up on the floor. These constitute a whole, a unique sculpture, despite their difference in form, material and mode of installation. Each of them embodies the sculptural gesture which begins within the MRI scanner and continues in Didou's atelier with the creation of different artworks - casts - out of the same matrix, MRI. *Skull I, II* and *III* spatialise duration, time. Darkness offers sculptures to the gaze and simultaneously protects them from being shown. White marble, greenish bronze and brown wood attract the eye closer and pull it away. This movement performed by the sculptures corresponds to the movement of the viewer's eyes, glancing at one *Skull* after the other as if they were snapshots. Vision is elastic.

Skull I is a white marble monolith on a black marble and pinewood pedestal. The contour of the layers is accurate, clear-cut thanks to water which is used in the process. The passage from one layer to the next occurs with fluidity – the layers constitute a whole without any interstices. To the eye caressing it, the surface is silky, liquid and cold. In *Skull I* the marble surface becomes light dissolving the boundary between material and immaterial, the artwork and its environment, the contour

and the background. The eye of the onlooker contributes to create the sculpture. The possibility for eyes to touch sculptures has been explored in cinema as the film *Lo Sguardo di Michelangelo/Michelangelo Eye to Eye* (2004) by Antonioni clearly demonstrates.^v In this visual reflection on the relationship between cinema and sculpture, marble and film, Antonioni looks at the statue of Moses and is watched by him as he enters the church S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome.

Antonioni's eye moves upwards on the marble surfaces proceeding from the hands, the feet or another particular of Moses (the drapery, the book) up to his gaze, where the eye pauses. As it proceeds, the film reveals Moses. We perceive and discover it as the film unfolds. To the eye of the viewer, experiencing sculpture through a film, cinema imposes its own pace. The aesthetics of shot and counter-shot of the glances between Moses and Antonioni corresponds to the camera's caressing of the marble. This play of eyes - Antonioni appears to be still, the statue of Moses is set in motion by Antonioni's gaze and by the twist of his head turned to the left - is transformed into a play of touching. The hand touches the surface which responds to the caress. Becoming hand, the eye goes into depth trying to penetrate the marble, the alternation of shot and counter-shot becomes a fluid movement. The gaze pulls away or attracts things closer. To desire to touch, to dare to touch with the hand what has been touched by the eye as if vision, even a haptic one, were not enough.

The change of the camera movement from surface to depth corresponds to the transition from vision to touch, from the eye caressing a surface to the hand exploring it. Eyes become fingers. The hand strives to penetrate

beyond the surface of the marble of *Skull I*, to plunge into the cavities, as Antonioni's hand goes into the flesh of Moses immersed in a play of light and darkness. Blindness and touch are often related. In Jean-Luc Godard's *The Old Place - Some Notes Regarding the Arts at the Fall of the Twentieth Century* (1998) a blind person explores sculptures by touch as the assistant editor to Godard in *JLG/JLG - Autoportrait de décembre/JLG/JLG - Self-Portrait in December* (1995), a blind woman, touches the film before cutting it. The hand, like the eye, is always stopped, its desire constantly aroused and unfulfilled.

The theme of the desire to touch a statue is one of the fantasies that the Romantic epoch took from the Classics, as in the story told by Heine of a young boy who falls in love at the sight of a marble statue of a Divinity. By moonlight the boy enters the garden and kisses the statue on the lips becoming a lover of marble statues. The episode is recalled by Mario Praz:

If the fleshy woman they love should suddenly become marble in their arms, which plight would these modern Pygmalions, who treat statues like flesh things, be in? Would they feel the same love for a woman turned into stone? To dismiss their love, would it suffice for them to know that they could not be loved again though still in love themselves? (...) If turning into marble is the final outcome of the loss of love, how could a marble subject generate the first spark of falling in love? Maestro Pastoso, let us come to terms: the whole matter of 'erogenic' statues is a gallant overstatement, but even so, let us blame the romantic moonlight just like so many other things (Praz, 1945, pp. 120-124).^{vi}

Such is the intensity of his gaze that Antonioni cannot help but touch Moses. But can statues touch back? In Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia/Journey to Italy* (1953), the statues Katherine Joyce visits at the museum in Naples and, in particular, the two embracing plaster-cast lovers that are unearthed in the Pompeii excavations leave their imprint on her. Walking around *Skull I*, we raise our gaze to the ceiling where a black marble mirror is hung. We stand still, eyes immobile. A white, lucent skull comes up in the mirror. We would expect to see our own image reflected or that of the sculpture as it appears to the naked eye - this is the common phenomenology of mirrors. But in Didou's sculptures, mirrors are not transparent and reflective surfaces, but rather looking-glasses through which one can look at something and see it better. Didou uses planar, concave and convex mirrors, or polished metal stainless steel surfaces which recall the ancient method of making mirrors. It is through anamorphic mirrors that Didou's *Skulls* touch us. Anamorphosis is the magnetic principle attracting viewers: a trap for the gaze. *Skull I* has moved: it seems to be split in two forms, two images that cannot be easily recomposed.

Anamorphosis is a method for producing a distorted image (or the image itself, called anamorphic image) which appears in natural form under certain viewing angles or which can be seen reflected in a curved (concave or convex) mirror.^{vii} In the early fifteenth century, along with linear perspective appears anamorphosis: the first one controls viewers by giving them the illusion of a rational and unified subjectivity, the second one disrupts the conventions of looking by creating an 'eccentric observer' - not a strange viewer, but rather an 'eccentric' one (Collins, 1992). Linear perspective and

anamorphosis are linked by the necessity of a fixed viewpoint, enclosed in a circumscribed space, from which a single viewer is able to see the image (Massey, 1997). Simultaneously, however, in anamorphosis the distance point does not provide any illusion of distance between viewer, horizon and picture plane, nor depth. The viewer is entrapped in a viewpoint which is close to the surface of the picture. Therefore, the rationalisation of vision promoted by perspective becomes complicit in its own disruption. The world as it was represented by classical perspective is now under pressure from dark forces of desire, irrational imagination, images feeding upon themselves instead of upon a reference.^{viii} The greater the autonomy of images, the more onlookers have to face the possibility and threat of illusions.

The three elements that compose *Skull I*, the sculptural piece, the mirror and the image reflected, compel the viewer to interact with the space shared by them. Anamorphosis functions like a script which organises the *mise-en-scène* of the viewers' bodies. The mirror obliges the viewer to maintain a distance from the sculpture. We see *Skull I* as a marble artefact but, as the gaze moves away from the distorting mirror, the formless material sculpture dissolves into an immaterial image with a precise form: a skull. The reflected image appears to be a 'virtual' image in so far as onlookers see it as if it was 'inside' the mirror - but the mirror does not have any inside. Viewers do not immediately recognise the image as the reflection of the sculpture - *Skull I* does not look like a skull when seen without the anamorphosis.

The anamorphic image is not enclosed within the sculpture, in the same way as the anamorphic image of the skull is present, for example, in *The Ambassadors*

(1533) by Hans Holbein. What looks like an unrecognisable image at first sight is in that painting revealed as a precise object, distinct from the painting where it is depicted. The anamorphic object revealed is only a *divertissement* in the composition which maintains its integrity even without the anamorphic image. In Didou, the anamorphic image is not a hidden image, but another sculpture and the same sculpture from another point of view - its double. Faces and skulls thus revealed are close-ups which disrupt the viewing order, the position of the perceiver and the object of perception, the hierarchy between the material and the immaterial, the actual and the potential. Anamorphosis becomes the potential of perspective not to promote a direct, objective, rational vision. Rather than a completed status, anamorphosis describes a process which oscillates between one form and another.^{ix}

Contrary to the use of anamorphosis by Renaissance artists, in Didou's work the reflected image does not represent the 'correct' vision of the sculpture; rather it creates another sculpture that exists only insofar as there is enough light. Light makes the thing appear by driving it out of the shadows: light becomes a necessary condition for allowing the gaze to momentarily grasp the image through the mirror. The interplay of light and shadow, of an optic and a haptic gaze, of a sculpture which becomes fragmented and recomposed through a mirror, brings to the foreground a phenomenology of darkness, of what is invisible, of what lies in the shadow. When viewers get closer to the sculpture, adjusting themselves in front of the anamorphic mirror, what is visible - the marble surface of *Skull I* - recedes to let what was previously invisible emerge: a skull.

Owing to their reflective, smooth, and clear surfaces, mirrors allowed modern perspectives of form and space which were key factors for the explorations made by Bauhaus and also for several Surrealist artists who took mirrors as constitutive compositional elements of their artworks. Among them, Florence Henri captured the property of mirrors as both tools for self-reflection and for the transformation of perspective. Her photographic portraits and self-portraits are mainly shaped through the use of mirrors which allow her to explore and manipulate spatial and temporal coordinates by creating a unique rhythm of fragmentation and multiplication.

In this respect, Didou's use of anamorphosis bears more formal correspondences to that of Henri rather than to the anamorphic sculptures created by the Swiss artist Markus Raetz.^x Works such as *Kopf II* (1992) or *Nichtpfeife* (1990-1992) enclose anamorphic perspective into the sculpture but without using mirrors. Raetz's object (for instance the glass and bottle installation) can be seen either as a small bottle and a big glass or as a small glass and a big bottle: the two visions exclude each other, they cannot coexist in the same act of seeing. Didou's use of anamorphosis dismantles the unity of the sculpture, of what is present (the material artefact) and what is absent (the body within the MRI coil, the MRI images reconstructed), of the three dimensional versus the two dimensional. The identity of Didou's sculpture is not dissolved by anamorphosis but rather multiplied. The spatial organisation of *Skull I* folds into it a temporal displacement that is absent in Raetz's works. Anamorphosis disorients the spectator. It is not a mere contemplation of the artwork's aura; rather, anamorphic mirrors create spatial and temporal estrangement. Reflections, play of mirrors and curvilinear lines are

symptomatic of a Baroque sensibility which emerges along with the purity and elegance of forms of the three *Skulls* unfolding on an invisible line.

On a pinewood pedestal, the bronze greenish layers of *Skull II* materialise as a stretched-out monolith or, thanks to the mirror, as a skull. *Skull II* expands into the environment like an architectural installation where the void plays an important role as the full space. The convex mirror has the silhouette of an MRI image of the head with distinguishable facial details such as the nose and the ears. Inside the head, not the brain but a skull. Once recognised as the image in the mirror and from a frontal viewpoint, *Skull II* appears as an upside down skull with a spinal cord even without the anamorphosis. The play of *seeing* the sculpture as a formless monolith or as a skull does not work anymore. The only image left to be perceived is that of a skull as the material sculpture or its immaterial counterpart.

In the scientific laboratory the mirror placed within the MRI coil above the head of the patient is the get-away point which allows the gaze to escape outside the scanner. In *Skull II* the get-away point is an anamorphic mirror, a widening of space and time. The sculpture migrates from the physical space, to an imaginary - but no less real - one, that of the mirror. *Skull II* loses its attributes of weight, substance, and materiality. Anamorphosis insinuates that matter is in itself fragile, contrary to any belief that matter remains constant and unchanged. MRI becomes an aesthetical procedure for re-thinking and re-organising space - between the viewer and the artwork and the filling and emptying of each sculpture - modality - the interplay between dimensions of the possible and the real in anamorphosis - and time -

the possibility to walk through the process which gave shape to the sculpture, backwards and forwards through the anamorphic mirror.

The encounter between Antonioni and the statue of Moses happens on a temporal plane different from the one of the actual encounter, from that of spectators watching the film. Moses is revealed as the film unfolds. Different temporal modalities overlap also when looking at the three *Skulls*. We firstly embrace them in a single glance - here and now. Then, thanks to the curved mirror, viewers walk through the sculpture backwards, facing what might have been its starting point: the physical body of the artist and MRI principles. The mirror is the mediator between the viewer and the sculpture but also between the artist himself and the sculpture. It functions as a centripetal black hole where time as linear succession collapses: the artist and, consequently, the viewers with him, can experience time as an infinite point where past and present coexist. The mirror turns the sculpture into a process rather than into a finished work. Anamorphic mirrors are temporal passages allowing viewers to walk through the process of creating a *work* of art.⁶

Skull III lies horizontally; it looks like a prehistoric animal, its wooden skin marked with veins. In contrast to *Skull I*, here light penetrates between one layer and the other, accentuating the role of the empty space. Due to the horizontal position of the sculpture and to the mirror which cannot be seen until one circumvents the light box and looks down, we are led to believe that there will be no more deceptive mirrors. The three *Skulls* unfold on the same line but the mirror occupies a different position in each of them with respect to both the sculptural piece

and to the surroundings. There is a scale going from above to below. *Skull I* asks viewers to look at the ceiling; *Skull II* to keep the gaze at the level of the monolith; *Skull III* to move around the pedestal and pull the gaze down to look inside the concave mirror contained in the light box-pedestal.

Our beliefs - the expectation of seeing one's own reflected image in the mirror - are subverted three times: a skull. Then a skull. A skull, again. Once we stop looking in the mirror, the three *Skulls* begin to move, attracting our attention. The play between movement and stillness, being touched/seen and touching/looking, is a perceptual play of activity and passivity: to perceive does not mean only to be active, to do something. Contrary to common belief, perception pertains to the field of passivity more than that of activity. To perceive means to let the world (also that of sculptures) surprise - and sometimes disappoint - us. In opposition to the Cartesian epistemology of representational thought, expectations fool us, not the senses. The last grinning skull - which, in contrast to the others, more closely resembles a three-dimensional object - wins back the world and its autonomy from us.

The predominance of passivity, the *epoché* within the MRI scanner, empties the sculptural gesture of any 'demiurgical' connotations and the sculptural object of its material, solid and plastic features. In the decade from the 1960s to the 1970s Minimalist poetics and practices had already attempted to dematerialise sculpture, also through film and photography. For instance, the space of the sculpture and that of the viewer merge together owing to the removal of the pedestal calling for a direct interaction with the sculptural object. In the experiments

pursued by artists such as Moholy-Nagy and Naum Gabo, the pedestal is not physically removed but rather dissolved through photography. In Brancusi's experiments with photography the pedestal becomes the sculpture and vice versa. Or, when the two are distinct objects, they are so fully integrated that there is no hierarchy between them anymore. *Skull III* locks the pedestal, the sculptural object and the mirror closer together, in a centripetal movement which announces the coincidence of the anamorphosis with the sculpture itself, and the disappearance of the pedestal which is pursued by Didou in his newest artworks. Didou challenges the hierarchy between the sculptural object and the pedestal (in *Skull II* the mirror has the form of an MRI scan, in *Skull III* the pedestal holds light, the sculpture and the mirror simultaneously), or the sculpture and the mirror as in his most recent works where the anamorphosis itself becomes the art object. This challenge avails itself from an image; not the photographic one, but that obtained with an anamorphic mirror.

IV

Immobile and blind inside the scanner, Didou is exposed to the rhythm of MRI, to the neutral succession of transcripts which open infinite possibilities. In the gesture of putting into brackets the idiosyncrasies of one's hand, the cadence of the MRI scan constitutes Didou's grid. The grid is a figure born out of practices of repetition and of following restrictive rules. It is an element reminiscent of the suspicion directed towards narration and linguistic articulation to be found in painting, architecture and sculpture in the Modernist era (Krauss, 1979). The grid is not an invention someone can claim. The grid can only be used and repeated. In its precise geometrical order,

the grid eliminates the centre, any hierarchical order, any reference and inflection. It shows both the viewer and the artist a self-contained point of origin which does not refer to anything else. In anamorphosis the distance point becomes the actual viewpoint: the object is positioned between the eye and the picture plane, whereas in 'common' perspective the picture plane intersects the space between the eye and the object represented. In this respect, the link between anamorphosis and the grid is the position of the viewing subject. The grid, like the anamorphic method and image, implies a distance point between the viewer, the surface to be viewed and the vanishing point.

Pursuing an aesthetic similar to that of the portraits and self-portraits made by the American artist Chuck Close, Didou strives to eliminate the reference to any personal and emotional relics. Most of Close's works are made without using image-generating techniques - although a photograph is often the starting point and the model he always goes back to. However, Close's painted works and his short film *Bob* (1973) look like ID photographs, computer-generated images rather than the product of a human hand. As for Didou, the grid is the neutral starting point; not only a figure of composition but an aesthetical element itself.

In his atelier, Didou transforms the MRI scans into a sequence of iron pieces numbered from one, the smallest piece, to sixty-nine, which is comprised of two small, full pieces. A succession of twenty-six letters corresponds to this succession of numbers, forming *Teschio-Alfabeto/Alphabet-Skull*, the alphabet through which Didou speaks. These steel letters form images rather than words, subverting the relationship between

reading and seeing present within the scientific laboratory where the images are exposed, but their condition of visibility is given by their readability. Here, on the contrary, the play of seeing and reading is rendered formally as a play between full and empty in the alphabet letters - an alternation that was already present in Didou's previous works, such as the red coloured plaques of *Plasma* (1997) and the iron leaves of *La Croissance et la Chute/Belief and Fall* (1989). MRI examination produces scans where tissues and structures are coloured according to a scale of black, white and grey. The fullness and emptiness of the alphabet letters highlight this colour contrast. The letters become the traces of sound, pressure and movement exercised within the MRI coil.

The gesture of adding (*porre*) and subtracting (*levare*), typical of the sculptor-demiurge in classical sculpture and architecture becomes, through MRI and anamorphosis, the gesture of breaking up the material object to recompose it into an image. *Skulls* are connected to the practice of casting which entails the notion of making copies out of the same matrix. The convergence between original and copy can assume the form of a threat to the irreducibility of humans to sculptures, of flesh to stone, a theme offered in many films, such as Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poète/The Blood of a Poet* (1930), Resnais's *L'année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year in Marienbad* (1961), Cassavetes's *Faces* (1968) or the already quoted *Journey to Italy*. What is a threat becomes in Didou's sculptures a potentiality, in the sense of the actual capacity of the thing to exist in a different and more complete state. Instead of a hierarchical dichotomy between the original and the model, the material and the immaterial, the virtual and the real, the anamorphic image shows how

potentiality (the image in the mirror) is already inscribed in the real (the material artefact) not disjointed from it.

V

The spectator moves along the magnetic lines of attraction created by *Eco*, the alphabet letters and the three *Skulls*. MRI travels too across the various archives in which it is stored and showed: the scientific laboratory, Didou's atelier, the art museum. Travelling - whether it is a physical or a mental movement - involves abandoning safe places and faces, to leave something behind and take something else to the new destination. As happens for all journeys, the subject - MRI, the sculptures, the viewer - is transformed by travelling and by the experience of the boundary between one place and the other, of the interstice between two archives. The scientific laboratory is not far from the museum, from the atelier of the artist: one cannot always easily distinguish the boundary of one archive with the other, touching the end of one archive and the beginning of another.^{vi}

Each archive bears the trace of the former archive: for instance, in this exhibition, MRI is not present as a set of techniques, nor is the physical component of the MRI apparatus present. Yet, magnetism, rhythm and the body are the traces left over by MRI. Sometimes, the trace can take the appearance of an uncanny presence which is perceived as not belonging to the sculptural piece but to elsewhere - the *punctum* in the image (Barthes, 1981). The *punctum* triggers other archives and along with them other images and places already left. The archives in which MRI dwells, and the gestures the subjects perform within them are characterised by the drive to

collect, which also entails the discovery that there is always something left outside of the archive, something that cannot be archived as Resnais's film *Toute la mémoire du monde/All the Memory of the World* (1956) reminds us.^{vii} The 'left out' can be triggered by another archive.

This uncanny presence, which was felt before but could not be seen or put into focus, reappears in the anamorphic mirror. The skull is an instant, a wound which can arrest the movement of our eyes and of the whole body. The instant cannot be preserved, it appears and disappears quickly. Then, movement starts again. We look at *Eco*, *Skull I*, *II* and *III* again - still in darkness but not caught by illusion anymore - with the awareness of what is coming next: three skulls. This revelation comes as a moment of clarity, acceptance and serenity after the constant play between vision and touch, movements of the sculptures and of the viewer.

The poetics of anamorphosis plays a central role in Marc Didou's latest art production where it becomes the artwork itself, fully merged with the physical object. The grid is not MRI anymore but a photograph which is first decomposed in a series of traits and then recomposed to form a face - not a head nor a skull - with all its features and expressiveness. Like Duchamp's rotating disks, Didou is experimenting with motion, light and perception but in other media rather than film.^{viii} Again, anamorphosis is not a privileged stance from which the perceiver can properly read what he sees, a work of art, a theoretically puzzling question. Anamorphosis obliges viewers to cast a second glance at the artwork, to take a detour in order to get lost and then start again from another point of view, from another place. Anamorphic seeing is enacted

by the movement of the viewer and of the artwork: that is, by doubt. Thanks to the experience of travelling, one can discover that uncertainty lies at the departure point, in known places and faces.

Notes

ⁱThe English translation is the following: 'An object is dead when the living gaze which was upon it has gone'. Quotation from Marker's and Resnais's *Les statues meurent aussi/Statues also Die* (1953).

ⁱⁱThe artist Richard Serra has effectively demonstrated the possibility of cinema as a gesture rather than as an object or place, as in his short film *Hand Catching Lead* (1968). The filmmaker's hand tries to catch pieces of lead falling from above within the frame. When it succeeds, the hand holds the lead and then releases it. In this artwork Serra performs the film-device of exploring notions of weight, impression, fatigue of a body (e.g. the hand, and the arm), repetition and gravity. For Serra, film is a way to approach sculpture as process-based.

ⁱⁱⁱThe difference between optic and haptic vision was first outlined by the art historian Riegl (1927). To transfer the categories optic/haptic to the perceiving subject means to highlight the spatial properties of representation and the observer's perception of them. This topic was highly contentious within the emerging discipline of art history as cinema was coming out as new art form.

^{iv}The term MR describes the procedure and the term MRI the picture obtained. Outside the clinical field, however, the general public uses the term MRI for both and I adopt this convention.

^vThe statue of Moses belongs to the mausoleum complex built for Julius II by Michelangelo Buonarroti in 1516.

^{vi}The English translation is based on the original Italian text: 'Codesti moderni Pigmaliioni che trattan le statue come cose tenere, a che partito sarebbero essi se una donna di carne da loro amata a un tratto si immarmorasse tra le loro braccia? (...) Avrebbero lo stesso affetto per la donna diventata di sasso? Per disinnammorarsi, non ce ne sarebbe più che abbastanza se si convincessero che, amando, non potrebbero in modo alcuno essere riamati? (...) che se il divenir marmo è l'effetto ultimo del non amare, come potrebbe l'esser marmo funger da causa prima d'innamoramento? Tutta questa faccenda delle statue erogeniche, conveniamone, Maestro Pastoso, è una galante montatura, e diamone pure la colpa, come di tant'altre cose, al chiaro di luna romantico' (pp. 120-124).

^{vii}First created by Leonardo Da Vinci who included anamorphic drawings of a child's head in his *Codex Atlanticus* (1483-1518), anamorphosis became popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and has recently been rediscovered by artists and critical theorists.

^{viii}Artists initially used anamorphosis to depict objects that might be considered as 'taboos', illicit because of their connection to eroticism, death, the scatological, the occult. These taboos were masked by means of anamorphic images (Baltrušaitis, 1989).

^{ix}In animals and vegetables anamorphosis describes both the gradual change in form from one type to another during the evolution of a group of plants or animals but also the process of metamorphosis in which body parts are added to those already existent. The ideas set forth by researchers within the socio-biological sciences (for instance Callois's observations on the phenomenon of

mimicry) inspired also Lacan and the Surrealists.

^xI am grateful to Giovanni Battista Martini who drew my attention to this point.

^{xi}Through the technique of the time delay, video artists like Dan Graham have criticised the perspectival window with its hierarchy between observer, object and projection plan and the prevarication of the temporal dimension of the present implied by it. For his works, Dan Graham has often made use of video, glass and mirrors, as in the case of *Time Delay Room* (1974).

^{xii}In the series of articles written in the fifties for *Le Cahiers du Cinéma*, Rohmer uses the word 'marble' in the sense of 'museum'.

^{xiii}The urge to collect which Benjamin denominates 'Sammeltrieb' is what Derrida denotes as 'archive-fever'. In Derrida the archive fever is the death drive at work in the archive, the drive which aims at effacing its own traces. Each archive is characterised by two oppositional drives: the impulse to collect, to store, to preserve, to remember, and the drive to efface, to destroy, to forget.

^{xiv}The *Rotoreliefs* (1935) were a series of cardboard disks with designs using concentric circles printed on both sides using offset lithography. They were meant to be played using an old-fashioned record player. The rotating-disk had to be watched with one eye closed, creating the effect of a three-dimensional image. In this way viewers participate in the completion of the work. Moreover, they internalised the work, since the images were literally created in the mind of the viewer as they turned.

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Filmography

Antonioni, Michelangelo *Lo Sguardo di Michelangelo* Italy, 2004
35mm, Colour, 15 mn.

Cassavetes, John *Faces* USA, 1968
35mm, Black and White, 130 mn.

Close, Chuck *Bob* USA, 1973
16mm, Black and White, 10 mn.

Cocteau, Jean *Le sang d'un poète* France, 1930
35mm, Black and White, 55 mn.

Godard, Jean-Luc *JLG/JLG – Autoportrait de décembre* France, 1995
35mm, Colour, 62 mn.

Godard, Jean-Luc, Miéville, Anne-Marie *The Old Place – Some Notes Regarding the Arts at the Fall of the Twentieth Century* France/USA, 1998
Video, Colour, 49 mn.

Marker, Chris, Resnais, Alain *Les statues meurent aussi* France, 1953
16mm, Black and White, 30 mn.

Resnais, Alain *L'année dernière à Marienbad* France/Italy, 1961
35mm, Black and White, 94mn.

Resnais, Alain *Toute la mémoire du monde* France, 1956
35mm, Black and White, 21 mn.

Rossellini, Roberto *Viaggio in Italia* Italy/France, 1953
35mm, Black and White, 79 mn.

Serra, Richard *Hand Catching Lead* USA, 1968
16mm, Black and White, 4 mn.

List of works

Eco
2004
Bronze Casting
230 x 185 x 110 cm

Skull I
2007
Three elements:
White marble
115 x 60 x 30 cm
Black marble pedestal
93 x 86 x 10 cm
Black marble mirror
93 x 75 x 2 cm

Skull II
2007
Three elements:
Bronze
110 x 20 x 16 cm
Wood pedestal
100 x 35 x 30 cm
Bronze mirror
26 x 20 x 6 cm

Skull III
2007
Three elements:
Wood
90 x 47 x 35 cm
Wood and glass pedestal
100 x 105 x 80 cm
Steel mirror
26 x 22 x 7 cm

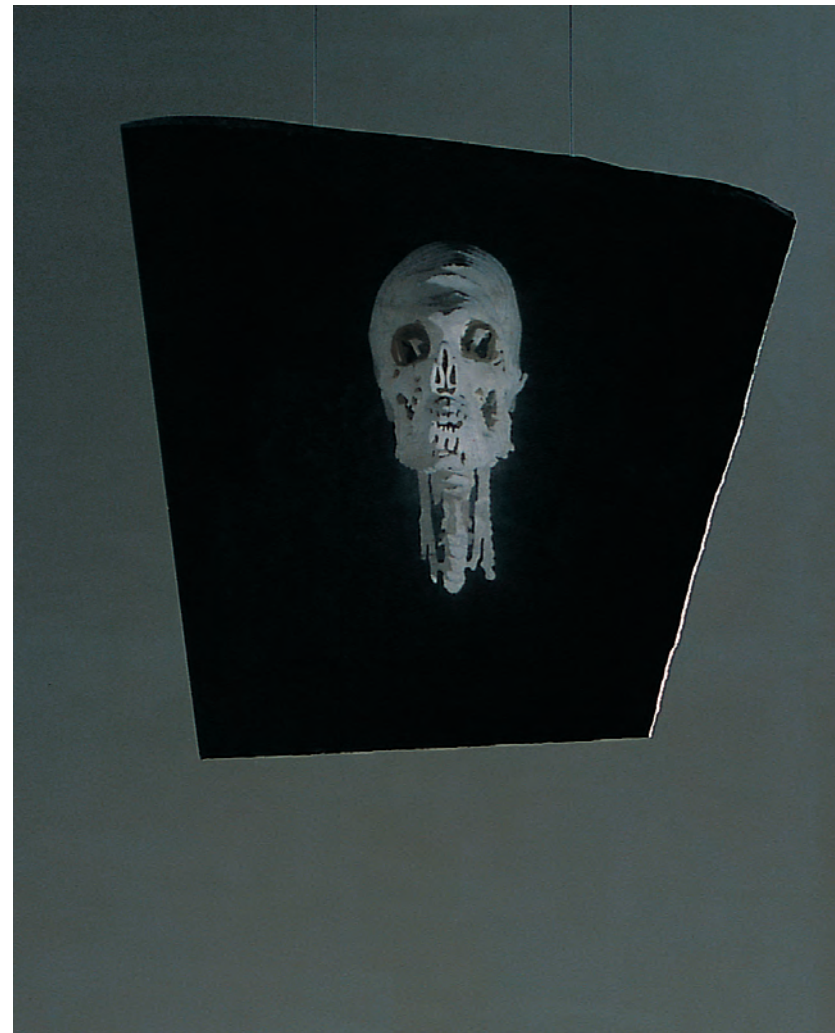
Teschio-Alfabeto
2007
Twenty-six elements:
Steel
Various dimensions



Eco - 2004



Teschio-Alfabeto - 2007







Skull III - 2007



Marc Didou

Marc Didou was born in 1963 in Brittany, France and graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Brest. His early career was dominated by painting but since 1989 he has been working in sculpture, holding his first solo exhibition at the Musée des Beaux Arts, Brest in 1991 and consequently receiving several important commissions for monumental public works. In 1994 his work came to the attention of world-renowned American sculptor Mark di Suvero, who invited him to New York. Having received an award for Artistic Creation from the Regional Council of Brittany, Didou went on to represent France at the international exhibition organised to coincide with the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy in 2001. In 2005 he created *Eco* for the city of Turin and was subsequently awarded the prestigious Michetti Prize. Appointed Professor of Plastic Arts at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Brest in 1999, he now works full-time as a sculptor in France and Italy.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1991 Musée des Beaux Arts, Brest, France
- 1993 FRAC Bretagne, Galerie du TNB, Rennes, France
- 1995 Musée de la Cohue, Vannes, France
- 1996 Ateliers d'Art et ville de Douarnenez, France
- 1997 Château de Kerjean, Saint Vougay, France
- 2002 Risonanze, Palazzo Comunale, Cascina Barulè, Genova – Rossiglione, Italy
- 2005 *L'immateriale della materia*, Museo Sant'Agostino - Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy
- 2007 The Naughton Gallery at Queen's, Belfast

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2003 *Il viaggio dell'uomo immobile*, Museo di Villa Croce, Genoa, Italy
- 2004 *Arte del video*, Fondazione Raggiante, Lucca, Italy
Scultura internazionale, Castello di Agliè, Agliè, Italy
Sul lato assolato della strada, Galleria Martini-Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy
- 2005 *In & out: opera e ambiente nella dimensione glocal*, 56° Michetti Prize, Francavilla al Mare, Italy

Public Commissions

- 1996 Institut Supérieur d'Electronique de Bretagne, Brest, France
- 1998 Château de la Roche-Jagu, Domaine Départemental des Côtes d'Armor, France
- 1998 Ville de Lesneven, Ville d'Hennebont, France
- 2000 Ville du Creusot-Le Breuil, France
- 2002 Genova, Rossiglione, Italy
- 2005 Area Mole Antonelliana, Turin, Italy



Marc Didou (Courtesy of Martini-Ronchetti Gallery)

The Curator

Silvia Casini is a doctoral candidate at Queen's University of Belfast, Film and Visual Studies Department. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and by Queen's University, her research investigates the use of medical imaging techniques in contemporary art practices.

In the autumn of 2006 she was a visiting scholar at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) at the Communication Department. After her first degree in Philosophy at Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy, she worked at the Venice International Film Festival where she managed the *Horizons* section which aims at providing an overview of new trends in cinema.

